

**The Conservative Party and New Media:
A Comparative History 1951-1964 and 2005-2012[©]**

By

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Anthony Ridge-Newman, hereby declare that this thesis, and the work presented in it, is my own research. I clearly state where I have consulted the work of others.

Signed.....

Date.....

Abstract

This comparative history seeks to understand the impact of new media in the Conservative Party. It does this with the analysis of case studies of original empirical research that are used to form cultural histories of the party 1951-1964 and 2005-2012. Both periods were characterised by significant techno-cultural advances in Britain in the form of television and the internet, respectively. This thesis asks, firstly, what role the advent of television played within the party, 1951-1964; and, secondly, what role the advent of specific internet technologies played within the party, 2005-2012. A third question is used to conduct a comparative history that reflects upon the two periods. It asks how the new media of television and the internet compare in terms of their impact on the organisational culture of the party. Historian John Ramsden described the party's organisation as a 'social organism'. Likewise, Richard Cockett likened it to a 'Darwinian' organism that utilises adaptability for survival. Similarly, this thesis evaluates the party in terms of its evolution. It does this using insider perspectives. 1951-1964 is informed using the collections of the Conservative Party Archive. 2005-2012 is explored using methods that are influenced by ethnography. Diverse accounts using on- and off- line sources are included with oral testimonies of party insiders. This thesis takes an integrated approach to techno-cultural and socio-political studies, which allows a more holistic view through the cultural lens. The thesis argues that the impacts of new political mass communication technologies on the Conservative Party's organisational culture have been to further contribute to an evolution away from a mass-party culture to a more technologically-centric culture, in which television 1951-1964 played a role in demanding further professionalisation of central-party culture; and internet technologies 2005-2012 most notably synthesised with the party in subcultures at the grassroots, which the author calls 'Cyber Toryism'.

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The Conservative Party and its leaders have played an important role in both British and world history. The party has had a rich and diverse evolution over many centuries and, probably, is not celebrated enough, in popular understanding, and perhaps in academia, for its historic achievements and tenacity. Naturally, political parties are cautious about providing academic access to their contemporary internal-culture. I was in the fortunate position of being already an active Conservative Party member before conducting this PhD research. Therefore, I have enjoyed privileged access to the Conservative Party. Firstly, the Runnymede, Spelthorne and Weybridge Conservative Group offered me significant support. I extend my thanks to the chairmen of the group, Graeme Reid and Councillor Hugh Meares, for the opportunities they helped me develop in order to provide me with rich interactions in the local Conservative community, which led to the opportunity to serve as a Conservative councillor for Virginia Water on Runnymede Borough Council. I thank also my, former, fellow ward councillors Margaret Roberts and Geoffrey Woodger. I give special thanks to Councillor Hugh Meares, and councillors Mr Derek and, the late, Mrs Diana Cotty, all of whom provided oral history testimony for this research. I was sorry to learn the sad news relating to Mrs Cotty while I was in the process of writing-up this thesis. Her testimony was not used in this research out of respect for the Cotty family, who have been themselves a part of British television history, and the history of the Runnymede & Weybridge Conservative Association.

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Abbreviations

Acronyms

BBC	British Broadcasting Company/Corporation
CCHQ	Conservative Campaign Headquarters
CCO	Conservative Central Office
CF	Conservative Future
CFers	Conservative Future Activists/Members
CPA	Conservative Party Archive
CRD	Conservative Research Department
FA	Facebook Administrator
IPUs	Indoor Projector Units
ITA	Independent Television Authority
ITV	Independent Television
KCL	Kings College London
MP(s)	Member(s) of Parliament
PAB	Parliamentary Assessment Board
PDA	Personal Digital Assistant
PDF	Portable Document Format
PI	Public Interaction
PPC	Prospective Parliamentary Candidate
RNA	Ridge-Newman Archive
RSWCA	Runnymede, Spelthorne & Weybridge Conservative Group
RSCF	Runnymede & Spelthorne Conservative Future (latterly RWCF)
RWCA	Runnymede & Weybridge Conservative Association
RWCF	Runnymede & Weybridge Conservative Future (formerly RSCF)
TV	Television
UCL	University College London
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
YCs	Young Conservatives

Contractions and Political Parties

Conservative Party	
Conservatives	
Tory Party	The Conservative & Unionist Party (UK)
Tories	
The party	
BNP	The British National Party (UK)
Labour	The Labour Party (UK)
Lib Dems	The Liberal Democrats (UK)
National Convention	The National Conservative Convention
National Union	The National Union of Conservative & Unionist Associations
Plaid Cymru	The Party of Wales (UK)
UKIP	The United Kingdom Independence Party (UK)

Part I
Introduction

ONE

The Conservative Party and New Media

Since the creation of the printing press in the fifteenth century there has been a chain of successive new media¹ that have in their own ways revolutionised the manner in which British society has communicated with the masses. The development of mass communication technology has evolved in line with wider societal and cultural changes. These historic advances occurred in tandem with developments in British parliamentary democracy and the advent of political parties. The British Conservative Party² has a genealogy and history that stretches over a 350 hundred year period. Throughout that time, political parties have had to change and adapt in order to remain electorally competitive in societies undergoing cultural evolutions during periods of apparent

¹ In the context of this thesis, the term 'new media' relates to the advent of relatively new mass communication, or computer-mediated communication, technologies and techniques in history, like television in the 1950s and 1960s, and the internet in the 1990s and 2000s, with a specific focus on their role and uses by political parties, in this case the British Conservative Party, in political engagement and political phenomena. For further definition of new media in historical contexts, see, Benjamin Peters and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, 'New Media', in Peter Simonson, Janice Peck, Robert Craig and John Jackson (eds.), *The Handbook of Communication History* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2013), p. 257-271.

² The Conservative Party is generally considered to be the political embodiment of conservatism in Britain. The term 'the Conservative Party' is used to describe the mainstream national Conservative and Unionist Party of the United Kingdom, which includes the Scottish Conservatives and Welsh Conservatives. Since the devolution of certain powers from the United Kingdom Parliament to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, the Conservative parties of Scotland and Wales have developed increased autonomous identities in relation to administering their respective devolved elections. Sources for this research inform perspectives on the Conservative Party in England and Wales, but not Scotland specifically. A similar approach to investigating the Scottish Conservatives was conducted in 2003. See, Alexander Smith, *Devolution and the Scottish Conservatives: Banal activism, electioneering and the politics of irrelevance* (Manchester University Press, 2011). For clarity, this thesis, when referring to the Conservative Party, is describing the British Conservative Party as a broad collective, or aspects of its nature and/or function as a political phenomenon. This thesis uses the term 'the Conservative Party' interchangeably with the phrase 'the party' and also synonymous phrases like 'the Conservatives', 'the Tory Party' and 'the Tories' in order to refer to the loose national collective of participants and groups with some official or unofficial affiliation to the party's political existence and is therefore a wide and generalised term. When referring to specific groups, roles or periods within the party's history or organisation, certain official and unofficial labels are attributed. Variations of official and academic Conservative Party nouns and terminology are used, e.g. the use of the term 'Conservative association-elites' would refer generally to individuals in positions of power within Conservative parties at the local level of the party organisation, or specifically in the context of a named association like, for example, the Anglesey Conservatives. In order to aid the comparisons of different periods in Conservative Party history, unofficial labels are attributed, using the name of the party leader who represented the national Conservative Party at that point in history. These include the party from 1951-1964 under: Churchill's Conservatives, 1951-1955, Eden's Conservatives 1955-1957, Macmillan's Conservatives, 1957-1963, and Douglas-Home's Conservatives, 1963-1964; and, in the contemporary context, Cameron's Conservatives 2005-2012. These labels are used in the general context in the recognition that the role of the party leader, which includes their leadership team of supporting party officials, acts as a cultural symbol in the internal and external dynamics of the party from local to international levels at those periods in history for which these individuals are the public face of the British Conservative Party.

continuity and change.³ As a comparative history, this thesis is interested in the impact of changing techno-cultural trends on the British Conservative Party. It addresses this using two empirical case studies, which together represent two of the most significant techno-cultural developments across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The advents of television (TV) and the internet in the twentieth century are examples of technologies that first developed in the wider cultural context and, subsequently, presented challenges for the Conservatives, and other parties, to adapt to new techno-cultural trends.⁴ Both developments in mass communication coincided with times of significant social, cultural and political change in Britain, and elsewhere. Television in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a new audio-visual broadcasting medium that entered the homes of ordinary people in the form of entertainment and factual programming via the British Broadcasting Company/Corporation (BBC).⁵ TV was a symbol of prosperity, emancipation and modernity in an era that had begun its recovery from the austerity of war.⁶ ‘The domestic nature of television...’, now in the contemporary context, ‘...is a concept that is taken for granted.’⁷ In this new millennium, amid the backdrop of an increasingly transient and globalised world economy, the internet - a dynamic and ever-evolving international network of computerised interactive digital-communication that has allowed the development of user-led interactive multimedia technologies, for the exchange of communication, socialisation, information, learning, and entertainment - has facilitated the virtual compression of time and space; and greater freedom, choice and access to information

³ Jon Lawrence, ‘The Culture of Elections in Modern Britain’, *History*, Vol. 96, No. 324 (2011), pp. 459-476.

⁴ In the case of television and elections, see, M. Even, *The evolution of political television in Britain and its influence on election campaigns 1950-1970*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Oxford (1986). For television and the Conservative Party, see, Michael Kandiah, ‘Television enters British politics: the Conservative Party Central Office and political broadcasting 1945-55’, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1995), pp. 265-284; Mark Cason Jarvis, *The Conservative Party and the Adaptation to Modernity 1957-1964*, Doctoral Thesis, University of London (1999); Mark Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain, 1957-64* (Manchester University Press, 2005), Chapter 7; and, generally, for British political parties and television, see, Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 170-232. In the case of internet technologies and political parties, see, Wainer Lusoli and Stephen Ward, ‘Digital Rank-and-file: Party Activists’ Perceptions and Use of the Internet’, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 4. (2004), pp. 453-470; and Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (eds.), *Political Parties and the Internet: Net Gain?* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2005). See, also, Chapter Two and the references to the work of Philip Howard. For further reading on the party’s adaptation to industrial and social change, see, T. F. Lindsay and Michael Harrington, *The Conservative Party 1918-1970* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1974), p. 2.

⁵ For an example of a cultural history on the early role of the BBC in Britain, see, Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and national identity in Britain, 1922-53* (Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁶ Jarvis, *Morality*, p. 123.

⁷ Milly Buonanno, *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (Intellect Books, Bristol, 2008), p. 13.

for the individual and collective.⁸ This research is influenced by the well established central thesis of British liberal media history that the ‘process of democratisation was enormously strengthened by the development of modern mass media.’⁹ Historically, advances in the democratic process in Britain, like the five major extensions of the right to vote, between 1832 and 1928, were accompanied by significant developments in mass communications, like the supposed freeing of the press in the eighteenth century and growth in film and radio in the early twentieth century. These major developments occurred prior to universal suffrage in 1928. Therefore, this thesis is based on the assumption that, in terms of media power, the advents of television and the internet, both of which developed at times of an historic peak in enfranchisement, were unrivalled in their potential as tools for democratic and political activity.

In recent times, the study of media seems to have become synonymous with cultural studies.¹⁰ However, historically, the term ‘culture’ has been applied to times of human tension in order to represent the clashing of two or more ideas or groups. One example is the ‘struggle for culture’ (kulturkampf) between church and state in Germany during the 1870s, which later became known as the ‘culture wars’.¹¹ In this sense, cultures become most salient when the status quo of one culture is challenged by some form of cultural change. The same principle can be applied to the political arena. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, described political parties as being agents that play the most significant part in a parliamentary democracy because they interact ‘in a sublimated form of civil war’.¹² Analysis of the times and places in which opposing ideas, practices and policies clash, can reveal the different cultural traditions of political parties. The intra-party dynamics, i.e. internal interrelations, of British political parties, like the Conservative Party, can be viewed in this manner. Internally, where the different organisational groups and factions interact, divisions and unifications of

⁸ Nicola Green, ‘On the Move: Technology, Mobility, and the Mediation of Social Time and Space’, *The Information Society*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (2002), pp. 281-292.

⁹ James Curran, *Media and Power* (Routledge, London, 2002), p. 4.

¹⁰ See, John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2003). A typical problem with cultural studies of any kind is that the term ‘culture’ is open to wide interpretation. Clifford Geertz, whose ‘interpretive theory of culture’ has influenced many historians, attempts to solve that problem in defining it as: ‘...an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life.’ See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, New York, 1973), p. 89.

¹¹ ‘Kulturkampf’ is a term used by the early anthropologist Rudolf Virchow, see, Christopher Clarke and Wolfram Kaiser (eds.), *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Cambridge, 2003).

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, introduction and edited by J. B. Thompson (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991), p. 181.

practices and values are identifiable. Between these dynamics, symbolic forms of communication are exchanged, which can be interpreted both historically from archival evidence and contemporarily through observation and testimony.¹³ This thesis aims to present such cultures using comparisons of different groups within the Conservative Party at different points in its history.

Scholars of political parties and political history have tended to divide themselves into subfields that address areas like political communication, party organisation, party systems and party development. Political communications tends to focus on the marketing strategies that political parties use to connect with the electorate. Traditionally, scholars of party organisation have been interested in the structural components of political parties.¹⁴ Party system theory and party development has led to a focus on generic party models and ideal types.¹⁵ Political histories often provide valuable panoramic views of the most salient aspects in the chronology of a party,¹⁶ but tend to focus on the upper-echelons of party dynamics. The outcome of these sometimes divergent approaches to the study of political phenomena has meant that the historiography is fragmented in places. Therefore, some often latent political phenomena have been neglected in academic research and scholarly literature. This has provided this thesis with an opportunity to contribute to filling some aspects of these gaps in our understanding. Influenced by ideas in cultural history,¹⁷ this research attempts to do so using an integrated and more holistic approach. It draws upon aspects of a range of scholarly disciplines in the social sciences and, as such, does not claim to adhere to any particular disciplines in absolute terms. Rather it seeks to borrow deliberately selected aspects of appropriate theories and concepts, which in some way

¹³ Geertz, *Interpretation*, p. 89.

¹⁴ Chrysa Lamprinakou, 'The Party Evolution Model: An Integrated Approach to Party Organisation and Political Communication', *Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2008), pp. 103-111.

¹⁵ Helen Margetts, 'The Cyber Party', in Richard Katz and William Crotty (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics* (Sage, London, 2006), pp. 528-535.

¹⁶ See, for example, Stuart Ball, *The Conservative Party since 1945* (Manchester University Press, 1998); Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *Recovering Power: The Conservatives in Opposition since 1867* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005); and John Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics since 1830* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008).

¹⁷ The discipline of cultural history has no definitive description. However, its works tend to place their emphasis on understanding the symbols of specific groups, in specific places, at specific times. See, Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Polity, Cambridge, 2008). Burke, a cultural historian, predicted that there would be an 'extension of the New Cultural History to include domains previously neglected, among them politics...' (p. 104.) He emphasises that: 'The links between politics and the media are only just beginning to be explored.' (p. 107.) Cultural history is different to other related disciplines in that where other disciplines might fragment phenomena into smaller and isolated cases, the cultural history approach allows for a more holistic representation. For a cultural history of British politics, see, Lawrence, 'Culture'.

relate to the study of the Conservative Party and new media, in order to build the case evidence for historical comparison. The aim is to seek a deeper understanding of the role that specific technologies have played in the Conservative Party's evolving organisation and culture.

Max Weber's significant works in political sociology, in which he 'was less concerned...to analyse the historical structure of the state than to clarify the nature of the political phenomenon in general',¹⁸ has influenced the thinking behind the approach that this thesis takes to understanding the Conservative Party. In line with the Weberian view, it is therefore appropriate to identify Conservative Party characteristics, such as its responses to the advent of new media, in order to determine what is significant about the party's nature and evolution. Rather than comparing multiple political parties at one point in history, this thesis compares the Conservative Party at multiple points in its own history, which together constitute the two main periods of interest, 1951-1964¹⁹ and 2005-2012.²⁰ As Kay Lawson suggests, 'the advantages of the case study approach is its ability to reveal the true dynamism of the interaction of political variables, and the relative strength of each in different contexts, at different times.'²¹

The remainder of this introductory chapter is used to outline, explain and discuss the research questions in more detail. It includes an account of the archives and sources that have been used to inform the primary research. This is followed by an introduction to the approach of the research, with a discussion of how the research questions are addressed. Finally, this chapter outlines the overall structure and content of the thesis, with a chapter by chapter summary of the main arguments and findings that constitute the basis of this work.

¹⁸ A. P. Thakur (ed.), *Weber's Political Sociology*, (Global Vision, New Delhi, 2006), p. 2.

¹⁹ For a thematic narrative covering main policy areas, like economy, foreign affairs, defence and decolonisation, under the four Conservative premiers 1951-1964, see, Andrew Boxer, *The Conservative Governments 1951-1964* (Longman, London, 1996).

²⁰ For a cultural history which compares periods in Conservative Party history, see, Timothy Heppell, *Choosing the Tory Leader: Conservative Party Leadership Election from Heath to Cameron* (Tauris Academic Studies, London, 2008). For a cultural history which compares two different media, see, Su Holmes, *British TV and Film Culture in the 1950s: Coming to a TV near you* (Intellectual Books, Bristol, 2005).

²¹ Kay Lawson, 'Conclusion: Toward a Theory of How Political Parties Work', in Kay Lawson (ed.), *How Political Parties Work: Perspectives from Within* (Praeger, Westport, 1994), p. 288.

The Research

The central problem addressed by this thesis is to understand, historically, what impact mass communication technologies, in terms of their advents as new media, have had upon the British Conservative Party. The word ‘advent’ is important in terms of exploring the below research questions. This research seeks to elucidate an historical understanding of how new media arrive, assimilate and develop in Conservative Party organisation and culture, specifically. These integrated intra-party dynamics are considered to be within the internal environment of the Conservative Party, which this thesis refers to as the party’s organisational culture. The work understands that (1) each case study is unique and individual, in terms of its countless variables; (2) political phenomena are also socio-cultural phenomena for which there are many potential external influences in wider society; and (3) such phenomena have no predefined historical trajectories.²² Significant long-term phenomenological trajectories can only be identified retrospectively using observations over significant periods of time. Therefore, the central research problem of this thesis lends itself to the rigorous and empirical historical approach. The comparative history is used in order to focus on two extended periods in Conservative Party history for comparison.

This thesis is interested in specific cases, at specific points, in the party’s history in terms of (1) the advent of the party’s cognitive assessment of the potentials for and uses of new media; and (2) the party’s intellectual and physical day-to-day interactions with new media. The term ‘impact’ is considered to be the repercussions and consequences of phenomenological events; and the role that they play in cultural aspects and the nature of Conservative Party organisation. The impact of these events can be limited to an individual or a small collective, or be wide-reaching for the party, or range on a scale anywhere between the two proportions. This work is built on the basis that certain new mass-media, which arrive in a socio-cultural context, arrive in the organisational culture of political parties in different ways in time and space. Furthermore, it uses both particular/minutia and general/overarching cultural themes. Therefore, the historical impacts of new media in each case study are treated as being organisationally and culturally unique.

²² Margetts, ‘Cyber’, *Handbook*.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions are focused on developing an understanding of the party's organisational culture at both micro- and macro- cultural levels.²³ This research does this in asking the following research questions. Firstly, what role did the advent of television play within the Conservative Party, 1951-1964? As introduced above, Television's development as a medium for mass communication followed a period of expanding enfranchisement in Britain. How political parties respond to these developments in the democratic systems in which they exist tells us something about their evolution. Therefore, in an increasingly globalised and technologically dynamic world, questions are emerging about the impact of internet technologies on changing political organisations. This leads naturally to a second research question that asks what role did the advent of specific internet technologies play within the Conservative Party, 2005-2012? These two main periods of interest in the comparative history are separated into smaller empirical case studies.

1951-1964 is presented in four separate periods: the party under the leaderships of (1) Winston Churchill, 1951-1955; (2) Anthony Eden, 1955-1957; (3) Harold Macmillan, 1957-1963; and (4) Alec Douglas-Home, 1963-1964. This 13 year period of continual Conservative governance was contextually characterised by Britain's imperial retreat.²⁴ It was a time of significant cultural change of which the advent of television was a part. In contrast, between 1997 and 2010, the Conservative Party endured 13 years in opposition, while 'New Labour' presided over a cultural transition to a new millennium. From the illusive 'millennium bug' in the year 2000 (Y2K) to the first release of Apple's 'iPad' in 2010, the New Labour period was partly characterised by developments in computer-mediated communications.

One question for scholars of the contemporary Conservative Party has been: how and to what extent has the party changed under the leadership of David Cameron?²⁵ To some extent, this thesis joins a number of wider works in the pursuit of the essence

²³ The terms 'microcultural' or 'microculture' are used in relation to cultural minutia related to the phenomenon in question. These can be either standalone minutia or collectives that form the wider culture, or 'macroculture', of the phenomenon. In this case, further analysis of the dynamics of these cultures tells us something about the nature of the Conservative Party's response to the advent of new media. See, Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (John Wiley, San Francisco, 2010).

²⁴ Stephen Brooke, 'The Conservative Party, Immigration and National Identity, 1948-1968', in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society: 1880-1990* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1996), pp. 147-170.

²⁵ Tim Bale, "'A Bit Less Bunny-Hugging and a Bit More Bunny-Boiling'? Qualifying Conservative Party Change under David Cameron", *British Politics*, No. 3 (2008), pp. 270-299.

of that question.²⁶ However, it does so with an examination of the party 2005-2012, with a sharp focus on its culture in the run-up to the 2010 General Election²⁷ and with particular interest in addressing the role of new communication technologies in its organisation. Lilleker and Jackson's study of Web 2.0 tools used by six party websites in the 2010 General Election found that the political parties used differing strategic approaches to these technologies.²⁸ Therefore, comparisons with other parties are not made extensively in this thesis, because it would not enlighten significantly further the research questions. However, there is some discussion of other British parties, for contextual purposes, in parts II and III.

During the 1951-1964 period, the technological nature of the medium of television meant that its technological application in the party's user culture was relatively uniform when compared to the fragmented nature of communication technologies in the contemporary period, which has been symbolised by its vast range of internet-based multimedia and multipurpose technologies. Therefore, in order to identify the specific characteristics and roles of each medium, where appropriate, the analysis of those research questions which relate to internet technologies are categorised by either the specific nature of the individual internet-based communication technology, like email,²⁹ or are grouped into technological types. For example, Facebook.com, Twitter.com and blogs can be categorised together as 'social media'.³⁰ In addition to

²⁶ See, for example, Peter Snowdon, *Back from the Brink: The Inside Story of the Tory Resurrection* (Harper Collins, London, 2010); Peter Snowdon, *The Extraordinary Fall and Rise of the Conservative Party* (Harper Collins, London, 2010); Tim Bale, *The Conservative Party from Thatcher to Cameron* (Polity, Cambridge, 2011); Peter Dorsey, Mark Garnett and Andrew Denham, *From Crisis to Coalition: The Conservative Party, 1997-2010* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2011); Timothy Heppell and David Seawright (eds.), *Cameron and the Conservatives: The Transition to Coalition Government* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012); and Peter Dorsey, Mark Garnett and Andrew Denham, *From Crisis to Coalition: The Conservative Party, 1997-2010*, (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2011).

²⁷ In terms of this research, 'the run-up to the 2010 General Election' is considered to be from the point at which David Cameron became leader of the Conservative Party in December 2005. Therefore, 'the run-up to the 2010 General Election', also referred to as 'the run-up to 2010', includes the 2008 London Mayoral Election Campaign; 2009 local and European Election campaigns; and long campaign and short campaign periods leading up to the General Election, 6 May 2010.

²⁸ Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, 'Towards a more participatory style of election campaigning: The impact of web 2.0 on the UK 2010 general election', *Policy & Internet*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2012), pp. 69-98.

²⁹ Email is an electronic mailing system, which is facilitated by the internet and used as a method for the exchange of electronic textual and audiovisual communications by individual users through networks of email providers. Its use was extant in British culture, in the private and professional contexts, throughout the contemporary period.

³⁰ The term 'social media' refers to a group of web 2.0 internet-based applications that include, but are not limited to, the most prominent social networking websites like 'Facebook' and 'Twitter' and also the blogosphere. The blogosphere is the universe of extant blogs on the Worldwide Web. Social media technologies are characterised by their interactive nature and relatively publically viewable information exchange of multimedia communications. See, Jose van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2013), pp. 3-5.

these internet-based technologies and applications, other internet-based case studies, to which the research questions are applied, include: campaign websites; ‘WebCameron’; ‘MyConservatives’; and ‘Merlin’.³¹ It is clear that the two technologies of television and the internet are different in many ways in terms of their application, uses, technological impact and historical development as new media. Identifying their basic differences is useful to the exploration of the research questions. However, it plays only a minor role in this research. Instead, the focus of this work is to compare the two historical sets of empirical evidence in order to develop a deeper understanding of how the Conservative Party has responded to the advent of the two most notable new media in its history, since the event of universal suffrage in Britain.

The research questions are designed to explore the primary hypothesis that, in the case of the Conservative Party 2005-2012, the advent of the internet impacted in terms of loosening aspects of the party’s long-established hierarchical organisation; and facilitated a degree of cultural empowerment in the technologically-savvy cohorts at the party’s grassroots. This is in contrast to a secondary hypothesis which states that the impact of television, upon the Conservative Party 1951-1964, was to contribute to a degree of cultural tightening, in the hierarchical context, in the organisation of its power relationships between (1) an increasingly professionalised-elite at its centre and (2) the mass-membership at the grassroots. The concepts of tightening, or ‘centralisation’, and loosening, or ‘decentralisation’, are used in this thesis. The aim is to provide the reader with visualisation tools with which to build pictures that illustrate the strength of grip held by the Conservative Party’s central-hierarchy over the wider-party organisation. This is particularly in terms of giving indications of shifting power-dynamics between the central-party and grassroots participants.³² Southern and Ward’s study of the impact of the internet in the campaigns of the five main British political parties in the 2010 General Election uses similar concepts. They conclude that new web-based applications, like social media, provided a veneer of localism and, therefore, gave the appearance of a general trend towards decentralisation. Moreover, their research found

³¹ These technologies were internet-linked applications that were designed and built for Conservative Party use in party organisation and campaign contexts. See chapters Five and Six.

³² In terms of this thesis, ‘power’ is understood to be the ability of an individual, or collective, to influence and/or impact on the roles of others and/or anthropogenic factors. The use of the term ‘hierarchy’ is in relation to party organisation and the systemisation of individuals into an organisational structure that functions in relation to the levels of importance and ‘power’ that may be wielded by any given individual or collective. For further reading on power, see, Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organisation and Power* (Press Syndicate, Cambridge, 1988).

that any general decentralisation from internet use was ‘countered’ by the increased centralisation of party databases.³³

A supplementary research question is used in the final stage of this comparative history. It brings together analytically 1951-1964 and 2005-2012 in the final part of the thesis. It asks: how do the roles of the new media of television and internet, in their respective periods, compare in terms of their impact on the organisational culture of the Conservative Party? This question is addressed in order to (1) identify and compare the modes of adaptation, e.g. deliberate top-down drivers of change and/or organic change driven from the bottom-up, which have in some way influenced the party’s evolution; and (2) to discern what these impacts mean more generally for the party’s organisational culture, and the distribution of power within the party hierarchy.

When compared to more traditional studies of political parties and media, which tend to take a more narrowcast approach, the comparative history approach provides a more panoramic view, albeit it an incomplete view of the party’s chronology between the two cases. To some degree, this is a limitation of the work. However, in taking two specific dissections of the party’s history, it enables a close-up comparison of the party’s responses to potential drivers of party evolution that have been separated by a significant distance in time. Furthermore, this thesis is primarily interested in the party’s response to developments in new mass communication technologies that have some significant socio-cultural omnipotence. Therefore, as this thesis is interested in the party’s response to the two most notable techno-cultural advances in British new mass communications since universal suffrage, a study that includes the party between 1965 and 2004 could tell us something about how the party’s organisational culture has evolved, and how the party has developed new ways of connecting with the voter, but it would not provide a significantly brighter illumination of the central research interests of this thesis. This is largely because there have been few other, if any, new media since 1928 which could claim a comparable degree of socio-cultural impact to that of television and internet.

Therefore, in summary, rather than being a study which simply compares two different media, this work compares two different histories of the Conservative Party’s relationship with new media during two different periods of technological expansion in Britain. Each historical case study is used to compare against the other in order to

³³ Rosalynd Southern and Stephen Ward, ‘Below the Radar? Online Campaigning at the Local Level in the 2010 Election’, in Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimer and Simon Atkinson (ed.), *Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and the Media in the 2010 General Election* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 218-237.

develop a meta-historical perspective of the role of new media in the Conservative Party's organisation. This view of the Conservative Party's history is grounded in the analysis of detailed empirical evidence and narrative. It assists the research questions in indicating how the roles played by each mass communication technology in the Conservative Party compare in terms of their impacts on its organisation and culture. It elucidates also an understanding of the party's response to these new media; and what this tells us about the party's nature and characteristics in its past and its more recent history.

Archives and Sources: 1951-1964

The research questions relating to the 1951-1964 period were informed with access to sources held in the Conservative Party Archive (CPA), Bodleian Library, Oxford.³⁴ The catalogue contains manuscripts in relation to CCO, the Parliamentary Party and the National Union, a collection of private papers, and non-manuscript materials that include party publicity ephemera; transcriptions of speeches; press releases; and photographs of party leaders.³⁵ The CPA's most extensive collections date from the early twentieth century to the early twenty-first century. However, in line with the sensitive nature of the Conservative Party's role in the British state, the materials held in its collections are not released for general research until they become at least 30 years old. Therefore, the CPA was an extensive and informative source for 1951-1964, but was not available whatsoever as a source for materials relating to 2005-2012.

In the first instance, I accessed the CPA's Online Catalogue.³⁶ I identified files which contained materials relating to Conservative Party organisation, publicity, activism and management between the period from 1950 to 1965, which resulted in excess of 130 files.³⁷ These included files on Conservative Party: publicity and propaganda; broadcasting; television; radio; film; press matters; gramophone records; procedures; area organisation; constituency organisation; membership; campaigning;

³⁴ The collections of materials in the CPA cover the three main areas of organisation in the Conservative Party's history. These include: the 1922 Committee, the Shadow Cabinet, and the Chief Whip's Office, constituting the party's political arm; the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations (National Union), later succeeded by the National Conservative Convention (National Convention), constituting the party's voluntary arm; and the Conservative Research Department (CRD), and Conservative Central Office (CCO), later succeeded by Conservative Campaign Headquarters (CCHQ), constituting the party's professionalised arm. See, CPA Guide to the Conservative Party Archive, April 2009, p. 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁶ The Online Catalogue of the Conservative Party Archive is accessible, online: <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/cpa/catalogue.html>.

³⁷ A full list of the CPA files used in this thesis is presented in the Bibliography.

elections; leadership; MPs; marginal seats; intelligence; and correspondence. These were areas of investigation that fell in line with the type of sources, and lines of enquiry, that I had access to in representation of the contemporary period. I then searched each file for relevant manuscripts and artefacts that would be usable as evidence in the arguments of this thesis. The manuscripts available for analysis consisted mostly of political memoranda. Political ‘memoranda have proven useful to...historians seeking to explain internal decision-making processes and the motives and rationale behind certain principles’.³⁸ Therefore, internal Conservative Party memoranda have provided this thesis with a rich understanding of the developments involved in the process of adaptation to technological change within the party’s organisation.

The sources of the materials contained within the files were represented most frequently by textual discourse-exchange between Conservative Party participants. These included, but are not limited to Conservative Party: members and supporters; CCO officials; leaders; MPs; candidates; professionals and employed staff; local and area agents and publicity officers; voters; activists; and Young Conservatives (YCs). This wide range of sources has provided the thesis with diverse insider perspectives for analysis, on the role of television in party’s organisation 1951-1964. However, other perspectives from outside the party include: broadcasters, like the BBC; broadcasting authorities, like the Independent Television Authority (ITA); other political parties, like the Labour and Liberal parties at inter-party meetings on broadcasting; letters from non-Conservatives; and press articles.³⁹ These perspectives offer the wider cultural-context in which to place the understanding of the party’s dynamics 1951-1964. I used all fragments of evidence that were relevant to answering the research questions and mapped them across 1951-1964 in order to develop findings. These findings were woven together to form the 1951-1964 narratives and analyses presented in Part II of this thesis.

It is pertinent to take a critical view of the role of the CPA sources in this thesis, because of the gap of half a century between the types of sources accessed to inform the two main periods of interest. A limitation of this work is that it is not currently possible to gain the same level of access to CCHQ sources 2005-2012 as is given to the sources at the CPA for CCO 1951-1964. Therefore, the 1951-1964 chapters are naturally more

³⁸ Kristina Spohr Readman, ‘Memoranda’, in Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann, *Reading Primary Resources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2009), p.126.

³⁹ For a useful introduction to primary sources for British television 1945-1998, see, Ralph Negrine, *Television and the Press since 1945* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998).

centred-on CCO than those depicting 2005-2012. However, the strength of using the 1951-1964 sources is that in the context of a comparative history the work is given a richer perspective. A number of scholars, some of whom are introduced in Chapter Two, have addressed the advent of television in the Conservative Party context. However, there are no apparent published works in the current historiography that, have compared extensively two sets of original analyses of primary sources in relation to television, 1951-1964, and the internet, 2005-2012, in the context of the Conservative Party's organisational culture. Therefore, it is on this basis that the thesis claims to offer originality to the academic study of the Conservative Party. Furthermore, a greater degree of originality can be claimed for the use of sources in the contemporary period, because of the nature of the privileged access I had to the Conservative Party in the process of developing this thesis in the run-up to the 2010 General Election. An account of these sources is outlined below.

Archives and Sources: 2005-2012

Contemporary materials and human testimony⁴⁰ were gathered in order to inform the research questions that apply to 2005-2012. The contemporary period has been based largely on my personal access to an extensive national network of participants within the Conservative Party. I have been a continuous member of the Conservative Party since 2006, which was prior to the development of these research questions. Furthermore, from 2008 onward, as a Conservative activist, I have enjoyed significant access to engagement within the party at the grassroots level, with occasional trips to 10 Downing Street and CCHQ. Aside from this research, I had taken steps to fulfil personal political aspirations. However, when I eventually embarked on this research, there was no way to predict that I would be presented with such a wide-range of firsthand opportunities in which to participate and observe the Conservative Party at a range of levels and in a number of contexts for use in this thesis.

Some of the roles that I performed inside the Conservative Party included being a: Conservative Future (CF) branch chairman and president; Conservative councillor; and Conservative parliamentary candidate. Holding that combination of roles in addition to other official and unofficial roles within the party, while conducting doctoral research on the party in the run-up to a general election, was an opportunity to gain

⁴⁰ 'If history is as much about people as it is about broad social processes, then testimony provides an invaluable source for historical analysis.' See, Devin O. Pendas, 'Testimony', in Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann, *Reading Primary Resources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*: (Routledge, Abingdon, 2009), p. 226.

access to new and alternative materials and sources that had not been used before in the academic context. Many of the sources were accessible because of my friendships, close-links and personal access to networks in the party. Some of the sources were accessed in the run-up to and during the 2010 General Election and others we accessed between May 2010 and October 2012. These sources are used to inform a number of case studies in Part III.

In the run-up to the May 2009 local government and European elections, I began a participant observation, with ethnographic leanings, in the electorally Conservative County of Surrey, with a focus on the Runnymede, Weybridge and Spelthorne Conservative Group (RWSCG). The RWSCG consisted of the two autonomous Conservative associations whose MPs represented the Runnymede & Weybridge and the Spelthorne constituencies. As will be evident, the ethnographically-inspired field work snowballed significantly to present me with many other opportunities for interaction within the party at a variety of levels throughout its hierarchy and in a range of geographical, socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts. It included a period in the run-up to the 2010 General Election when I was selected as the Conservative PPC for the Labour-Plaid Cymru marginal constituency of Ynys Môn | Anglesey.

The evidence presented in Part III is a result of this intensive experiential research in the field of Conservative politics and elections. Therefore, the work draws on a wide-range of sources in addition to the researcher's observations and memoirs. These include: unpublished documents; published documents; articles and communications; formal semi-structured interviews with Conservative Party participants; and information supplied direct to me by anonymous Conservative-insiders, which I refer to as informants/respondents or where appropriate using a generic label for general identification of the source like 'activist' for example. As in Part II, where appropriate, I reference usable sources in the footnotes. However, the ethnographic-based evidence detailed throughout the contemporary research chapters, like personal narrative, is presented without specific references to the ethnographic source e.g. research logs/journals, except for specific citations in reference to text from an informant's interview or useable forms of correspondence like non-sensitive emails.

From early 2008 to mid-2010, I engaged in a number of data gathering exercises both on- and off- line. I collected and catalogued in the digital form, an extensive range of emails, social media data, like Facebook and Twitter interactions, and

ConservativeHome.com⁴¹ stories. The email archive was saved digitally using the ant@politician.com email account via the Mail.com email provider, which included communications from: Conservative associations, like Anglesey, Cities of London and Westminster, Hammersmith, Kingston, Richmond Park, Runnymede & Weybridge, and Spelthorne; Tory-affiliated groups, like The Bow Group,⁴² ConservativeHome, Conservative Way Forward,⁴³ The Tory Reform Group,⁴⁴ and CCHQ communications.⁴⁵

Using an approach based on snowballing techniques, I joined, observed and sampled a range of Facebook groups and pages related to the Conservative Party in the run-up to 2010.⁴⁶ These data were accessed directly via my personal account on Facebook.com. The Facebook groups accessed included: three university-based CF/society groups: University College London (UCL) CF, Kings College London (KCL) CF, and Aberystwyth University CF; four association-based Conservative Future groups: Aberconwy CF, Runnymede & Weybridge CF, Richmond Park CF, and Cities of London & Westminster CF; three Tory parliamentary candidates: Ridge-Newman for Ynys Môn, Nigel Huddleson for Luton South, and Michelle Tempest for West Durham; and four Tory-affiliated groups: Tory Reform Group, The Bow Group, Conservative Way Forward, and Progressive Conservatives.⁴⁷ The Facebook pages accessed included Conservative Party-affiliated pages of: Anthony Ridge-Newman, Ynys Môn candidate;

⁴¹ ConservativeHome, also known as 'ConHome', is a Tory-affiliated blog owned and financed by Lord Ashcroft, which was founded and is edited by Tim Montgomerie, online: <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/>.

⁴² The Bow Group is a Tory-affiliated group which describes itself as a centre-right think tank and is therefore regarded as being closely associated with mainstream Conservative thought. See, The Bow Group, 'Welcome to the Bow Group', online: <http://www.bowgroup.org/content/welcome-bow-group> [accessed, 28 November 2012].

⁴³ Conservative Way Forward is viewed as the Tory-affiliated group that is to the right of Cameron's Conservatives, because its principles are rooted in Thatcherism. See, Conservative Way Forward, 'About Us', online: <http://www.conwayfor.org/about-us.html> [accessed, 28 November, 2012].

⁴⁴ The Tory Reform Group is the Tory-affiliated group which is generally associated with the left of the party. It was founded in order to 'challenge the laissez-faire economics which...had come to dominate the party's thinking.' See, John Charmley, *History of Conservative Politics 1900-1996* (Macmillan, London, 1996), p. 113.

⁴⁵ Digital and paper-based evidence gathered and sampled for the representation of the 2005-2012 period has been stored and organised in private on- and off- line collections, which I refer to as the Ridge-Newman Archive (RNA).

⁴⁶ The snowball approach is an organic approach used in social science, whereby access to, and sampling of, sources occurs naturally in a stepwise fashion throughout the course of the fieldwork in a chain of referrals (known as chain referral technique) from one event or recommendation to another. See, H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Rowman & Littlefield, Landham, 2006), pp.192-194. The approach was adapted to suit the specific needs of this research.

⁴⁷ Progressive Conservatives were 'a group of classical liberals in the Conservative Party' according to Michael Rock's Facebook Page, Director of Progressive Conservatives 2009-2011.

Boris Johnson, London Mayor; David Cameron, party leader; David Jones, Shadow Minister; Kwasi Kwarteng, Spelthorne Candidate; Robin Walker, Worcester Candidate; and the party's four main groupings of: Conservative Future; Conservatives; Scottish Conservatives; and Welsh Conservatives. The other parties' pages included: Labour Party; Liberal Democrats; and Nick Clegg, Liberal Democrats leader. In the run-up to the 2010, I sampled, again using the snowball approach, and saved in Portable Document Format (PDF), a range of Conservative Party websites, web pages, like www.conservatives.com, and other sites like the 'Total Politics' magazine's website in order to capture and cite statistics and facts within this thesis. These included also some web-based news and blog articles.

From October 2006 until October 2012, I kept a range of paper-based communications from the party and its participants in relation to my party membership. During three election periods: (1) London Mayoral Election 2008; (2) European Election 2009; and (3) General Election 2010, I collected a range of other paper-based materials, like campaign ephemera and Conservative Party campaign guidance. I collected pertinent Conservative Party publications and observational data at Conservative Party conferences in 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012. During that time, I collected also a range of observational data. Many sources grew out of my personal involvement in the Conservative campaigns of 2008, 2009 and 2010. I gained a number of informal-informants who were accessed both on- and off- line. Their identities, for ethical reasons, will remain anonymous in this thesis.

There are some significant ethical considerations and problems in relation to this work. I have resolved these in line with the Royal Holloway, University of London, ethical guidelines. I did this by submitting an ethics form to my supervisor in the process of designing the research. Subsequently, I made some considered choices about how to approach the use of information in these chapters. Unlike the 1951-1964 period of this thesis, 2005-2012 falls within the traditional 30 year timeframe that is generally considered to be an acceptable length of time for the release of documentation and information into the public domain. Moreover, when dealing with an organisation like a political party, a significant portion of the information, to which I have had personal access, would be considered sensitive. Therefore, I have had to consider my role and position of trust within the Conservative Party. Even though I overtly informed various Conservative Party participants about my research topic, as my roles within the party developed, my authentic commitment to the roles I held within the party meant that it was unmanageable and unrealistic to inform every individual inside and outside the

party with whom I had contact in the course of carrying-out my political and organisational roles and academic interests.

Therefore, I have consciously sanitised aspects of the narrative informed by anonymous informants in order to ensure that the information disclosed is both ethical and appropriate to the research aims.⁴⁸ In the course of this research, I developed good relationships with a large number of informants. I am committed to maintaining their anonymity. The manner in which I address this is based on Alexander Smith's approach to protecting 'identities'.⁴⁹ Unless I have at some point gained direct, written and informed consent from a specific informant, e.g. through the semi-structured interviews, or unless the informant has made comments in a public on- or off- line forum like a blog or at a party conference event, I endeavour to not refer to the informant by name in relation to a direct quote or cited information. In most cases, I believe it to be ethical to maintain the informant's anonymity. However, where an individual held an overt and official role in the political process, e.g. a chairman or officer of a Conservative organisation, I have engaged my judgement on a case-by-case basis in terms of the extent to which I reveal the actions, sentiments and identities of such individuals. Therefore, in some cases, rather than directly naming the individual(s), where appropriate, I use generic terms like 'association officer' in order to indicate the type of individual and source from which the information came. I give general indication to the group and/or location in which the information originated, e.g. 'from the Anglesey association'.

I refrain from identifying the source type only in the instances where I suspect that indication to the source-type would lead to revealing the identity of the informant. However, an exception to that rule is for those artefacts, e.g. emails and internet postings, which were clearly intended by the author for public distribution or audience. Examples of this would be an auto-response email from an MP or a widely distributed correspondence from a political group. I include some verbatim text contained in emails sent by myself on Conservative Party organisation matters. In such cases, the names of other Conservative participants are quoted, but only in the capacity of their overt and/or public roles within the party. These instances are in relation to the participant's role as a prominent actor in a specific- or meta- narrative that is integral to the explanation of an example or scenario with historical relevance to illustrating

⁴⁸ Avner Segall, 'Critical ethnography and the invocation of voice: From the field/in the field-single exposure, double standard?', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (2001), pp. 579-592.

⁴⁹ See, Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*, p. 12.

aspects of my response to the research questions. I endeavour to not include anything that would be considered secret or sensitive in nature. However, in certain instances, potentially sensitive materials may have been used to inform general arguments and observations to give cultural texture to the narrative. In these cases, the sources are anonymised.

The campaigns featured in the case studies demonstrate to some extent how some individuals are willing to engage in activism and campaigning for specific candidates and/or causes, and are willing to display their support in public groups in internet venues like Facebook, Twitter and on political blogs. However, it is important to note that these party-workers and supporters are not necessarily ‘paid-up’ members of the Conservative Party.⁵⁰ The dichotomy of this observed phenomenon challenges what it means to be a Conservative member and harks back to the term often used by CCO in the 1950s to describe the ‘Conservative supporter’.⁵¹ Through my observations, I witnessed firsthand the value that these supporters bring to the party. In many respects, each supporter may be of greater value to the party in monetary terms than the price of an individual membership subscription.⁵² Therefore, I use interchangeably the terms ‘supporter’ and ‘member’, and often use the term ‘Conservative participant’ as a catchall phrase, with the loosest possible definition to indicate an individual who engaged in some supportive interaction within the party, either through a physical act of support in word or deed; or through financing the party in some way, either through donations, events or membership subscriptions. I use the terms ‘registered’ member or ‘paid-up’ member, in references to precise membership data, which was, in itself, the vocabulary used by the officers of the Conservative associations with whom I had contact.

A diverse oral history⁵³ of retrospective testimonies from respondents, who were actively engaged in official and unofficial roles inside the Conservative Party, has

⁵⁰ See, Justin Fisher, Edward Fieldhouse and David Cutts, ‘Members Are Not the Only Fruit: Volunteer Activity in British Political Parties at the 2010 General Election’, *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, online: DOI: 10.1111/1467-856X.12011 (2013).

⁵¹ See chapters Three and Four.

⁵² For example, a well organised and efficient delivery network, as I observed in the Virginia Water & Thorpe Branch of the Runnymede & Weybridge association, can save an association’s resources and a candidate’s campaign fund from being significantly depleted in paying thousands of pounds in costs for delivery services. The cost of delivery by Royal Mail for one A4 leaflet on Anglesey in the 2010 General Election was in the region of £2,151 for full coverage of the constituency. RNA Quote for Isle of Anglesey from Royal Mail, sent by email to ant@politician.com, 3 November 2010.

⁵³ Oral history ‘has often been framed in terms of “uncovering new stories” or “giving voice to the unheard, the secret,” making it, in effect a form of exposé or evidence where no other is available.’

offered this thesis a range of insider perspectives of their observations and analyses of the role of the internet in the 2010 General Election. The ten oral history accounts were drawn from pre-arranged interviews and were conducted between 12 March 2011 and 1 July 2011, ranging approximately one year from the 2010 General Election. In terms of this research, the respondents were given a letter, informing their consent, and asked to sign a declaration giving their permission for their testimonies to be used in relation to this thesis and subsequent publications. The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and later transcribed by a professional transcription service. The individual transcripts were emailed to the corresponding respondents who were given 14 days to respond with any amendments. Subsequently, in using the text from the interviews, I have edited final inclusions in respect to formatting, correcting grammar, and removing passages of text or arrangements of words that either added no meaning to the context of the response, e.g. 'you know', or confused the respondent's intended meaning. The transcription service did not provide an entirely accurate transcription of some of the phrases and jargon. Therefore, I edited and corrected also these errors accordingly. The oral testimonies these respondents have provided a range of insider perspectives that have fed an alternative oral history narrative of the Tory Party's use of new media in the run-up to the 2010 General Election and beyond.

The official roles of the ten respondents in 2010 were: Councillor Ben Howlett, key national CF activist (elected National Chairman of CF 2011-2013); Craig Elder, Deputy Head of New Media at CCHQ; Councillor Hugh Meares, Chairman of Runnymede & Weybridge Conservative Association (RWCA); Iain Dale, author of and commentator on the Iain Dale's Diary blog; Jonathan Isaby, Co-Editor of the ConservativeHome blog; Oliver Cooper, key London CF activist; Councillor René Kinzett, Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) for Swansea West Conservatives; Robin Walker, Conservative PPC for Worcester (successfully elected to Parliament); Therese Coffey, Conservative PPC for Suffolk Coastal (successfully elected to Parliament); and councillors Mr Derek and, the late, Mrs Diana Cotty, RWCA officers and activists.⁵⁴ Each respondent was considered to be unique in terms of their interaction with the Conservative Party in the run-up to the election. Therefore, the line of questioning was prepared in advance based on their unique role and position within

Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (eds.), *Oral History and Public Memoires* (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2008), p. viii.

⁵⁴ I became uncomfortable about using the testimony of the Cotty family when I learned of the death of my friend, former Runnymede colleague, and respondent, Councillor Mrs Diana Cotty. But all other testimonies are used in this thesis.

campaigns in specific geographical locations. For some respondents, their campaign universe expanded as far as a neighbouring constituency. For others, campaigning across many different locations in England and Wales occurred. Therefore, the interviews were semi-structured in order to allow the freedom for culturally rich and qualitatively detailed responses to be given for analysis.

The Approach

This comparative history is influenced by academic thought in the disciplines of Cultural Studies, History and Political Science. In addition to the traditional archival approach used to inform 1951-1964, the methodological approach to the contemporary period is influenced by ethnography, which provides the comparative history with an ethnographic sensibility.⁵⁵ The work is addressed from a standpoint using the insider perspective. This provides an insight into Conservative Party phenomena in relation to the research questions; and provides an opportunity for analysis of the role of new media in the Conservative Party from diverse sources from within the party itself.

Using interpretive analyses influenced by hermeneutics, this thesis is interested in detailing and describing the cultural minutia of how the Conservative Party and its constituent-parts used specific new media, in the microcultural context.⁵⁶ These fragments of minutia are used to build piece-by-piece the wider view of the party's macroculture, which tells us something about its responses to the use of technology in

⁵⁵ Ethnography is an anthropological approach that is simply concerned with observing human cultures. It can be adapted to observe most human settings and is applied here to both on- and off- line observation of participation. For further reading, see, Barbara Tedlock, 'From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (1991), pp. 69-94. For an example of ethnographic analysis of political rituals see Marc Abeles, 'Modern political ritual: Ethnography of an inauguration and a pilgrimage by President Mitterrand', *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 29 (1998), pp. 391-404; for an example of the use of ethnography in cultural history, see, Romain Bertrand, Jean-Louis Briquet and Peter Pels, 'Introduction: Towards an historical ethnography of voting', in Romain Bertrand, Jean-Louis Briquet and Peter Pels (eds.), *Cultures of Voting: The Hidden History of the Secret Ballot* (Hurst and Company, London, 2007), pp. 1-15; and for an anthropological view of change in intra-party relationships, see, Florence Faucher-King, *Changing Political Parties: An Anthropology of British Political Conferences* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2005). Aspects of this thesis are influenced by 'autoethnography', therefore, see, also, Leon Anderson, 'Analytic Autoethnography', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2006), pp. 373-395.

⁵⁶ The analysis of the evidence has been influenced by 'hermeneutics', in the broad sense, as a tool of the social sciences for the interpretation of textual sources, ephemera, oral testimonies and firsthand observations, primarily because it places importance on analysing cultural minutia in the context of wider cultural understanding. See, Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (Sheed and Ward, London, 1975); and Zygmunt Bauman, *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding* (Routledge Revivals, London, 1978/2010).

the context of its wider cultural history.⁵⁷ An aim of the analysis is to give greater holistic texture to vivid descriptions of Conservative Party phenomena. Therefore, the description of individuals' interpretations, judgements and perspectives are used to enhance the cultural narratives using subjective indicators like the assessment of atmospheres, feelings and images. These indicators provide rich descriptions of the cultural phenomena of interest.

Another aim of this thesis is to unearth potentially latent phenomena in Conservative Party history. Providing an absolute list of variables that constitute the party's culture would defeat the purpose of the thesis, and is beyond its remit. However, it is always useful in any cultural study to develop an awareness of the types of holistic indicators that might be addressed in the work.⁵⁸ Not all indicators were pre-defined, but those which were include Conservative Party: attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, bureaucracies, cultures, customs, innovations, lifestyles, motives, perceptions, resources, structures, and symbols. The analysis involves also the assessment of some key historical Conservative Party characteristics in relation to its evolution.⁵⁹ These include Conservative Party: activism and engagement;⁶⁰ age and demographics;⁶¹ adaptability;⁶² association autonomy;⁶³ awareness and consciousness; deference;⁶⁴ discipline; geographical locations; hierarchies;⁶⁵ ideas and ideologies;⁶⁶ leadership;⁶⁷

⁵⁷ Jan Kubik, 'Ethnography of Politics: Foundations, Applications, Prospects', in Edward Schatz (ed.), *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2009), pp. 25-52.

⁵⁸ Hanna Adoni and Sherrill Mane, 'Media and the Social Construction of Reality toward an Integration of Theory and Research', *Communication Research*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (1984), pp. 323-340.

⁵⁹ Many of the party's historic characteristics have been identified in, Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd, and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7, which suggests that there are differences in the behaviours and attitudes between younger and older members of the Conservative Party, for example, under 25s are twice as likely to be very active when compared to the general party membership.

⁶² For general reading on the party's historic adaptability, see, Seldon and Ball, *Century*, pp. 64-65, 165, 170, 547, 611.

⁶³ See, for example, Stuart Ball, 'Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), pp. 261-311.

⁶⁴ For the party's deference, see, for example, Seldon and Ball, *Century*, p.215.

⁶⁵ For the party's hierarchy, see, for example, *Ibid.* p. 4, 6, 214.

⁶⁶ For twentieth century Conservative ideology, see, E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism* (Oxford University Press, 2002); and Kevin Hickson, *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2005). For twenty-first century Conservative ideology, see, Timothy Heppell and Michael Hill, 'Ideological Typologies of Contemporary British Conservatism', *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 3 (2005), pp. 335-355.

⁶⁷ See, Tim Bale, *The Conservatives since 1945, The Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

organisation; pragmatism;⁶⁸ reaction to new technologies;⁶⁹ and traditions. There are also some main fixed objects of interest like Conservative Party: artefacts; affiliated groups; cadres; cohorts; factions; leaders; and participants, all of which are addressed as individual units for analysis. Analyses of the dynamics between combinations of these key factors constitute some of the main themes discussed throughout this work.

Thesis Structure and Outline

Thesis Structure

The thesis is presented in four parts. Part I, of which this chapter is part, aims to be an introduction to the research, historiography and other influences on which this thesis builds its ideas and arguments. Building on what has been introduced above, Chapter Two discusses scholarly perspectives in the disciplines of Cultural Studies, History and Political Science.

Parts II and III contain the four research chapters. Part II represents the Conservative Party 1951-1964, with two chapters. The first of these chapters, Chapter Three, presents and analyses the archival evidence on the role of television in Churchill's and Eden's Conservatives. The second chapter of Part II continues this approach, but moves forward in the chronology to represent Macmillan's and Douglas-Home's Conservatives, in Chapter Four.

Part III takes a four decade leap toward contemporary times in order to examine the role of the advent of specific internet technologies in the Conservative Party 2005-2012, and consists of two chapters which present evidence from oral testimonies and participant observation. Chapter Five presents oral testimony and researcher memoirs' detailing the role of internet technologies in Conservative associations. These form a number of campaign-based case studies that act like snapshots of specific vistas of the party at the grassroots between 2008 and 2010. The second chapter of Part III, Chapter Six, builds on the individual snapshots taken in the previous chapter to provide a more panoramic view of the role of internet technologies in Cameron's Conservatives at the national level. This is informed using extensive oral testimony and some numerical data that grew-out of participant observations.

Part IV presents the comparative history in two chapters. Firstly, Chapter Seven compares the findings for the Conservative parties of the 1951-1964 period and the

⁶⁸ For the party's pragmatism, see, Seldon and Ball, *Century*, p. 9, 296, 345, 382, 540, 609.

⁶⁹ For the party's response to technology, see, for example, *Ibid.*, p. 12, 170, 188.

findings for Cameron's Conservatives 2005-2012. Part IV concludes with a reflection on the main narratives, analyses, arguments and findings in Chapter Eight. This precedes the Bibliography, which includes organised lists of primary and secondary sources; and the Appendices, which include the full interview transcripts for each respondent's oral history testimony.

Outline of Arguments

The main purpose of Part I of this thesis is to discuss how various academic influences inform the research questions and method. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two introduces ideas like modernity and postmodern thought and argues the importance of placing the analyses of the case studies in their time-specific contexts. The chapter takes a critical approach to the analysis of Helen Margetts' 'cyber party'.⁷⁰ It is argued that aspects of her evocative model appear somewhat impaired, but that it is nevertheless a useful concept when adapted to explain certain phenomena observable in Cameron's Conservatives 2005-2012.

Firstly in Part II, Chapter Three argues that from Churchill's Conservatives to Eden's Conservatives 1951-1957 the party was rooted in a mass-based culture that was transitioning from being a political party which seldom recognised the importance of television as a political medium to incorporating opportunities at all levels of the party's diverse hierarchy for interaction with the new medium. In contrast, Chapter Four argues that the party underwent a significant process of evolution between 1957 and 1964 in terms of its cultural and organisational approach to political television. By the end of the period, the advent of television acted as a driver of change that contributed to influences that in turn saw a tightening of operations, thus forming a more centralised and professionalised-party. It is suggested that this contributed to a new TV-centric culture in the party's organisation, which was accompanied by a decline in the party's traditional mass-based culture.

A half century jump from Part II takes the reader from late modernity to the new millennium in Part III. Chapter Five introduces themes relating to the role of the internet in Cameron's Conservatives like the: digital and age divide; digital bureaucracy; digital campaign-enhancement; dissolution of geographical boundaries; heterogeneity of Conservative associations; integration of new technologies in traditional hierarchies; and rapport and digital trust signals. Chapter Six expands on

⁷⁰ Margetts, 'Cyber', *Handbook*.

these themes and integrates them into the wider arguments for the 2005-2012 period. The chapter relates its findings to Margetts' idea of 'the Cyber Party' and argues that, in the run-up to 2010, a newly empowered organisational subculture evolved at the Conservative Party's grassroots, which I call 'Cyber Toryism'.

Finally Part IV, provides a comparative history in Chapter Seven, which argues that the advent of internet technologies facilitated a culture in the party which in turn contributed to a loosening of the grip that the central-party had held traditionally over the organisation of its communications since the late 1950s; and that between 2005 and 2010 there was some redistribution of power away from central-elites to those Conservative participants at the grassroots who embraced innovative uses of specific internet technologies. Therefore, the thesis concludes in Chapter Eight that, since the late 1950s, the impact of the advents of new political mass media on the Conservative Party's organisational culture have been to contribute to an evolution away from a mass-party culture to a technologically-centric culture, in which television 1951-1964 significantly penetrated central-party culture; and internet technologies 2005-2012 most notably synthesised with the party in subcultures at the grassroots.

TWO

Theory and Historiography

This research could have taken a number of different paths to the study of the Conservative Party. The most obvious alternative to comparing histories through the cultural lens is to choose one of the diverse parsimonious approaches to the study of political parties in Political Science. However, few political scientists engage with methods that embrace the complex dynamics of political parties in a holistic-cultural context.⁷¹ This chapter takes a critical approach to the presentation of the work influencing it in the academic areas of cultural theory and the study of political parties. The first section outlines some of the theoretical influences including communication culture, organisational culture, political culture, cultural methodology and digital culture. The second section addresses the historiography and academic perspectives in relation to the Conservative Party and new media in the periods of interest. The chapter argues in favour of addressing the study of political parties on an individual case basis, using in-depth cultural analysis.

Cultural Theory

John Thompson draws on diverse theoretical strands like cultural history and communication theory in order to provide some basis for the understanding of the role of media in the context of modernity,⁷² which this thesis argues is significant to the interpretation of the role of television in the Conservative Party 1951-1964. Thompson's main thesis states:

...that we can understand the social impact of the development of new networks of communication and information flow only if we put aside the intuitively plausible idea that communication media serve to transmit information and symbolic content to individuals whose relations to others remain fundamentally unchanged. We must see instead that the uses of communication media involves the creation of new forms of action and interaction in the social world, new kinds of social relationship and new ways of relating to others and to oneself. When individuals use communication media, they enter into forms of interaction which differ

⁷¹ Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Edward Schatz, 'From the Inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research', *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2004), pp. 267-271.

⁷² John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2003).

in certain respects from the type of face-to-face interactions which characterises most encounters of daily life.⁷³

In this respect, this thesis approaches television, 1951-1964, and the internet, 2005-2012, as impacting on the interactions between participants within the Conservative Party in new ways. This means that new cultural phenomena are observable in the form of adaptations in their behaviours, attitudes and approaches to new media. Furthermore, this thesis is particularly interested in identifying and detailing Conservative participant interactions with new media and using the dichotomies, in terms of how they differ from general face-to-face human contact, in order to place the cultural analysis in context.

Thompson's theory is useful in that it identifies the broad sociological connections of power relations between the individual and the political arena, and provides a theoretical understanding for how communication technologies can mediate it and facilitate the formation of new cultures and social networks. In light of the recent developments in social networks online, one could argue that Thompson's words were prophetic. However, although Thompson recognises the historical development of a globalised society, he takes a sceptical stance on the idea of a postmodern age. In that sense, Thompson's theory is useful as it helps contextualise the wider issues of modernity in which this thesis has an interest for the 1951-1964 period. However, the advent of the highly globalised and networked world in which Cameron's Conservatives developed in the run-up to 2010 requires this research to embrace some plasticity in its approach. Therefore, Thompson's ideas are used cautiously in the contemporary context.

Edgar Schein's ideas and approaches in relation to organisational culture⁷⁴ go some way in providing contexts for the analysis of sub- and micro- cultures in postmodern society in relation to the role of culture and individual leadership in organisations. Schein's interdisciplinary model for cultural analysis draws upon the fields of anthropology, sociology and psychology. His integrated approach is based on gathering empirical evidence that is rooted in his own experiences and observations; and the use of interdisciplinary academic theory, as a method to explain what he observes. His book has been developed from the earlier editions to recognise the growing diversity and complexity that organisational phenomena have been shown to exhibit as

⁷³ Ibid. p. 4

⁷⁴ Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (John Wiley, San Francisco, 2010).

the time continuum has moved forward. Schein stresses the necessity to evolve one's thinking in line with organisational evolutions, which is a flexibility that lacks in Thompson's approach to cultural theory.

Hierarchical parties like the Conservative Party are influenced by the organisational role and political vision of the party leader. Schein argues:

...(1) that leaders as entrepreneurs are the main architects of culture, (2) that after cultures are formed, they influence what kind of leadership is possible, and (3) that if elements of the culture become dysfunctional, leadership can and must do something to speed up culture change...⁷⁵

These points are useful for the development of an understanding of the relationships between the Conservative Party leadership and other party dynamics. Points two and three are applicable to the understanding of the long view of change in the Conservative Party, especially in chapters Three and Four to explain how the party changed rapidly under Macmillan to Douglas-Home. Schein's idea that organisational leaders are entrepreneurs is useful in chapters Six and Seven as a possible explanation of how innovations of individuals in leadership roles impacted on changing uses of new technologies in Cameron's Conservatives. Schein rightly points out that developments in computer-mediated communications have caused the dynamics of relationships between leaders and their organisations to culturally evolve in response to the expansion of the interconnectivity of globalised networks. This helps to address the explanation of the overall developments in Conservative Party culture over longer periods of time and, therefore, has given a particularly useful theoretical grounding for arguments in the comparative history in Chapter Seven.

There are significant differences between Thompson's modernist and Schein's postmodernist perspectives. Thompson argues that the networking capabilities of contemporary technologies is important to the understanding of changes in human behavioural response, but that it does not collectively mark the advent of a new age. Conversely, Schein suggests that evolutions in the complexities of internet technologies means there is a fundamental divergence between (1) the traditional hierarchies, and (2) contemporary networks, of organisations. Therefore, the dichotomies produced from the conflation of these two approaches is useful for the assessment of the differences observed in the evidence from the two periods of interest, such as the traditional

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

hierarchy of the Conservative Party 1951-1964, which is discussed in Part II; and the dynamic network characteristics of the Conservative Party 2005-2012, which are discussed in Part III.

It is useful to explore some of the thinking behind political culture in order to place the concepts of Thompson's communications culture and Schein's organisational culture more deeply in the political context. The multiple strands of thought in relation to political culture were brought together by Dennis Kavanagh in the 1970s.⁷⁶ At that time, Kavanagh suggested that the scholarly approaches in political culture were 'concerned with orientations towards political objects'⁷⁷ and that it 'may be seen as the overall distribution of citizen's orientations to political objects.'⁷⁸ He describes orientations as the motives, norms, symbols, knowledge, awareness, emotions and judgements relating to the political system. Objects in politics are outlined as the parts that comprise the political system including state institutions, political organisations and the perspectives of the individual. It was a broad approach that was largely focused on the description of macrocultural interactions between objects within the political system. Kavanagh presented key themes such as political parties being 'subcultures' of the political system, 'political socialisation'⁷⁹ and 'political culture and change'.

This thesis considers political socialisation, to be the process by which individual Conservative participants learn the cultural and hierarchical ways of Conservative Party networks at the microcultural level. This may lead to subsequent dynamic interactions between: individuals and collectives; informal and official collective groups; hierarchical and structural phenomena; and new and traditional media: symbols, objects, attitudes, approaches and behaviours. Political culture and change is used as a meta-historical concept in order to help explain and compare the influences of wider historical trends and phenomena, in the two periods of interest. The thesis recognises a range of interconnected influences, with both internal and external origins, upon the Conservative Party's cultural and organisational responses to change, but focuses on the uses and influences of media and technologies in the societies in which it has operated at different points in time; and how this relates to its intracultural dynamics.

⁷⁶ Dennis Kavanagh, *Studies in Comparative Politics: Political Culture* (Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1972).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Here the term 'political socialisation' refers to the identity of a citizen in a democratic system and their socio-political development and understanding within it.

Philip Howard's studies⁸⁰ approach the role of new media in the wider context of changing political cultures in specific societies. Although his work is often set in entirely different contexts to this thesis, his basic ideas are applicable to aspects of this framework. He suggests that in addition to 'abstract values and ideologies' political culture is influenced by technology and that our ideals, electoral leanings and opinions are shaped by technological evolution.⁸¹ This thesis is influenced by Howard's idea that, firstly, technology can evolve and, secondly, that it has the power to impact on individuals and groups. This supports the assumption on which this thesis is based that certain techno-cultural evolutions in wider society lead to new media innovations which have the potential to impact at micro- and macro- cultural levels in the Conservative Party.

Like Kavanagh, Howard uses political culture as an approach to develop an understanding of the macrocultural perspective. In doing so he is able to draw on the diverse strands of political communication studies that address political engagement in Middle Eastern countries. However, the work lacks the kind of cultural texture that would be gained by an approach with an ethnographic sensibility. Howard is himself a proponent of creatively adapting ethnographic methods for research in e-politics and political culture. 'As new forms of social organisation and communities appear, researchers must adapt their methods in order best to capture evidence.'⁸² He describes ethnographic approaches as 'the systematic description of human behaviour and organisational culture based on first-hand observation.'⁸³ His innovative 'network ethnography' is an integration of network analysis and ethnographic methods.⁸⁴ This is an example of how researchers have to become increasingly creative in order to tackle the challenge of understanding the cultural implications of the rapid developments in internet technologies. Howard argues for 'a more cultural analytic frame that allows one to treat singular innovations and acts as conditions and symbols of important cultural change in the way we conduct our politics'.⁸⁵ And for 'a more sensible analytical frame' that 'treats technological innovation as co-evolutionary with

⁸⁰ Philip N. Howard, *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006); Philip N. Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁸¹ Howard, *Citizen*, p. 33.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 208

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

organisational behaviour.⁸⁶ This idea fits neatly in the context of this thesis under the assumption outlined above that developments in technology can trigger changes in the evolution of the Conservative Party's organisational culture. Like Howard, the socio-cultural anthropologist Alexander Smith is interested in using ethnography to understand political cultures. Smith's ethnography of the Scottish Conservatives in the run-up to the 2003 Scottish parliamentary and local elections⁸⁷ joins David Seawright's work on the Scottish Conservatives⁸⁸ in addressing the party from a cultural perspective.

Smith's ethnographic study of a Conservative association is focused on describing and understanding the culture of its bureaucracy and activism, and how the Scottish Conservatives interacted in social and political contexts. In this sense, it has some similarities to the approach taken by this research and is, therefore, a useful reference point for Part III of this thesis. However, conversely, this thesis places the social and political contexts in the background and puts the view of the party's relationship with new media in the foreground. Smith's study pays some attention to the traditional communication practices at the Conservative association level, such as the use and symbolism of the 'InTouch' leaflet.⁸⁹ Although there is further mention of the use, coordination, and quality, of communication technologies in the campaign, the analysis of the role that new media played is not a focus of his work. The setting is also quite different. Since Scottish devolution, Conservatism north of the border has underperformed when compared with the Conservative Party's progress in England and the devolved electoral region of Wales.⁹⁰ Therefore, the wider political backdrop in which this thesis is set is different in temporal and geographic terms because it presents primary data that is concerned mainly with the Conservative Party in England and Wales 1951-1964 and 2005-2012.

Smith's ethnographic account describes the process of him becoming a Conservative Party insider:

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 205.

⁸⁷ Alexander Smith, *Devolution and the Scottish Conservatives: Banal activism, electioneering and the politics of irrelevance* (Manchester University Press, 2011).

⁸⁸ See, David Seawright, *An Important Matter of Principle: The Decline of the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party* (Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999); David Seawright, 'The Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party: The Lesser Spotted Tory', in G. Hassan and C. Warhurst (eds.), *Tomorrow's Scotland* (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 2002).

⁸⁹ The 'InTouch' leaflet is a common contemporary campaign medium, which is usually distributed in the form of a printed and paper-based newsletter and is used by many Conservative associations.

⁹⁰ Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*.

Employing the anthropological approach of participant observation, I became involved in the Conservative campaign for the 2003 local government and Scottish Parliament elections. I attended meetings, branch and fundraising events as well as leafleted and canvassed for local Tory candidates along with countless volunteers. I worked with party professionals and strategist as they drafted, formatted and produced dozens of the discursive artefacts that I will discuss in forthcoming chapters. I also enjoyed access to meetings of the Core Campaign Team, a group of seven individuals that met regularly in Dumfries between January and April 2003 and coordinated the party's campaign across the region. I also participated in meetings of Alex Fergusson's campaign team in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale and worked closely with the Conservative candidate David Mundell on his campaign for the Dumfries constituency.⁹¹

Smith states that his academic interests in the party began before he became actively involved within it. In contrast, I became a Conservative member at least two years before considering and conducting this study. Therefore, as my political interests predate my academic interests, Smith and I have approached the ethnographic study of the Conservative Party from opposing ends of the same plane.

The internal dynamics of Conservative Party organisation and its relationship with new media requires an approach that is both flexible and able to represent the complexities of the rich specifics it exhibits. Ethnography is a long-established tradition in cultural studies and has come 'to refer to an integration of both firsthand and empirical investigation and the theoretical and comparative interpretation of social organisation and culture.'⁹² Ethnography can successfully illuminate what most other approaches do not consider relevant. There are significant parts of everyday cultures that go unnoticed by those living in them, and the positivistic methods that are often employed to research them. Conversely, organisational ethnographers seek to draw out the intricate everyday aspects of the organisational environment.⁹³

Although the quotidian experiences of people working in organisations may, to some, hardly seem exciting, for organisational ethnographers much of the intriguing "mystery" of organisational life is hidden in the ordinary exchanges of ordinary people on an ordinary sort of day. From every perspective, the intricacies of everyday organisational life can be better

⁹¹ Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*, p. 12.

⁹² Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2009), p. 1.

⁹³ W. C. J. Koot, *The complexity of the everyday: An anthropological perspective on organisations* (Coutinho: Bussum, 1995).

grasped not through questionnaires developed and analysed while sitting in an office, but by going out into the organisational “field”.⁹⁴

Approaches to studying political histories, organisations and cultures, tend to, like Philip Howard’s work, address the more salient issues. Therefore, much of the everyday mechanics which collectively power the political machines of our democracy remain latently unrecorded. Conversely, this thesis seeks to connect the everyday practices of the ordinary party-participant to the more prominent, or glamorous, aspects of Conservative Party cultural-life. To-date, Smith’s work on the Scottish Conservatives is the closest to that aim in the Conservative Party context.

The history of ethnography demonstrates that it ‘does not have a standard well-defined meaning.’⁹⁵ Central to the ethnographic tradition has been its looseness and methodological adaptability that allows the researcher to mould an ethnographic research design to the phenomenon in question. Subsequently, the practice of ethnography is open to wide interpretation. In this sense, using methods with an ethnographic sensibility to investigate the role of the internet is no different to the ‘remoulding’ that ‘has arisen from the fact that ethnography has been associated with, and also put in opposition to, various other methodological approaches.’⁹⁶ All new technologies that revolutionise the ways in which humans communicate, stir human interests as they begin the process of cultural integration - like cave paintings, paper and pen, the printing press, telegraphy and telephony, the gramophone, film, radio, television, mobile communications and, more recently, the internet.

Advances in the ways in which humans interact with technology has led to expansion in the theory and practice of ethnography, like the developments in ‘virtual’, ‘internet’ or ‘online’ ethnographies.⁹⁷ The internet as a new and academically unfamiliar medium has raised debates in terms of how to approach online research. As the internet has become integrated in everyday culture, these debates and their resultant theories have become less relevant. The argument for making a special case for virtual ethnography has not gained much traction in academic literature. The inherent

⁹⁴ Seirk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels and Frans Kamsteeg, ‘Studying everyday organisational life’, in Seirk Ybema, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels and Frans Kamsteeg (eds.), *Organisational Ethnography: Studying the Complexities of Everyday Life* (Sage, London, 2009), p. 1.

⁹⁵ Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, p. 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (Sage, London, 2008); A. Markham, ‘The methods, politics and ethics of representation in online ethnography’, in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, 2005); C. Mann and F. Stewart, *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research: A Handbook for Researching Online* (Sage, London, 2000).

flexibility of ethnographic methods means that it should be employed innovatively in order to best fit the specificity of the research questions and the phenomena in question. Therefore, there are unique considerations to be taken with every ethnographic study and, although the online environment has presented new problems for studies with ethnographic leanings, there is no absolute approach applicable to using ethnographic-based methods that involve the internet. Ethnographies associated with internet studies are likely to require a different approach from one study to the next, because cyberspace and its impact in the offline world has dynamic implications.

That said, there are some prominent characteristics that are evident in most ethnographic practices. For example:

Ethnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are generally available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry.⁹⁸

The benefit of ethnographic-based approaches is that they can be unstructured and open ended.⁹⁹ This is significant for cultural research involving emerging phenomena, like much of what is observable in contemporary techno-cultural trends. In order to have a fixed research design from the outset, one has to know exactly what data is available for analysis. Ethnographic fieldwork usually involves unknown, developing or snowballing events. A rigid approach could obstruct access to potential sources of exceptionally significant data. A prime example of this is exhibited in this thesis. If flexibility had not been central to the initial research design, then, the opportunity to use my experience as a Conservative PPC in 2010 would have been lost, because I had no way of knowing whether or not I would become a Conservative candidate when I first embarked on designing this research. As events transpired, the thesis became enriched by unique access to firsthand insider-observations from the candidate's perspective.

A further consideration is to assess what benefits the ethnographic tradition can provide the historian. In general, comparative approaches to scholarly analysis are universally accepted across a range of disciplines and have become an established academic convention. Using comparative methods with new media ethnographies is

⁹⁸ Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*, p. 3

⁹⁹ See, J. A. Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2004).

encouraged in order to widen the scope of an otherwise ‘parochial’ perspective.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, combining ethnographic-based methods with a comparative approach is an invaluable tool for the cultural historian, allowing them to integrate the methods for viewing contemporary objects with traditional historical practices for viewing the past. The combined approach provides a resultant research design that assists the comparison of similar phenomena at different points in history and, thus, both periods are provided with greater depth and perspective.

Approaches to online media, political engagement, socialisation and culture have been largely focused on consumption, production and impacts on voting,¹⁰¹ rather than the nuances of cultural interaction. Studies that do consider online political interaction tend to be generalist, quantitative and devoid of cultural descriptions and analysis.¹⁰² One key example is research by Baumgartner and Morris.¹⁰³ Their survey of 3500 young people involved in the 2008 US presidential primaries showed that social networks had no significant impact in political participation over other forms of media. This tells us little about the role that these technologies played in daily culture. Chris Atton’s work,¹⁰⁴ especially his use of cultural history to present a discourse analysis of British National Party (BNP) web pages, is a beginning to the redress of imbalance in the literature. Moreover, work using theory with a digital-cultural emphasis has begun contributing to a web of ideas. For example, Matt Hills’ secondary analysis of scholarly perspectives on digital participatory culture and social networking¹⁰⁵ discusses the role of ‘nomadic communication’ through the use of mobile phones with wireless internet access. Hills suggests that as digital technology rapidly develops, human culture is

¹⁰⁰ See, Daniel Miller and Don Slater, ‘Comparing Ethnography of New Media’, in James Curran & Michael Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media and Society* (Hodder Arnold, London, 2005), pp. 303-319; and Daniel Miller and Don Slater, *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (Berg, London 2000).

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Jennifer Stromer-Galley, ‘Will Internet Voting Increase Turnout? An Analysis of Voter Preference’, in Philip N. Howard and Steve Jones (eds.), *Society Online: The Internet in Context* (Sage, London, 2004), pp. 87-101; and, in the same collection, Carin Dessauer, ‘New Media, Internet News, and the News Habit’, pp. 121-136; and Wendy Griswold and Nathan Wright, ‘Wired and Well Read’, pp. 203-222.

¹⁰² See, Ronald E. Rice and James E. Katz, ‘The Internet and Political Involvement in 1996 and 2000’, in Philip N. Howard and Steve Jones (eds.), *Society Online: The Internet in Context* (Sage, London, 2004), pp. 103-136.

¹⁰³ Jody C. Baumgartner and Johnathan S. Morris, ‘MyFaceTube Politics: Social Networking Web Sites and Political Engagement of Young Adults’, *Social Science Computer Review*, Vol. 28 (2010), pp. 24–44.

¹⁰⁴ Chris Atton, *An Alternative Internet: Radical Media, Politics and Creativity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004), Chapter 3, ‘Far-Right Media on the Internet: Culture, Discourse and Power’, pp. 62-90.

¹⁰⁵ Matt Hills, ‘Participatory culture: mobility interactivity and identity’, in Glen Creeber and Royston Martyn, *Digital Cultures: Understanding New Media* (Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2009), pp. 107-121.

evolving alongside, and some propose that ‘there is ample reason to believe that human evolution is accelerating.’¹⁰⁶

This thesis leans toward those works that argue in favour of more holistic approaches that tell us something about cultural impact with a view to gaining greater understandings of the roles that digital communication technologies play in our lives and organisations. Abstract positivist alternatives using questionnaires, surveys and large sample sizes tell us something about generalised trends or patterns of opinion; but tell us little about real observable-interactions between humans and technology at the boundaries of the offline world and cyberspace. When the results from human studies are taken to higher levels of abstraction, the less representative of real-world phenomena the results become. Approaches that are culture-centric, like Michele Willson’s investigation of the politics and ethics of disembodiment;¹⁰⁷ Kevin Robins’ account of the place of geographical space in techno-culture;¹⁰⁸ and Kahn and Kellner’s analysis of the role of techno-cultures in globalisation,¹⁰⁹ generate a theoretical grounding through which the multidimensionality and complex intricacies of human life and its increasingly integrated relationship with advanced technologies can be fully understood in relation to human development.

¹⁰⁶ Seirk Ybema et al., *Ethnography*, p. 455.

¹⁰⁷ Michele Willson, ‘Community in the Abstract: A Political and Ethical Dilemma’, in David Bell and Barbara M. Kenedey (eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2007), pp. 213-226.

¹⁰⁸ Kevin Robins, ‘Against Virtual Community: For a Politics of Distance’, in David Bell and Barbara M. Kenedey (eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader*, (Routledge, Abingdon, 2007), pp. 227-235.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Kahn and Douglas Kellner, ‘Technopolitics and Oppositional Media’, in David Bell and Barbara M. Kenedey (eds.), *The Cybercultures Reader*, (Routledge, Abingdon, 2007), pp. 618-637.

The Historiography: Conservative Party and New Media

Overview

No historical work featuring twentieth century British television is complete without reference to Asa Briggs' extensive study of British broadcasting history. His work, over five volumes, is the probably the most authoritative account of the rise and expansion of television in Britain.¹¹⁰ Similarly, Burton Paulu provides a comprehensive historical review of the development of British television 1920-1980.¹¹¹ Although both Briggs and Paulu usefully detail matters surrounding the development of political television, their books do not provide extensive analyses of television's impact on the organisational developments in British political parties. Academic literature providing a thorough examination of the Conservative Party's relationship with new media in the twenty-first century is scarcer than that of the twentieth century. Those scholars who have begun pursuing interests in e-politics and new political communications have tended to compare a range of political parties using parsimonious models that produce generalised outcomes.¹¹² Therefore, they provide only a thin representation of the complexities in which individual parties operate and evolve in terms of their adaptation to the use of new media.

¹¹⁰ See, Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume IV: Sound and Vision* (Oxford University Press, 1979); and *Volume V: Competition*, (Oxford University Press, 1995). Volume IV offers a general understanding of the relations between the BBC, and later the ITA, and the major British political parties, 1945-1955, especially in terms of inter-party discussions on the development of political broadcasting. Volume V provides a chronology of events in British broadcasting from 1955-1974, and provides extensive analysis of the relationships between politics, government and broadcasting. This is probably best exemplified in Briggs' account of the BBC's role in the case of the Suez Crisis in which the tensions between the regulation and the freedom of the BBC's reporting on the crisis were significantly showcased.

¹¹¹ See, Burton Paulu, *British Broadcasting in Transition* (Macmillan, London, 1961); and Paulu, *Television and Radio in the United Kingdom* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1981). Paulu describes the genesis of the BBC, as a collection of radio manufacturers in the 1920s. He discusses also the BBC's broadcasting monopoly of British television broadcasting in the early 1950s; and the introduction of the ITA in 1954. Paulu provides analysis of the impact of television on film and radio; and examines the advent of general political broadcasting and associated legalities.

¹¹² See, for example, Julian Bowers-Brown, 'A marriage made in cyberspace? Political Marketing and UK party websites', in Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (eds.), *Political Parties and the Internet: Net Gain?* (Routledge, New York, 2005), pp. 98-119; Nick Anstead and Andrew Chadwick, 'Parties, Election Campaigning and the Internet: Toward A Comparative Institutional Approach' in Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard (eds.), *The Handbook of Internet Politics* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2009) pp. 56-71; Nigel Jackson, 'Political parties, the Internet and the 2005 General Election: third time lucky?', *Internet Research*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2007), pp.249-227; Nigel Jackson and Darren Lilleker, 'Building an Architecture of Participation? Political Parties and Web 2.0 in Britain', *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 3-4, (2009); A. Williamson, L. Miller and F. Fallon, *Behind the digital campaign: An exploration of the use, impact and regulation of digital campaigning* (Hansard Society, London, 2010); and Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, 'Towards a more participatory style of election campaigning: The impact of web 2.0 on the UK 2010 general election', *Policy & Internet*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2012), pp. 69-98.

Until the 1970s, twentieth century Conservative Party history had been neglected for many years and consisted mostly of political biographies.¹¹³ The first substantial analysis of local and national Conservative Party organisation was work by John Ramsden covering 1902-1940,¹¹⁴ which he developed from earlier doctoral research.¹¹⁵ Following Ramsden,¹¹⁶ there have been a number of subsequent notable scholars whom have made significant contributions to the academic tradition of studying British Conservatism and the Conservative Party. These historians and students of political parties include Stuart Ball,¹¹⁷ Tim Bale,¹¹⁸ Andrew Gamble,¹¹⁹ Timothy Heppell,¹²⁰ Philip Norton,¹²¹ and Anthony Seldon.¹²²

¹¹³ Stuart Ball, 'The Conservative Party Since 1900: A Bibliography', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), pp. 742-747.

¹¹⁴ John Ramsden, *The Age of Balfour and Baldwin 1902-40* (Longman, London, 1978).

¹¹⁵ John Ramsden, *The Organisation of the Conservative and Unionist Party in Britain, 1910-1930*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Oxford (1974).

¹¹⁶ Other notable works by John Ramsden include: Ramsden, 'The Changing Base of British Conservatism', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *Trends in British Politics since 1945* (Macmillan, London, 1978); Ramsden, *The Making of Conservative Party Policy: The Conservative Research Department since 1929* (Longman, London, 1980); and Ramsden, *An Appetite for Power: A History of the Conservative Party Since 1830* (Harper Collins, London, 1999).

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Stuart Ball, 'Stanley Baldwin', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *Recovering Power: The Conservatives in Opposition since 1867* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005); Ball, 'The legacy of Coalition: fear and loathing in Conservative politics, 1922-1931', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2011), pp. 65-82; Ball, 'The Conservative Party, the role of the state and the politics of protection, c. 1918-1932', *History*, Vol. 96, No. 323 (2011), pp. 280-303; and Ball, *Dole Queues and Demons: British Election Posters from the Conservative Party Archive* (Bodleian Library Press, Oxford, 2011).

¹¹⁸ See, for example, Tim Bale, "'Cometh the hour, cometh the Dave": how far is the Conservative Party's revival all down to David Cameron?', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 80, No. 2 (2009), pp. 222-232; Bale and Paul Webb, 'The Conservative Party', in Nicholas Allen and John Bartle, *Britain at the Polls 2010* (Sage, London, 2010); Bale, James Hampshire and Rebecca Partos, 'Having One's Cake and Eating It Too: Cameron's Conservatives and Immigration', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (2011), pp. 398-406; Bale 'Painting their way out of the corner: the Conservatives in opposition', in Nigel Fletcher (ed.), *How to be in Opposition: Life in the Political Shadows* (Biteback, London, 2011), pp. 133-154; Bale, *The Conservative Party from Thatcher to Cameron* (Polity, Cambridge, 2011); Bale, *The Conservatives since 1945, The Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford University Press, 2012); Bale, 'Wither the Tory left? The demise of progressive conservatism', *Juncture*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2012), pp. 84-91; and Bale, 'David Cameron, 2005-2010', in Timothy Heppell (ed.) *Leaders of the Opposition: from Churchill to Cameron* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2012).

¹¹⁹ See, for example, Andrew Gamble, *The Conservative Nation* (Routledge, London, 1974); and Gamble, 'The Conservative Party', in H. M. Drucker (ed.), *Multi-Party Britain* (Macmillan, London, 1979).

¹²⁰ See, for example, Timothy Heppell, *The Conservative Party Leadership of John Major 1992 to 1997* (Edwin Mellen, Lewiston, 2006); Heppell, 'Ministerial Selection and the Cameron Government: Female Ministerial Representation and the One-Third Objective', *Representation*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2012), pp. 209-219; Heppell and S. Lightfoot, "'We will not balance the books on the backs of the poorest people in the world" Understanding Conservative Party Strategy on International Aid', *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 83, No. 1 (2012), pp. 130-138.

¹²¹ See, for example, Philip Norton (ed.), *The Conservative Party* (Prentice-Hall, London, 1996); Philip Cowley and Norton, 'Rebels and rebellions: Conservative MPs in the 1992 Parliament', *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (1999), pp. 84-105; and, Norton 'The Role of the Conservative Political Centre, 1945-98', in Stuart Ball and Ian Holliday (eds.), *Mass Conservatism: The*

There is a significant historiography that deals with Churchill's leadership,¹²³ especially his role as Prime Minister during the wartime coalition. Many of these works depict the party's respective 'collapse' and 'revival' either side of Clement Attlee's premiership.¹²⁴ As Stuart Ball notes, much of the work on Churchill has addressed the war period in a 'pattern of neglect of the post-war decade which is apparent in many other works on Churchill'.¹²⁵ Biographical accounts of Anthony Eden have been largely focused on Britain's international relations and reveal little about his relationship with Conservative Party organisation.¹²⁶ A similar approach has been taken to the prominent biographies on Harold Macmillan. D. R. Thorpe focuses his biography¹²⁷ on analysis of the major themes of Macmillan's premiership like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Profumo Affair. Alistair Horne takes a critical stance towards the premier, arguing that Macmillan's demise, as Tory leader, was because he became distracted by foreign matters and subsequently mishandled British affairs.¹²⁸

While biographical approaches contribute significantly to Conservative Party historiography, their sharp focus on the narratives of individuals, especially party leaders, means that some of the more mundane aspects of changes to the day-to-day life of party-culture are overlooked. This thesis attempts to narrow the gap in our knowledge of 'the everyday' with narratives that describe the interrelationships between varieties of actors within the party. The remainder of this chapter provides a broad discussion of the main scholarly perspectives in relation to this thesis in order to contextualise the Conservative Party's evolution and relationship with new media.

Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s, (Frank Cass, London, 2002), pp. 183-99; Norton, 'The Conservative Party: The Politics of Panic', in J. Bartle and A. Kings (eds.), *Britain at the Polls 2005* (CQ Press, Washington, 2006), pp. 31-53.

¹²² See, for example, Anthony Seldon, *The Conservative Party since 1945* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1991); and Seldon and Daniel Collings, *Britain under Thatcher* (Pearson Education, London, 2000).

¹²³ See, for example, Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front 1900-1955* (Jonathan Cape, London, 1992); Henry Pelling, *Winston Churchill* (Macmillan, London, 1974); Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (Heinemann, London, 1991); Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (WM Collins, London, 1979).

¹²⁴ See, for example, Jorgen Ramussen, 'Party Discipline in Wartime: The Downfall of the Chamberlain Government', *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 32 (1970); Kevin Jefferys, 'May 1940: the Downfall of Neville Chamberlain', *Parliamentary History*, Vol. 10 (1991); and Anthony Seldon, *Churchill's Indian Summer: The Conservative Government 1951-55* (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1981).

¹²⁵ Ball, 'Bibliography', p. 733

¹²⁶ See, for example, Sidney Aster, *Anthony Eden* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1976); David Carlton, *Anthony Eden* (Allen Lane, London, 1981); Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1986); Victor Rothwell, *Anthony Eden: A Political Biography 1931-57* (Manchester University Press, Political Biography, 1992); D. R. Thorpe, *Eden, the life and times of Anthony Eden, first Earl of Avon, 1897-1977* (Chatto & Windus, 2003).

¹²⁷ D. R. Thorpe, *Supermac: The Life of Harold Macmillan* (Chatto & Windus, London, 2010).

¹²⁸ Alistair Horne, *Macmillan: The Official Biography*, (Pan Macmillan, London, 2008).

Conservative Party Studies in Context

Political science is a multi-theoretical discipline that is divergent in the ways in which political parties are investigated. The two approaches of political communications and party organisation are most commonly used to elucidate an understanding of how political parties behave. However, these strands of party behaviour analysis are assumed to be ‘in highly different contexts.’¹²⁹ In the case of the Conservative Party, there is a cultural relationship between the organisation of party members and the modes by which the party machine communicates with voters. For example, it is the local delivery networks and Conservative associations who often mobilise delivery of the ‘InTouch’ leaflet.¹³⁰ Therefore, fragmented political science approaches in isolation are less able to provide the holistic picture needed to assist our understanding of the dynamics between the evolving uses of new media technologies and the complexities of Conservative Party organisation.¹³¹ It is for this reason that this thesis takes a critical view of political science approaches while borrowing some of their influences, and integrating them into the approach to this work.

As introduced in Chapter One, the Conservative Party’s history is rooted in the genealogy of democracy. Cultural evolutions in Britain led to advances in the country’s democratic system which in turn facilitated the formation of political parties, like the Whigs and Tories, in Parliament. Further evolutions in the parliamentary system saw the institutionalisation of Whigs and Tories in formalised party organisation like that of the Conservative Party under Robert Peel, Prime Minister, 1834-1835 and 1841-1846. However, unlike the formation of the British Liberal Party at the Willis Room in 1859 or the beginnings of the British Labour Party with the Trade Unions of 1900, the Conservative Party has ‘no such neat historical occasion...as a point of entry for the student of conservatism.’¹³² Maurice Duverger argued that party centralisation is an inevitable result of the institutionalisation process. His hypothesis suggests that parties that developed outside parliament, like Labour, will more likely be centralised than parties, like the Tories, which naturally evolved in Parliament.¹³³ Samuel Huntington¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Chrysa Lamprinakou, ‘The Party Evolution Model: An Integrated Approach to Party Organisation and Political Communication’, *Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2008), p. 103.

¹³⁰ Alexander Smith, *Devolution and the Scottish Conservatives: Banal activism, electioneering and the politics of irrelevance* (Manchester University Press, 2011).

¹³¹ Lamprinakou, ‘Model’.

¹³² Philip Norton and Arthur Aughey, *Conservatives and Conservatism* (Maurice Temple Smith, London, 1981), p. 90.

¹³³ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organisation and Activity in the Modern State* (Methuen, London, 1964).

considers ‘social forces’ as playing a significant role in the development of political parties. Although his work is theoretically similar to that of Duverger, Huntington’s model relates to multiple parties within political systems, which in turn provides a broader view of party development. However, both approaches are limited because they over-simplify the complexity, uniqueness and specific nature of an individual political party’s existence. Therefore, it is important not homogenise political parties, but rather address the nature of each political party based on its individuality.

John Ramsden’s authoritative representation of the Conservative Party 1940-1975¹³⁵ provides a lucid description of the Conservative Party’s organisation as a ‘social organism’, which adapts and changes, or evolves, over time. Ramsden explains in great detail how a range of factors interrelate both inside and outside the party to influence its evolution and what we understand as its history. Mark Low claims that in order to regain its electability, the post-Major Conservative Party organisation underwent a process of ‘evolution’ which resulted in a shift of power from the local associations to the party’s new managerial centre, but with ‘room for further development’.¹³⁶ Similarly, this thesis aims to understand the shifts in power in the party’s organisation which occur through its cultural evolutions.¹³⁷

Richard Cockett suggests that: ‘Like the best of Darwinian organisms, the Conservative Party has always had as its greatest strength the ability to adapt and

¹³⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, ‘Political Development and Political Decay’, *World Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1965), pp.386-430.

¹³⁵ John Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill & Eden, 1940-1957: A History of the Conservative Party* (Longman, Harlow, 1995); and Ramsden, *Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath, 1957-1975: A History of the Conservative Party* (Longman, New York, 1996).

¹³⁶ Mark Low, *The Evolution of the Conservative Party Organisation: Renewal and Recharacterisation of Local Autonomy*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Sheffield (2009), p. i; see, also, Mark Low, ‘The Intricacies of the Local Parliamentary Candidate Selection Process in the British Conservative Party: An Organisational Approach’, PSA Annual Conference, London, 19-21 April 2011, pp. 1-14.

¹³⁷ There is a body of work in the field of anthropology in which grounding in cultural evolution is used to explain historical social change. See, for example, Stephen Shennan, ‘Population, Culture, History and the Dynamics of Culture Change’, *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 41, No. 5 (2000), pp. 811-835; Joseph Henrich, ‘Demography and Cultural Evolution: How adaptive cultural processes can produce maladaptive losses – The Tasmanian Case’, *American Antiquity*, Vol. 69 (2004), pp. 197-214; Paul Ehrlich and Simon Levin, ‘The Evolution of Norms’, *PloS Biology*, Vol. 3, No. 6 (2005), e194; and Deborah Rogers and Paul Ehrlich, ‘Natural selection and cultural rates of change’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 105, No. 9 (2008), pp. 3416-3420. Furthermore, outside of anthropological fields, such works have begun influencing approaches that address cultural aspects in relation to the role of new media. See, for example, Declan Mungovan, Edna Howley and Jim Duggan, ‘The influence of random interactions and decision heuristics on norm evolution in social networks’, *Computational and Mathematical Organization Theory*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2011), pp. 152-178.

survive.¹³⁸ Conservative adaptations have meant that the party has survived to be one of the oldest and most successful extant political parties in western democratic history. Some scholars suggest that the Conservative Party has exhibited throughout its history the recurring characteristics of both continuity and change.¹³⁹

While the Conservative Party's longevity is testament to political continuity, the party's evolution is not simply a smooth adaptation to its changing political environment. As well as powerful elements of continuity, periods of discontinuity can be identified in the party's evolution.¹⁴⁰

This thesis understands observed changes in Conservative Party evolution as being both incremental changes over a longer period of time and rapid changes after periods of slight or no change.

Evolution theory is the antithesis of the revolutionary model. Many of the theoretical influences in this thesis, like the work of Edgar Schein, and Philip Howard are grounded in the assumption that the evolutionary process in human culture is intrinsic. The two main schools of evolutionary thought are (1) the classical evolutionists' developmental perspective; and (2) the contemporary evolutionist perspective that is inspired by the Darwinian model of natural selection. Like species in biology, these models can be applied to societal and cultural phenomena. This thesis leans towards the notion of punctuated equilibrium which is more generally accepted in social theory.¹⁴¹ For clarity:

...punctuated equilibrium refers to a discontinuous conception of political time in which periods of comparatively modest institutional change are interrupted by more rapid and intense moments of transformation.¹⁴²

Punctuated equilibrium has been handily applied to the understanding of both political¹⁴³ and organisational¹⁴⁴ phenomena.

¹³⁸ Richard Cockett, 'The Party, Publicity, and the Media', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.) *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p. 547.

¹³⁹ See, Brendan Evans and Andrew Taylor, *From Salisbury to Major: Continuity and change in Conservative politics* (Manchester University Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁴¹ For a succinct explanation of evolutionary theory and its applicability to social and political phenomena see, Colin Hay, *Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 156-163.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Chrysa Lamprinakou's 'Party Evolution Model'¹⁴⁵ recognises that a party's unique electioneering characteristics develop throughout its evolution, and is therefore an advance on Duverger's ideas, and Huntington's model, mentioned above. Lamprinakou's work is grounded in 'institutionalism', which is a theoretical approach in the field of international relations. The 'Party Evolution Model identifies to what extent the implementation of sophisticated marketing techniques that form the party's electoral behaviour is related to the party's historical and organisational past.'¹⁴⁶ The Party Evolution Model is a theoretical approach that attempts to synthesise two traditionally divergent approaches to party behaviour in the political sciences: (1) party organisation and development; and (2) political communications and marketing.¹⁴⁷

Lamprinakou's critical analysis of existing approaches to party development culminates with synthesis in her Party Evolution Model. Rather than a narrowcast perspective of the party, the Party Evolution Model allows the researcher to analyse how parties 'have evolved over time with regard to organisational evolution and change.'¹⁴⁸ Lamprinakou claims that other models give 'only a partial and incomplete account of party behaviour' and 'that by not taking into account the distinct political cultures of parties they tend to treat party member behaviour as predefined and fixed.'¹⁴⁹ Political marketing models often take a blinkered approach to the study of the winning of elections. Lamprinakou argues that in doing so they 'tend to ignore institutional constraints of party organisation and provide a more superficial approach to party behaviour.'¹⁵⁰

Lamprinakou's theory makes good progress in synthesising party organisation and political communication. But, although the model is both campaign and organisation focused, it overlooks a detailed perspective on political culture and

¹⁴³ See, for example, Frank Baumgartner, Christian Breunig, Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Bryan Jones, Peter Mortensen, Michiel Nuytemans, and Stefaan Walgrave, 'Punctuated Equilibrium in Comparative Perspective', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 53 (2009), pp. 603–620; and Graeme Boushey, 'Punctuated Equilibrium Theory and the Diffusion of Innovations', *Policy Studies Journal*, Vol. 40 (2012), pp.127–146.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, E. Romanelli and M. Tushman, 'Organizational Transformation as Punctuated Equilibrium: An Empirical Test', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 5, (1994), pp. 1141-1166; and R. Sabherwal, R. Hirschheim and T. Goles, 'The Dynamics of Alignment: Insights from a Punctuated Equilibrium Model', *Organization Science*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2001), 179-197.

¹⁴⁵ Lamprinakou, 'Model'; see, also, Chrysa Lamprinakou, *The Party Evolution Framework: An Integrated Approach to Examining the Development of Party Communications and Campaign*, Doctoral Thesis, Brunel University (2010).

¹⁴⁶ Chrysa Lamprinakou, 'Model', p. 107.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

organisational culture, like the works of Philip Howard and Edgar Schein, respectively. Lamprinakou does however argue in favour of a cultural understanding of parties, because other approaches:

...fail to identify the parties as dynamic organisations whose intra-party relationships are characterised by struggles over the organisational distribution of power.¹⁵¹

Therefore, this thesis builds on Lamprinakou's ideas, because it borrows aspects of her approach and combines it with more culture-centric perspectives. This thesis diverges from Lamprinakou's interest in 'marketing techniques' and rather places greater emphasis on the role of specific communication technologies as new media in the party's 'historical and organisational past'. In borrowing some of the Party Evolution Model's ideas in tandem with those of Schein's approach to organisational culture, this thesis gains an understanding of party development that places a greater emphasis on 'internal organisational and structural evolution and the election campaign attributes of party behaviour'.¹⁵²

Other approaches to explaining party behaviour include the study of party development and models. Duverger first identified what he argued to be the structural differences of cadre and mass parties.¹⁵³ The 'cadre', or 'caucus', party is based on the assumption that elite political activists dominate the selection of favoured candidates on the party's behalf. The emphasis is placed on the quality of the selector-activists rather than their quantity.¹⁵⁴ The 'mass' party model unites a large membership of participants who are organised in regional branches and subscribe to one national party identity. The prominent British parties of the 1951-1964 period could be argued to have exhibited mass-based characteristics. Otto Kirchheimer's 'catch-all' model¹⁵⁵ describes a system in which the party leadership is strengthened and party membership plays a more peripheral role. Angelo Panebianco's 'electoral-professional' model emphasises the importance of party leadership being supported by a team of professionals rather than a mass of amateur volunteers.¹⁵⁶ Richard Katz and Peter Mair's 'cartel party'¹⁵⁷ is

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁵³ Duverger, *Parties*.

¹⁵⁴ See, A. Ware, *Political Parties and Party Systems* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995), p.87.

¹⁵⁵ Otto Kirchheimer, 'The Transformation of West European Party Systems', in L. LaPalonbara and M. Weiner (eds.), *Political Parties and Political Development* (Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 87-118.

¹⁵⁶ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organisation and Power* (Press Syndicate, Cambridge, 1988).

¹⁵⁷ Richard Katz and Peter Mair, 'Changing Models of Party Organisation and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1995), pp. 5-28.

argued to be a model in which parties respond to the decline in political participation by colluding with rival parties for the use of state-funded electoral provisions. However, Mair states that, unlike what he claims to have observed elsewhere in Western Europe, Britain is the exception to the cartel-party trend.¹⁵⁸

Helen Margetts argues that nothing is predetermined in terms of the ‘trajectory’ of party development and notes that ‘earlier models have co-existed with later ones.’¹⁵⁹ Most of the models that have emerged to replace the mass-party explanation of party behaviour have tended to underestimate the impact of new types of activism in Britain in the internet age. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that local activism has been playing a significant role in electoral performance of political parties in Britain as recently as 2010.¹⁶⁰ Those who prescribe to the concept of party ideal types have come to a consensus that there has been a general decline in party membership since the 1960s.¹⁶¹ Some believe that this has led to changes in the traditional mass-based party system in Britain.¹⁶² Leon Epstein, who grounded his ideas in the ‘oligarchic’ party model,¹⁶³ claims that complex parties, like the Conservative Party, are controlled from the top and that ‘strong counter-organisational tendencies represented by new campaign techniques involving mass media, professional skills and large financial contributions’ challenge the mass-party model.¹⁶⁴ Ward et al. suggest that, although the internet had not ‘matured’ in terms of its role as a medium for political communication, impact on

¹⁵⁸ Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997).

¹⁵⁹ Helen Margetts, ‘The Cyber Party’, Workshop Paper, The Causes and Consequences of Organisational Innovation in European Political Parties, ECPR Joint Session, Grenoble, 6-11 April 2001, p. 8.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, Justin Fisher, David Cutts and Edward Fieldhouse, ‘Constituency Campaigning in 2010’, in Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimer and Simon Atkinson, *Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and the Media in the 2010 General Election* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 198-217; D. Denver, G. Hands, J. Fisher and I. ‘MacAllister Constituency Campaigning in Britain 1992-2001: Centralisation and Modernisation’, *Party Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 5 (2003), pp. 541-59.; R. J. Johnston and C. J. Pattie, ‘Campaigning and advertising: an evaluation of the components of constituency activism at recent British general elections’, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 28, (1998), pp. 677-85; and Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd, and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁶¹ See, for example, P. Mair and I. van Bienen, ‘Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies, 1980-2000’, *Party Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2001), pp. 5-21.

¹⁶² See, Helen Margetts, ‘The Cyber Party’, in Richard Katz and William Crotty (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics* (Sage, London, 2006), pp. 528-535. See, Stuart Ball, ‘Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation’, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), pp. 261-311, especially p. 293, for a description of how the party’s peak in mass-membership has declined steadily since the end of the 1950s.

¹⁶³ Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (The Free Press, New York, 1915/1962).

¹⁶⁴ Leon D. Epstein, *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (Pall Mall Press, London, 1967), p.260.

intra-party change is plausible.¹⁶⁵ They suggest that computer-mediated communications could either (1) further weaken party membership; or (2) strengthen and empower party participation with a new model in which electronic platforms offer the attraction of greater networking opportunities.

Douglas Carswell and Daniel Hannan are examples of two Conservative politicians, who claim to have been empowered by evolutions in the nature of the internet and its relationship with British politics. In the run up to 2010, both Carswell and Hannan were active users of internet-based applications like blogs.¹⁶⁶ Their self-published book¹⁶⁷ describes radical ideas for libertarian reform, and extols the virtues of the internet as a revolutionary medium that gives greater choice to the consumer. They suggest also that the internet can be used to empower the outside politician, over party bigwigs.¹⁶⁸ On one notable occasion Hannan himself exemplified this phenomenon, when his rhetorical attack on Gordon Brown in the European Parliament went viral on 'YouTube'¹⁶⁹ within hours. In his blog for the Telegraph he reported that:

The internet has changed politics – changed it utterly and forever. Twenty-four hours ago, I made a three-minute speech in the European Parliament, aimed at Gordon Brown. I tipped off the BBC and some of the newspaper correspondents but, unsurprisingly, they ignored me: I am, after all, simply a backbench MEP. When I woke up this morning, my phone was clogged with texts, my email inbox with messages. Overnight, the YouTube clip of my remarks had attracted over 36,000 hits. By today, it was the most watched video in Britain.¹⁷⁰

This demonstrates how the advent of the internet is believed to have changed the nature of politics in Britain. In Part III, the thesis explores how relatively insignificant actors in the democratic process can now, through the democratising power of the internet,

¹⁶⁵ Stephen Ward, Rachel Gibson and Paul Nixon, 'Parties and the Internet: an overview', in Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (eds.), *Political Parties and the Internet: Net gain?* (Routledge, New York, 2005), p. 29.

¹⁶⁶ See, for example, TalkCarswell: <http://www.talkcarswell.com/>.

¹⁶⁷ RNA, Douglas Carswell and Daniel Hannan, *The Plan: Twelve Months to Renew Britain* (Lightning Source, Milton Keynes, 2008).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁹ YouTube (www.youtube.com) is an internet platform which allows users to broadcast and upload videos.

¹⁷⁰ Daniel Hannan, 'My speech to Gordon Brown goes viral', *The Telegraph*, 21 March 2009, online: http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/danielhannan/9289403/My_speech_to_Gordon_Brown_goes_viral/ [accessed: 22 July 2010].

alight digital platforms from which to usurp traditional political hierarchies and the once powerful agendas of the traditional media.¹⁷¹

In light of this increased democratic activity facilitated by the internet and, more specifically, social media,¹⁷² a shift of power in intra-party structure, facilitated by internet technologies, has real potential for the empowerment of grassroots participants. Helen Margetts suggests that these kinds of changing trends in party development are indicative of a new ‘ideal-type’ of party in Britain. Therefore, Margetts proposes ‘the cyber party’ as a potential party-type to succeed the mass-party model, as parties in Britain transition further away from traditional modes of party structure. The cyber party is defined as a political party that exploits wider techno-cultural trends, with increased use of internet, and other computer-mediated communications, and integrates its organisation with new trends in internet-based citizen participation. Margetts argues that the cyber party¹⁷³ is an alternative response to the cartel-party and that both types of parties can exist simultaneously – at the same time and in the same political system. Furthermore, both forms of party may share characteristics, for example ‘the blurring of the distinction between members and supporters’.¹⁷⁴ Evidence presented Part III would suggest that this was the case in the Conservative Party 2005-2012. But evidence in Part II suggests that the case was also the same for the party between 1951 and 1964, when the party was arguably at its height as a mass-based party.

Margetts’ theory is underpinned by the assumption that the internet is the ideal space for political and democratic activity and that the internet is playing a deinstitutionalising role in British political parties. Her ideas were first being developed over a decade ago in 2001¹⁷⁵ and have not gained significant traction in the wider literature since the formal publication of the cyber party concept in 2006.¹⁷⁶ Perhaps this is because there are some weaknesses in the cyber party concept. For example, Ward et al. suggest that ‘one could reasonably argue that any new members recruited via the internet would have weak attachments to the local party’.¹⁷⁷ They attribute this to the impersonal characteristics of internet use. If this is found to be the case, then, as the internet and political parties continue to co-evolve, the cyber party model is likely to

¹⁷¹ Jose van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2013), p. 10.

¹⁷² Rachel Gibson, ‘Party Change, Social Media and the Rise of “Citizen-initiated” Campaigning’, *Party Politics*, online: DOI: 10.1177/1354068812472575 (2013), pp. 1-15.

¹⁷³ Margetts, ‘Cyber’, *Handbook*.

¹⁷⁴ Margetts, ‘Cyber’, ECPR, p. 8.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Margetts, ‘Cyber’, *Handbook*.

¹⁷⁷ Ward, Gibson and Nixon, ‘Internet’, p. 29.

be limited in its potential. Ward et al. also suggest that there is greater potential for dissent in internet-based party membership, which is another potential limitation for cyber-based parties. Chapter Six provides evidence that demonstrates examples of internet-based dissent in the Conservative Party since 2005. Chapter Eight suggests that Margetts' valuable ideas would have greater impact if rooted in a cultural and more organic frame.

This thesis rejects assumptions which state that generic models of party development can characterise absolute representations of party behaviour. Instead, it supports the premise that every political party is organisationally unique and its evolution is influenced by (1) the intricacies of its process of formation, and subsequent history and characteristics; and (2) cultural influences from its external environment. Therefore, understanding the influence of the party's unique 'genetic' characteristics is central to the understanding of how it responds to, for example, new media.¹⁷⁸ This thesis does accept that general trends in the ways in which political parties operate can be useful to the discussion of influences on the party's culture, therefore, it sets concepts, like the 'mass-party', in a cultural context. Although this thesis does not subscribe to Margetts' ideas of the cyber party in their published form, her evocative idea has influenced the explanation of latent phenomena, in the organisational culture of the Conservative Party, which have been unearthed through observational and testimonial evidence in Part III. Furthermore, this thesis recognises that complex political parties like the Conservative Party can exhibit a combination of elements that would be familiar characteristics in a number of theoretical party models. Therefore, the use of such characteristics, which are drawn from a range of concepts, is useful to this thesis for background contextualisation when discussing wider historical and cultural trends in the party's evolutionary development.

Another approach in the pursuit of understanding political parties is to assess party change in individual and complex case studies. Tim Bale tends to take this approach to his work on the Conservative Party. In line with the aforementioned punctuated theory, he argues that between 2005 and 2010 the Conservative Party exhibited rapid change in its organisation under Cameron's leadership.¹⁷⁹ Bale's subsequent book, which offers a valuable holistic view of 'the drivers of party change',¹⁸⁰ takes a long-view historical approach to the analysis of Conservative Party

¹⁷⁸ Panebianco, *Power*.

¹⁷⁹ Bale, *Cameron*.

¹⁸⁰ Bale, *Drivers*.

change over five decades. Bale found that Conservative Party change is a complex process and dependent on dynamic relationships between the above, and other, factors. Moreover, Bale's 'overall findings' suggest that the various drivers of change play different roles in a range of areas of the party and in different ways.¹⁸¹ Therefore, it is important not to homogenise and overly simplify findings, which is the danger for many parsimonious approaches.¹⁸²

The traditional approach to twentieth century Conservative Party organisation has focused on the structure of the party. This has been represented significantly in the Conservative Party historiography.¹⁸³ The early evolution of the Conservative Party, which evolved out of aristocratic groupings in Parliament, has been characterised as a party with a tradition of deference in which the constituent parts of the party organisation deferred power and responsibility to a social elite at the top of the party.¹⁸⁴ According to A. Potter,¹⁸⁵ the Conservative Party in the run-up to the 1951 General Election was characterised by a nineteenth century tradition of party-wide discipline that was maintained through the party's deferential structure in which the party leader was respected as the authority figure. In reference to the Conservatives, Robert McKenzie claimed that 'it would be difficult to envisage a more tight-knit system of oligarchic control of the affairs of a political party'.¹⁸⁶ These ideas influenced the traditional view of the party's hierarchy as being 'monarchical' in which the party leader at the top held significant power over the lower levels of party organisation. However, it should be noted that both McKenzie and Potter were reflecting on the party at a time of Conservative domination.

Furthermore, the 'oligarchic' model¹⁸⁷ of directly interconnected groups within the party has been disputed in favour of the 'baronial' model, which describes a more fragmented organisation and distribution of power among diverse levels and

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 313-316.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Bale also questions the efficacy of the parsimonious approaches to party change that are often used by political scientists.

¹⁸³ For a comprehensive guide, see, Ball, 'Bibliography', pp. 742-747.

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, Bob Jessop, *Traditionalism, Conservatism and British Political Culture* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1974); and Dennis Kavanagh, 'The Deferential English: A Comparative Critique', in Richard Rose (ed.), *Studies in British Politics*, (Macmillan, London, 1976), pp. 58-83.

¹⁸⁵ A. Potter, 'British Party Organisation 1950', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (1951), pp 65-86.

¹⁸⁶ Robert T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties: The Distribution of Power within the Conservative and Labour Parties*, (Heinemann, London, 1963), p. 291.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (The Free Press, New York, 1915/1962).

collectives.¹⁸⁸ Arguably, the latter model is indicative of Conservative Party organisation before William Hague's 'Fresh Future' reforms in the wake of the party's defeat to 'New Labour' in 1997. Tim Bale describes Hague's changes as bringing 'together the party's voluntary, professional, and parliamentary components into a unified structure for the first time, giving those at the centre new rights to intervene at constituency level.'¹⁸⁹ This correlates also with Mark Low's aforementioned assessment of the party's evolution and suggests that there has been some tightening of centralised-control in party's organisation since 1997.

Andrew Taylor argues that, historically, the party leaders have held 'the right to pronounce authoritatively what constitutes as Conservatism in any given period.'¹⁹⁰ This would suggest that the ideological leanings of specific leaders can influence the party's culture at points in its history. Moreover, it would perhaps explain why the party's ideology is thought to constitute a diverse broad church of ideas that have 'long been a blend of paternalist and libertarian traditions',¹⁹¹ the emphasis of which has shifted throughout the course of its history. Some scholars believe that the party holds the ability to put aside its ideological leanings in order to take a pragmatic approach to managing change with the aim of winning elections.¹⁹² 'Because of this, all Conservative leaders have faced charges of opportunism and betrayal; and historians generally judge them by their success in adapting to change.'¹⁹³

The source of the Conservative Party's ability to adapt and change has been argued to be as a result of these so called pragmatic characteristics. The party 'has its roots in a tradition of practice, a belief in the superiority of enlightened pragmatism which is taken to be the genius not only of Conservative but also of British political practice.'¹⁹⁴ In terms of Cameron's selection as party leader, Timothy Heppell suggest that the 'Conservatives were re-engaging with the merits of pragmatism in the pursuit of power'.¹⁹⁵ This would suggest that there is something inherent in the nature of the

¹⁸⁸ Richard Rose, *The Problem of Party Government* (Pelican, London, 1976), p. 154.

¹⁸⁹ Bale, *Drivers*, p. 1.

¹⁹⁰ Andrew Taylor, 'Preface', in Timothy Heppell, *Choosing the Tory Leader: Conservative Party Leadership Elections from Heath to Cameron* (Tauris Academic Studies, London, 2008), p. xiii.

¹⁹¹ Martin Francis, "'Set the People Free?'" Conservatives and the State, 1920-1960' in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1996), p. 58; and see, also, Mark Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain, 1957-64* (Manchester University Press, 2005).

¹⁹² Taylor, 'Preface', *Leader*.

¹⁹³ John Charmley, *History of Conservative Politics 1900-1996* (Macmillan, London, 1996), p. 1.

¹⁹⁴ Norton and Aughey, *Conservatism*, p. 16.

¹⁹⁵ Timothy Heppell, *Choosing the Tory Leader: Conservative Party Leadership Elections from Heath to Cameron* (Tauris Academic Studies, London, 2008), p. 193.

Conservative Party which drives shifting cultural trends that can ignite phenomena into being - in order to influence evolutionary change in the party when environmental conditions allow it. This thought is returned to in Chapter Six when the thesis proposes that the grassroots of the party underwent a cultural response to synthesise with the uses of specific internet technologies 2005-2010.

New Media in the 2000s

By 2005, the internet, as tool for daily organisation, had been assimilated significantly throughout British society and had grown also to play a role in the personal and professional lives of ordinary individuals.¹⁹⁶ In the cultural context ‘evolution’ and ‘technology’ are often cited together, which is evident in the following perspective on the rapid evolution of internet technologies in human culture.

Since 1997 computerised systems for socialising have offered a fascinating arena of symbolic evolution. Children in many countries are routinely logged on to social network software whenever possible. This practice allows them to keep in touch with their friends almost all of the time that they are not in school, engaged in physical activity, or in bed. Even during those times they may have their mobile phones switched on. From an evolutionary viewpoint, the speed of adoption of social network software is staggering. Social network software such as Facebook, Hyves, LinkedIn, Plaxo, Twitter, Xing and others have spread with speeds that exceed flu epidemics, and we are just getting started.¹⁹⁷

However, what is of interest to this thesis is not simply an analysis of the general trends in the use of social networks, but rather ascertaining whether the Conservative Party’s internal culture responded to technological changes in the wider culture and, if so, how it manifested itself in its organisation.

The general elections of 2001 and 2005 were not considered significant in terms of political web-campaigning. According to Downey and Davidson, ‘the internet did not play a qualitatively greater role in the 2005 election than it did in 2001.’¹⁹⁸ Between

¹⁹⁶ Sonia Livingstone, ‘Critical Debates in Internet Studies: Reflections on an Emerging Field’, in James Curran and Michael Gurevitch (eds.), *Mass Media and Society* (Hodder Education, London, 2005).

¹⁹⁷ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organisation: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival* (McGraw-Hill, London, 2010), pp. 471-472.

¹⁹⁸ John Downey and Scott Davidson, ‘The Internet and the UK General Election’, in D. Wring, J. Green, R. Mortimer and S. Atkinson (eds.), *Political Communications: The Election Campaign of 2005* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007), p. 95.

the 2005 and 2010 elections, the Conservative Party underwent notable change.¹⁹⁹ Under the new leadership of David Cameron, the party attempted to detoxify its dated ‘nasty party’ image and rebrand itself as an electable and progressive alternative to New Labour. While he was leader of the opposition, Cameron’s contemporary style of leadership involved the use of internet applications like WebCameron, a video blog. The advent of it has been cited as the first significant use of e-politics in Britain.²⁰⁰ However, Ward et al. have suggested that rather than for use in political marketing, ‘internet-based technology might have a greater impact internally within parties’.²⁰¹ In part, it was this hypothesis that influenced the original idea from which this thesis was developed. WebCameron’s symbolism, and how it was used for reaching the voter, is discussed in further Chapter Six.

In terms of political communication in the 2010 General Election, one could be forgiven for overlooking the internet, and questioning whether, in fact, television was actually the new political medium in Britain at that time. Arguably, in some respects, 2010-style political television was indeed a new medium in British election culture. It was the first general election in British history in which the party leaders went head-to-head in an American-style leader debate.²⁰² In terms of academic interest in political communication, the television debates have gazumped thus far the historical prominence of the internet in the campaign.²⁰³ There have been some general academic examinations of techniques used in 2010, most of which survey the internet as one constituent part of overall campaign activity.²⁰⁴ These works tend to address and compare the activities of the main British parties, but not so much attention has been

¹⁹⁹ Bale, *Cameron*.

²⁰⁰ Downey and Davidson, ‘Internet’.

²⁰¹ Ward, Gibson and Nixon, ‘Internet’, p. 27.

²⁰² Andrew Chadwick, ‘Britain’s First Live Televised Party Leaders’ Debate: From the News Cycle to the Political Information Cycle’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (2010), pp. 1-21.

²⁰³ For literature on aspects of the 2010 leader debates, see, Dominic Wring and Stephen Ward, ‘The Media and the 2010 Campaign: the Television Election?’, in A. Geddes and J. Tonge (eds.), *Britain Votes 2010* (Hansard Society, Oxford, 2010); Dennis Kavanagh and Philip Cowley, *The British General Election of 2010* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010); Stephen Coleman (eds.), *Leaders in the Living Room: Prime Ministerial Debates of 2010: Evidence, Evaluation and Some Recommendations* (Reuters Institute, Oxford, 2011); and Ric Bailey, ‘What Took So Long? The Late Arrival of TV Debate in the UK General Election of 2010’, in Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimore, and Simon Atkinson (eds.), *Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and Media in the 2010 General Election* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011) pp. 7-21; see also in the same collection: Stephen Coleman, Fabro Steilbel and Jay Blumler, ‘Media Coverage of the Prime Ministerial Debates’, pp. 37-55; and Caroline Lawes and Andrew Hawkins, ‘The Polls, The Media and Voters: The Leader Debates’, pp. 56-73.

²⁰⁴ See, Justin Fisher, David Cutts and Edward Fieldhouse, ‘Constituency Campaigning in 2010’, in Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimore, and Simon Atkinson (eds.), *Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and Media in the 2010 General Election* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011), pp. 198-217.

given to an in-depth study of the role of the internet in the Conservative Party's culture in 2010.

New Media in the 1900s

The twentieth century was a period when mass democracy shaped the organisation of political parties and the Conservative Party embraced new methods for electioneering in order to reach out to a larger voting pool.²⁰⁵ One notable example was Stanley Baldwin's use of film and radio to communicate the new Conservative ideas of the time.²⁰⁶ Taylor suggests that:

The Conservatives were fortunate that the advent of mass democracy was accompanied by the emergence of new media suited to mass political communication, and in Baldwin they had a leader who appreciated the possibilities of the new technologies and who worked hard to master them.²⁰⁷

A number of additional scholars have examined the Conservative Party's relationship with the new medium of film.²⁰⁸ It is thought that film was used to educate already converted voters and that it had little impact on winning new votes when compared to the political media which came after it.²⁰⁹

In the post-war years, the new method of political communication was television. The first election broadcasts were transmitted in 1951.²¹⁰ In 1953, an interview with Harold Macmillan was the first political broadcast outside of an election. Tim Bale suggests that Macmillan's appeal as Prime Minister was enhanced later by his

²⁰⁵ Ball, 'Evolution'.

²⁰⁶ See, for example, Sian Nicholas, 'The Construction of a National Identity: Stanley Baldwin, "Englishness" and the Mass Media in Interwar Britain', in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society, 1880-1990* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1996), pp. 127-146.

²⁰⁷ Andrew Taylor, 'Speaking to Democracy: The Conservative Party and Mass Opinion from the 1920s to the 1950s', in Stuart Ball and Ian Holliday (eds.), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s* (Frank Case, London, 2002), p. 79.

²⁰⁸ See, for example, T. J. Hollins, 'The Conservative Party and Film Propaganda between the Wars' *English Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 379 (1981), pp. 359-369; and John Ramsden, 'Baldwin and Film', in N. Pronay and D. W. Spring (eds.), *Politics, Propaganda and Film 1918-45* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1982).

²⁰⁹ Hollins, 'Film'.

²¹⁰ Interestingly, the fundamental 'intention and approach' of Conservative 'Party Election Broadcasts' between 1951 and 1997 remained the same, according to, Michael Kandiah, 'The Conservative Party's 1997 Party Election Broadcasts in Historical Context', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (1997), pp. 459-462.

‘increasingly confident use of television’.²¹¹ Similarly, Richard Cockett claims that Macmillan ‘was one of the first politicians to recognise the importance of mastering the art of television, and his polished performances helped him considerably in his career.’²¹² Colin Seymour-Ure’s book²¹³ provides elucidations of the relationships between prime ministers and the media, and argues that, as Churchill’s successor, Eden was the first prime minister to take initiative in the process of managing media relations, ‘because of his awareness for the potentials of television’.²¹⁴ Moreover, he suggests that Macmillan furthered this approach with the continuation of a ‘strategic review of broadcasting and politics’.²¹⁵ The theme of mastering a new medium tends to be recurrent in the historiography of the Conservative Party’s relationship with new media in the early to mid-twentieth century. Scholars have tended to address the party leader’s ability to adapt to the medium, rather than providing an in depth understanding of how television impacted specifically on the ways in which the Conservative Party went about organising itself. Although this thesis considers leadership as an important factor in understanding the dynamics of the party’s relationship with media, it recognises that it is one of many factors in a complex web of interactions that together contribute to Tory Party culture.

There are a number of more general texts in the historiography that have a greater emphasis on television, but these are not necessarily focused on change in the organisational culture of the Conservative Party. Mark Jarvis’s analysis of television and the Conservative Party, 1955-1964,²¹⁶ addresses the impact of the advent of debates about commercial television. However, rather than significantly relating this to party organisation, Jarvis explores the wider-symbolism of television in relation to the Conservative Party Government. He focuses on the case of the Pilkington Committee, which was assembled to address developments in British broadcasting; and what the outcomes of the Pilkington Report, which ultimately led to an increase in pirate radio, can tell us about morality in Britain’s social history. Jarvis concludes that: ‘Television and radio were defining elements of the affluent society.’²¹⁷ Tim Bale identifies the advent of television as an additional driver of change in the Conservative Party 1951-

²¹¹ Bale, *Drivers*, p. 54.

²¹² Cockett, ‘Publicity’, p. 565.

²¹³ Colin Seymour-Ure, *Prime Ministers and the Media: Issues of Power and Control* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2003). See, also, Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1996), Chapter 8.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.159.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

²¹⁶ Jarvis, *Morality*, Chapter 7.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

1964. Like, Mark Jarvis, his analysis of the role of television in the party is focused largely on the role of the advent of commercial television, except with a greater focus on party policy and the resultant impact on interrelations between Conservative parliamentarians, CCO figures and political elites. Bale's overall emphasis is different to that of this thesis, because new media, i.e. television, play a more minor role in his 1951-1964 narrative; although, like this research, he does provide detailed analysis of the party's organisation.²¹⁸

While these works detail effectively the broad relationships between broadcasting and political development in Britain, they tend to focus on the elite figures in the party and the more salient issues in the historic record. Accounts detailing less familiar aspects of the party's culture, and thus the more latent-factors hidden in the everyday lives of political participants, are scarcer. Furthermore, although works, like Ramsden's books, which cover the 1951-1964 period, provide invaluable expressions of the Conservative Party at that time, most accounts are thin when it comes to the impact of the developments of political television in the party's organisation. This thesis attempts to add greater depth to this understanding in Part II, which follows, with a narrative in two chapters on the Conservative Party's organisational culture and the role of television 1951-1964.

²¹⁸ Bale, *Drivers*.

Part II
The Research: 1951-1964

THREE

Television in Churchill's and Eden's Conservatives

1951-1957

The post-war Conservative Party suffered electoral defeats in 1945 and 1950 to Labour's Clement Atlee. However, the Conservatives returned to power on winning a slim majority of 16 MPs²¹⁹ at the 1951 General Election, on 25 October, under Winston Churchill. Their success has been attributed to both a rethink of party policy and a restructure of the party's organisation²²⁰ under Lord Woolton, Chairman of Party Organisation, October 1946-July 1955,²²¹ and Stephen Pierssene, General Director, October 1945-August 1957.²²² Woolton, who insisted on the use of the tag 'Socialist' to replace 'Labour' in Conservative vocabulary,²²³ and has been described since as the 'greatest of all Conservative Party managers',²²⁴ was 'horrified at the apparent lack of system'²²⁵ in the party's organisation. However, rather than interfering with the day-to-day procedures of the party-workers, he focused on developing the party's propaganda, funds and membership. One of his notable changes in party organisation was to limit candidate donations to £25 p.a., thus democratising the candidate selection process and forcing the local associations to raise funds through their supporter-base.²²⁶

These changes in the Conservative Party came about at a time when a culture of civic bureaucracy had begun proliferating in the form of committee meetings and increased regulation. At the same time, the post-war re-launch of television was subject to strict regulations that stemmed from the bureaucratic-style of the Atlee government.²²⁷ Early political television²²⁸ had been characterised by its formal and

²¹⁹ Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts* (Biteback Publishing, London, 2006), p. 59.

²²⁰ See, for example, Robert Blake, *The Conservative Party from Peel to Churchill* (Wm Collins, London, 1979), pp. 259-260; Harriet Jones, 'The Cold War and the Santa Claus Syndrome: Dilemmas in Conservative Social Policy-Making, 1945-1957' in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Barielowska (eds.), *The Conservative Party and British Society, 1880-1990* (University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1996), pp.240-254; and Andrew Boxer, *The Conservative Governments, 1951-1964* (Longman, London, 1996), p. 1.

²²¹ David Butler and Gareth Butler, *Twentieth-Century British Political Facts 1900-2000* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000), p. 136.

²²² *Ibid.*, p.137.

²²³ Blake, *Conservative*, p. 261-262.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 259-60.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Michael Kandiah, 'Television Enters British Politics: the Conservative Party's Central Office and political broadcasting, 1945-55', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1995), pp. 265-284.

rehearsed appearance in which politicians read scripts to camera. However, in 1951, the Conservative Party was the first political party to deviate away from that approach in using the broadcaster²²⁹ Leslie Mitchell to perform a pre-rehearsed ‘question and answer’ format with Anthony Eden.²³⁰

The historian Richard Cockett has contributed to Conservative Party historiography with his narrative²³¹ that introduces the major themes of television’s impact on like, for example, Conservative Party: organisation; broadcasting style; declining use of film and rising use of television; electoral motives; and relationships with broadcasters and publicity professionals. Michael Kandiah’s article²³² on broadcasting and CCO, 1945-1955, is probably the closest match to the themes addressed in this chapter that exists in the current historiography. Kandiah focuses on the decline of radio and rise of television. He argues that the BBC and Conservative Party formed a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship that impacted on CCO ‘broadcasting strategies’ and developments in the ‘politicisation of television’.

This and the following chapter, which together constitute Part II of this thesis, expand on Cockett’s and Kandiah’s themes by presenting a wider view and deeper analysis of the role of television in the organisational culture of the party 1951-1964. Firstly, this chapter seeks to understand the impact of television in the Conservative Party during Churchill’s post-war premiership and Eden’s subsequent premiership. The chapter addresses the period in two sections. A section on Churchill’s Conservatives focuses on the party’s culture surrounding the use of a range of publicity and propaganda techniques. The section also assesses aspects of the party organisation in the early 1950s and provides a detailed discussion on the party’s attitude to the advent of political television. The second section on Eden’s Conservatives presents an analysis

²²⁸ The term ‘political television’ in relation to this thesis includes the ideas, discussions, procedures, reactions, interactions, broadcasts and technological factors that are involved in the daily cultures of political parties in their pursuits to engage with the medium of television as a method for communicating with the electorate. Political television can refer to actual broadcasts, but also the past, present and future non-broadcasting elements of planning and operations which are invested in producing the end product of broadcasting a programme, news segment and/or party-specific election broadcast.

²²⁹ In the 1950s, the term ‘broadcaster’ was used in different contexts. Here the term refers to an individual who works in the broadcasting industry for a corporate broadcasting organisation, like the BBC. However, the Conservative Party used the term also in reference to the representatives whom it intended to use as its speakers in its political broadcasts.

²³⁰ Richard Cockett, ‘The Party, Publicity, and the Media’, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p. 547-578, see p. 565.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Kandiah, ‘Television’.

of the changing nature of the Conservative Party organisation at the time of Eden's premiership. Like the first section, the role of television is placed into context with some discussion of additional political media that the party used for reaching voters. However, greater attention is given to the party's understanding of, and awakening to, the advent of the television - with a deeper analysis of its impact on the party's traditional hierarchy and cultural behaviour as a mass-based party.²³³

Churchill's Conservatives 1951-1955

Party Organisation and Churchill's Conservatives

By 1952, Churchill's Conservatives, with the cooperation of 507 Conservative associations, raised their membership subscriptions by 351,708 in a ten week period to an approximate figure of 2.8 million, of which 124,000 were considered to be Young Conservatives (YCs).²³⁴ This was the first recruitment campaign in four years, the last being when the party was in opposition. The campaign was used as a 'platform' for government ministers to influence public opinion,²³⁵ and is a demonstration of the party using its mass-based culture to promote its propaganda agenda. The Conservative associations were notified of the recruitment campaign by a letter which included a plea for support from Churchill, Woolton and Eden.²³⁶ This is an example of the resource-intensive procedures that were used to communicate with the mass-membership of a national party in the early part of the 1950s; and a time in which Conservative Party elites used their hierarchal status to engage their volunteers in greater face-to-face interactions with the masses at the grassroots.²³⁷

During Churchill's premiership, the party held the collective memories of post-war electoral defeat and maintained a determination, which was reminiscent of Churchill's war-time spirit of defiance, not to return to such disappointing times. Therefore, Churchill's Conservatives went to great lengths to ensure that the organisation of the party was 'always up to date, and flexible to meet new needs as

²³³ See, Duverger in Chapter Two.

²³⁴ CPA CCO 500/11/5 Conservative Recruiting Campaign, Report to the Executive Committee of the National Union, 1952; and CCO 4/6/251 Letter from R. K. Carrick to J. G. Smyth, 31 August 1954.

²³⁵ CPA CCO 500/11/5 Conservative Recruiting Campaign, Report on Organisation, 1952, point 4.

²³⁶ CPA CCO 500/11/5 Conservative Recruiting Campaign, letter from Churchill, Eden and Woolton to association chairmen, 28 May 1952.

²³⁷ Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

they' developed.²³⁸ By 1954, the party's self-perception was that its national and provincial organisation had 'been flexible and adapted itself to change.'²³⁹ Furthermore, Churchill's Conservatives believed that the National Union and CCO evolved in line with the provincial and area organisation.²⁴⁰ Since May 1886, when a 'Special Conference' was convened to divide up the party's provincial areas based on the traditional regional divisions in England & Wales, the party's view of its organisation outside of CCO was that it had developed organically in line with the growth of regional populations and party membership.²⁴¹ Therefore, Churchill's Conservatives at CCO held self-belief in their ability to adapt and change, and viewed it as an organisational attribute.

By 1952, the party had begun to explore the role of the area offices and their relationship with CCO departments and local associations.²⁴² There was the recognition that 'paperwork' and bureaucracy could be a hindrance to the efficiency of operations, and that the circulation of minutes 'had greatly extended since the war.'²⁴³ Moreover, there was a desire for CCO agents to be freed from paperwork. It would allow them to focus on being contact points for MPs, candidates, agents and association chairmen; and to act as liaisons, thus facilitating centralised agendas. This demonstrates that the party was prepared to take an introspective and critical assessment of its own organisation and make deliberate practical changes to its behaviour in order to improve its operations.²⁴⁴ CCO had begun to express its wish to take responsibility for all circulated material, signalling a desire to further centralise specific aspects of the party's operations. The central-party understood that in order for it to function in a modern context, the local associations had to surrender some aspects of their autonomy to CCO.

In addition to this internal view, the assessment of mass or 'public' opinion had become a growing interest for the central-party.²⁴⁵ Area Publicity Officers were tasked

²³⁸ CPA CCO 4/6/209 The Party Organisation, p. 1, Revised May 1954.

²³⁹ CPA CCO 4/6/208 National and Provincial Organisation Today, 4 February 1954.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ CPA CCO 4/5/6 Report on the development of 'Provincial Organisation' since 1886, 12 May 1952.

²⁴² CPA CCO 500/1/22 Report of Committee on Area Office Organisation for seven meetings, held between 2 December 1952 and 20 January 1953.

²⁴³ CPA CCO 500/1/22 Report of Committee on Area Office Organisation, ND, p. 7, point 11.

²⁴⁴ Nick Tiratsoo and Jim Tomlinson, *The Conservatives and Industrial Efficiency, 1951-1964: Thirteen wasted years?* (Routledge, London, 1998).

²⁴⁵ See, Andrew Taylor, 'Speaking to Democracy: The Conservative Party and Mass Opinion from the 1920s to the 1950s', in Stuart Ball and Ian Holliday (eds.), *Mass Conservatism: The Conservatives and the Public since the 1880s* (Frank Case, London, 2002), p. 78-99.

with gathering such information through a fortnightly survey at the association level.²⁴⁶ The central-party held the same interest in the views of the national Conservative Party membership. There was particular attention paid to comparing, by region, the general trends in the opinions of party members. The matters of concern for CCO included determining the state of party morale; understanding how party policy was resonating among its members; and establishing party opinions in relation to propaganda.²⁴⁷ Again, this highlights the party's desire to be introspectively self-aware. Churchill's Conservatives' substantial investment of central-party resources in the process of ascertaining and understanding the mood of its members, suggests that they were indeed committed to an organisational culture in line with the type of mass-party characteristics discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. In understanding the views of their members, the Conservatives ensured that the party organisation was able to adapt in order to satisfy its supporters, thus promoting the growth of a large and engaged campaigning workforce. Ultimately, this would enable the post-war Conservatives to hold on to electoral power at the subsequent election.

As a mass-based party in the early 1950s, the Conservative Party sought votes from the mass-electorate largely through its people-centric organisation.²⁴⁸ However, following the impacts of universal suffrage, the party had begun adapting to developments in mass-communication technologies, like film and radio, to reach new audiences.²⁴⁹ Subsequently, many in the party became proponents of providing the electorate with 'political education'.²⁵⁰ The progress of early television had been interrupted, because the impact of World War II on national security and austerity meant that it went into hibernation at the BBC from 3 September 1939 to 7 June 1946.²⁵¹ Television's slow development from its primitive roots at the end of the 1920s meant that radio remained the primary broadcasting tool prior to 1955.²⁵² However, by November 1952, the potentials of political television were beginning to stir interests in

²⁴⁶ CPA CCO 500/1/22 Report of Committee on Area Office Organisation for seven meetings held between 2 December 1952 and 20 January 1953.

²⁴⁷ CPA CCO 4/6/272 State of Party Organisation, Summary of Replies to the General Director's memorandum of 21 July 1954.

²⁴⁸ Lawrence, *Masters*, p. 172.

²⁴⁹ Taylor, 'Democracy', *Mass Conservatism*, p. 78-79; and Kandiah, 'Television'.

²⁵⁰ Cockett, 'Publicity'.

²⁵¹ Burton Paulu, *British Broadcasting in Transition* (Macmillan, London, 1961), p 8.

²⁵² Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1996), p. 73; and Kandiah, 'Television'.

Churchill's Conservatives, shown by a survey of public opinion that was conducted by the party, called 'The Viewers View'.²⁵³

As television began its ascent as a potential political tool in the minds of CCO-officials, the role that film was playing at the association level was beginning its decline.²⁵⁴

There was general agreement, with the exception of the East Midlands Area, that our film propaganda was not worth the money it must cost... steps should be taken to terminate at an early date our use of IPU's [Indoor Projector Units] and the production of films.²⁵⁵

This suggests that there was an early awareness of changes in general technological trends at a range of levels in the party organisation, and that the party's introspective and methodical approach to understanding the impact of external factors on its organisation led the party to begin reassessing its practical behaviour and uses of technology.

Propaganda and Churchill's Conservatives

CCO propaganda was a tactical extension of party strategy, and was only put into action after being approved by the party chairman.²⁵⁶ It shows that, unlike some other aspects of the party organisation, the party's publicity was already relatively centralised in the early 1950s. However, this did not mean that party propaganda escaped criticism from its members. The central-party was quick to recognise that it had a problem when its supporters began questioning the quality of its output in comparison to that of the Labour Party.²⁵⁷ After the initial euphoria of winning the 1951 General Election subsided, 'much concern' set into the psyche at CCO that the Government was receiving 'adverse publicity'. The Conservative-elite placed the blame for that on the mechanisms of 'Government propaganda and publicity since 1945' in that it had been

²⁵³ CPA CCO 500/1/22 Report of Committee on Area Office Organisation, c. November 1951, p. 8, point 14.

²⁵⁴ Cockett, 'Publicity'.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 25, point 46. For further reading on film and the Conservatives, see, for example, T. J. Hollins, 'The Conservative Party and Film Propaganda between the Wars', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 96, No. 379 (1981), pp. 359-369; John Ramsden, 'Baldwin and Film', in N. Pronay and D. W. Spring (eds.) *Politics, Propaganda and Film 1918-45* (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1982); and Cockett, 'Publicity'.

²⁵⁶ CPA CCO 4/4/254 Letter from S. Pierssene, 10 December 1951.

²⁵⁷ CPA CCO 4/5/295 Document outlining the state the party's 'Propaganda', 4 November.

‘set up under the socialists and therefore ... not ... entirely in line with Conservative thought and intentions.’²⁵⁸

In the run-up to the 1951 General Election, Churchill’s Conservatives, on 20 August 1951, mounted a ‘National Advertising Campaign’.²⁵⁹ It was led by Mark Chapman-Walker, Director of Publicity, and Colin Mann, Chief Publicity Officer. It was customary to send a letter from the respective CCO official(s) to the desired party recipients in order to announce the launch of a centrally-devised initiative. In the case of the National Advertising Campaign, a letter from the Chief Publicity Officer went out to all Constituency Agents, CCO Agents and Area Publicity Officers. It was common for association chairmen and/or agents to respond discursively with praise and/or critique in relation to both internal and external Conservative Party matters.²⁶⁰ This trend of interactivity at the grassroots continued and was even encouraged by the central-party.

CCO provided the constituency associations with clear instructions on how to use propaganda in local publications and broadcasts, in order to encourage their participation locally in such media.²⁶¹ This included a list of their respective local newspapers²⁶² that had been deemed appropriate by CCO for participation in the campaign. Adverts were supplied free-of-charge by CCO to the Conservative associations for use in local newspapers. In this case, an organisational dichotomy of freedom versus control was being exhibited by the central-party. On the one hand, CCO was encouraging the associations to engage with the media with a greater freedom of interactivity; but, on the other, it was enacting control over certain aspects of those interactions. The use of manipulative tactics such as this is evidence to suggest that there was a move towards a more centralised-CCO approach to party organisation. The modus operandi used by CCO was to be respectfully coercive, rather than dictatorial. Stuart Ball suggests that CCO achieved control over constituency associations because of the party’s deferential temperament.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ CPA CCO 4/4/254 Letter from S. Pierssene, 10 December 1951.

²⁵⁹ CPA CCO 4/4/244 letter from Colin Mann the Chief Publicity Officer to all Constituency Agents, Central Office Agents and Area Publicity Officers, 14 August 1951.

²⁶⁰ See, for example, CPA CCO 4/4/244 Letter from Bassetlaw Division Association to Lord Woolton, 20 April 1951; and CPA CCO 4/5/295 Letter from S. H. Pierssene in reply to the Agent for Middleton, Prestwick and Whitefield Association, who gave criticism over propaganda during the County Council Elections, 9 May 1952.

²⁶¹ CPA CCO 4/4/244 Appendix A of the letter from Colin Mann, 14 August 1951.

²⁶² CPA CCO 4/4/244 Appendix B of the letter from Colin Mann, 14 August 1951.

²⁶³ Stuart Ball, ‘Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation’, in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), pp. 261-311.

In terms of propaganda output, film was the medium that CCO had held the most control over since the early part of the twentieth century. By the 1950s, it was an already established medium for use in political communication.²⁶⁴ However, along the party's journey towards prominent use of television, there was a process of convergence in the uses of the two audiovisual media.²⁶⁵ For example, political films that were aired on television were also shown at cinema evenings and other party social gatherings.²⁶⁶ This suggests that Churchill's Conservatives took a conservative approach to making sudden changes to its publicity practices; and favoured instead a more cautious approach to change.²⁶⁷ Steady incremental changes in this manner support the idea that the party underwent gradual evolutionary processes that shadowed over time the technological developments of the mid-twentieth century.

As a largely agrarian party, the use of 16mm film projectors, also known as the 'cinematograph', was widely used by Churchill's Conservatives in rural constituencies in order to take conservatism to small villages.²⁶⁸ These cinema evenings used popular films, to draw in an audience, which were prefaced with a political speech on film. A similar approach was taken in attempts to galvanise the party supporters. One film called 'The Personal Touch' was used to educate campaigners on the best practice for canvassing. The party's use of film as a medium in that way was in keeping with its wider 1950s policy-agenda which aimed to encourage a more educated British public.²⁶⁹ In addition to film, the use of gramophone records was integrated into party events, which were considered to be 'quite attractive social evenings' for local Conservative Party supporters.²⁷⁰ The in-house use of film and gramophone records at constituency-based political evenings gave Churchill's Conservatives relative freedom and control over the ways in which its message was administered and how it went about attracting audiences. This was in contrast to television with its limited audience potential,

²⁶⁴ Cockett, 'Publicity'.

²⁶⁵ CPA CCO 4/4/252 note on a BBC film 'Freedom of Speech' shown both in cinemas and on television, 7 December 1950.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ The cautious approach to combining television and politics in the 1950s was exhibited by both political parties and the BBC, but for different reasons. For further insight, see, William Pickles, 'Political Attitudes in the Television Age', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1959), pp 54-66.

²⁶⁸ CPA CCO 4/4/252 Report of 'The Use of Cinematograph in Country Constituencies', 22 February 1951. ²⁶⁹ Tiratsoo and Tomlinson, *1951-1964*.

²⁷⁰ CPA CCO 4/4/252 Report of 'The Use of Cinematograph in Country Constituencies', 22 February 1951, paragraph 5.

restricting regulation, and necessary dependence on cooperation with the BBC for any broadcast.²⁷¹

The Conservative and Unionist Film Association, based at 70 St Stephen's House, Westminster, played a significant role in the party's propaganda output during the early 1950s. It communicated directly with Conservative associations in relation to 'advertising material' and produced booklets for the Sound and Film Library, which included both 16mm and 35mm films on topics ranging from political propaganda and history to general entertainment films.²⁷² 'The Vote', an educational film, is one example of many film lectures used by the party.²⁷³ Before television had taken its place, film was considered to be 'invaluable' for political education. MPs used film to communicate with their constituents, but it was a costly medium at £25 per two and a half minute speech.²⁷⁴ CCO regularly loaned IPU's to constituency associations for use free-of-charge,²⁷⁵ but also provided them with advice on the most appropriate projectors for purchase.²⁷⁶ It is evident that throughout the 1950s, the legacy of film, as a precursor to television, had an influence on the role of television in Conservative Party organisation and the ways in which the party managed and processed television as a part of its propaganda output.

For the Conservative Party, the problem with recorded media, like film and gramophone records, was that they had a relatively short political shelf-life. The Speaker's Department at CCO considered that most gramophone records became outdated within three months, and some 'considerably sooner.'²⁷⁷ It was this factor which determined the party's decision against the use of long-play records. The party used gramophone records in order to distribute snippets of Churchill's speeches.²⁷⁸ However, the party became aware that there were limitations to the medium. For example, the listener had to turn-over the disc after just four minutes, thus interrupting the speech. CCO believed that this was potentially the reason for a decline in the sales

²⁷¹ Asa Briggs, *Sound and Vision: History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume IV* (Oxford University Press, 1979).

²⁷² CPA CCO 4/5/294 Booklet from the Sound and Film Library (16mm), October 1952; and booklet (35mm), October 1953.

²⁷³ CPA CCO 4/5/294 The Vote Film Lecture, 15 April 1953.

²⁷⁴ CPA CCO 4/5/294 Letter from the Party Chairman to Leonard Ropner MP, 12 November 1952.

²⁷⁵ See, for example, CPA CCO 4/5/294 Letter from the Chief Organisation Officer, 14 August 1952; and letter, 5 August 1953.

²⁷⁶ CPA CCO 4/5/294 Letter from Bruce Moir, Organising Officer, 6 January 1954.

²⁷⁷ CPA CCO 4/4/255 Letter from the Speaker's Department, 23 October 1950.

²⁷⁸ CPA CCO 4/5/297 Letter from Chapman-Walker, Chief Publicity Officer, to party officials on 'Conference Gramophone Records', 23 October, 1952.

of Churchill's voice.²⁷⁹ The newer medium and recording technology of tape had a greater capacity for lengthy recordings. However, in the early 1950s, the Radio and Recording section at CCO did not have the facilities to transfer recordings from gramophone to tape, nor did it have the budget to record all ministerial speeches to tape directly from radio broadcasts.²⁸⁰ Therefore, Churchill's Conservatives at CCO were aware of the limiting factors inherent in specific media types. They made assessments in terms of the likely organisational impacts that would be had from the integration of any new medium in CCO operations, and recording-technologies were deemed as a low priority. The party considered the cost implications and organisational factors to be the most salient concerns when proposing change and investment in new publicity techniques and only invested its resources in methods that its elite decision-makers considered most effective.

Looking ahead to the 1955 General Election, in 1952 CCO outlined a three stage tactical propaganda strategy.²⁸¹ The plan stated the party's intentions to use all media in an 'intense' manner as it progressed toward the election. It outlined its intent to use party-workers; briefing newspapers; constituency magazines, CCO publications, films, ministerial speeches, membership campaigns and press campaigns, but made no mention whatsoever of television or broadcasting. This finding suggests that, in 1952, television was relatively low on the party's publicity agenda as a medium with any significance in terms of electoral impact. However, in 1954, with the development of the Radio and Television section, the party's attitude to television changed sharply. This rapid shift, which was preceded by a period of steady incremental change, suggests that the evolutionary theory of punctuated equilibrium, outlined in Chapter Two, is useful in explaining the party's evolution in this case.

Furthermore, although in previous years film may have been considered to be a declining medium for political communication, the looming general election created a flurry of activity in the use of film strip projectors in lecture halls.²⁸² The trend coincided with the party's realisation that television could be used to its advantage and that party supporters should be educated to use the medium for mutual benefit. Therefore, Churchill's Conservatives' use of propaganda tools could be characterised by its undulations and oscillations of internal opinion and action - in terms of the changing ideas about which media it thought to be useful to its aims.

²⁷⁹ CPA CCO 4/5/297 Memo between Hinchcliffe and the Chief Publicity Officer, 21 April 1952.

²⁸⁰ CPA CCO 4/5/297 Letter from the Chief Publicity Officer, 14 November 1952.

²⁸¹ CPA CCO 4/5/296 Propaganda Plan, 1952.

²⁸² CPA CCO 4/6/316 File on Propaganda Films, 1954-6.

The 1954 CCO film production 'TV Can Tell It' was used in association and branch meetings. The film was tailored to its niche audience of Conservative Party supporters in order to instruct them in what they should be looking-out for on television. In a letter from Chapman-Walker to all Conservative associations, members were asked to take photographic evidence of Government projects in their local areas which could be used for propaganda in television broadcasts.

In view of the growing importance of TV I am sure you will appreciate how necessary it is for the party as a whole to cooperate in, and contribute to, the production of television Party Political Broadcasts. In order to explain how this can be achieved we have made a 16mm 15 minute film...²⁸³

The party was beginning to awaken to the idea that the trends in political television in the United States would soon be witnessed in Britain.²⁸⁴ This was in keeping with the wider public discourse: 'Indeed, much of the productivity debate at that time can be characterised as being about how far British industry should be "Americanised".'²⁸⁵ CCO realised that it needed to begin restructuring its central, regional and constituency organisations in order that it may foster a culture which would enable the necessary change needed to develop its use of the medium for political advantage. In the transition, the party used the more familiar medium of film in order to help facilitate the necessary changes in attitudes and activities among its mass-membership. This signals that 1954 was a symbolic year in the advent of political television and its role in the party's propaganda.

Broadcasting and Churchill's Conservatives

Prior to the 1950 election, broadcasting was a contentious issue between the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties, especially on the topic of the allocation of election broadcasts. A precedent was first set in 1939, when the Conservatives and Labour were given five broadcasts each and the Liberals two. However, these numbers doubled during the 1945 election and led to subsequent ambiguity over the allocations

²⁸³ CPA CCO 4/6/316 Letter from Chapman-Walker, Chief Publicity Officer on 'TV Can Tell It', 25 February 1954.

²⁸⁴ CPA CCO 4/6/316 Memorandum notes on 'TV Can Tell It', 1954. For further reading on the Americanisation of British broadcasting, see, Thomas Hajkowski, *The BBC and national identity in Britain, 1922-53: Studies in Popular Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 12; and, for the Conservative perspective, Tim Bale, *The Conservatives since 1945, The Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 95.

²⁸⁵ Tiratsoo and Tomlinson, *1951-1964*, p. 20.

of election broadcasts.²⁸⁶ The Conservative Party became concerned that its close political relationship with the National Liberals would lead to the Labour Party insisting that the National Liberals' broadcasts would need to be deducted from the overall Conservative allocation. Ambiguity, frequent inter-party meetings, and the parties' cautious approaches to the topic of television, were characteristic of the period. This in turn had some impact on the ways in which Churchill's Conservatives interacted internally, which manifested itself in a timid and contemplative approach to the use of television. However, the extent to which these factors impacted on the party's dynamics was tempered by the status of radio as the incumbent and dominant broadcasting medium.²⁸⁷

Some in the Conservative-elite at CCO believed that radio was 'a greater vote winner than all other media of propaganda combined.'²⁸⁸ Frequently, although not always, in organisational and semantic terms, there was little distinction made between the medium of radio and television. In terms of the organisation of party publicity, documentation on both radio and television were often filed together to under the label of 'Propaganda - Broadcasting'.²⁸⁹ This indicates that in the early 1950s, Churchill's Conservatives viewed television as a subsidiary of its parent broadcasting medium of radio. Quite often, the two broadcasting media were addressed as being synonymous. Instead of using intra-party processes to differentiate between the two broadcasting media, the party largely focused its thoughts and attentions on: the ratio of broadcasts allowed for each party; the broadcast content; the quality of broadcaster performance technique; and which Conservative-broadcasters to use.

In the run-up to the 1951 General Election, a meeting held at the Home Office,²⁹⁰ agreed that the allocation of radio broadcasts would be repeated based on the allocation of the 1950 General Election, giving the Conservatives and Labour five broadcasts each and the Liberals three. The radio broadcasts were ordered on a set calendar of dates with time slots of either 6.15pm or 9.15pm and were national broadcasts, with no options given for regional broadcasts. As for television:

²⁸⁶ CPA CRD 2/20/6 'Note by Mr Hepburn after talk with Mr Profumo' on General Election Broadcasts, October 1949.

²⁸⁷ Seymour-Ure, *Broadcasting*, pp.88-89.

²⁸⁸ CPA CRD 2/20/6 Report attached to memo from SH Pierssene, General Director, on Party Broadcasts at the 1950 General Election, 12 December 1949, p.1.

²⁸⁹ See, for example, CPA CCO 4/4/250 - Propaganda - Broadcasting - 1950-2; CPA CCO 4/5/289 - Propaganda - Broadcasting (A-M) - 1952-4; CPA CCO 4/5/290 - Propaganda - Broadcasting (N-Z) - 1952-4; CPA CCO 4/5/291 - Propaganda - Broadcasting, Mr. Hare's file - 1952.

²⁹⁰ CPA CRD 2/20/7 Meeting minutes 'General Election Broadcasts, 1951', held 21 September 1951.

The BBC were anxious that [the] medium should be used; the Labour Party were not in favour of using it ... and the Conservative Party wanted to go into the matter further and be free to reopen if necessary. Later it was agreed that the Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties should each have a TV broadcast of 15 minutes (8-8.15pm).²⁹¹

Therefore, in the run-up to 1951, with radio as the dominant and favoured broadcasting medium for elections, television was viewed with some suspicion by all the main political parties and its political development was tentative as a consequence. However, Churchill's Conservatives, when in opposition, were more open to the potential uses of television for political gain than Atlee's governing Labour Party.

In April 1951, Churchill's private secretary sent a note of thanks²⁹² to Pierssene for his memorandum on 'Political Broadcasting',²⁹³ in which he notes that Churchill said that he would be keeping it nearby. The document addressed the ratio of Party Political Broadcasts between the Conservatives, Socialists and Liberals, which at that time was set to the ratio of 6:5:1, with the governing party being entitled to the most. The paper argued that the ratio should be altered in line with changes in the numbers of votes cast between the 1945 and 1950 elections. The document also noted that scripts from broadcasts should have been made available by the BBC for the party leaders, but none had been provided for CCO. Pierssene was aware that, by the end of 1952, Britain's television coverage was set to reach 78% of the population and that a number of key marginal seats would be brought into the coverage area as progress on transmitters was made. Therefore, it was logical that the party who mastered the political broadcast could make significant electoral gains in constituencies that came into reach of television coverage.

The crucial question that Churchill's Conservatives were asking themselves was whether they would gain or lose-out with the introduction of the televised Party Political Broadcasts. Pierssene and his colleagues believed that viewers would become irritated if televised-political broadcasts in the evening became too frequent. Therefore, CCO was reluctant to take the lead. Even if the party had a slight advantage, it recognised there would be a significant additional workload for its staff. The party was also aware that it would have to invest in, to a greater extent, preparing and rehearsing speakers for

²⁹¹ CPA CRD 2/20/7 Meeting minutes 'General Election Broadcasts, 1951', point 5, held 21 September 1951.

²⁹² CPA CCO 120/1/1 Letter from Churchill's Secretary to S. H. Pierssene, 26 April 1951.

²⁹³ CPA CCO 120/1/1 Memorandum on 'Political Broadcasting' for S. H. Pierssene to Churchill, 24 April 1951.

broadcasts. The party's perceived poor performance in other broadcasts had knocked its confidence and subsequently tempered its enthusiasm for mastering the medium.

However, on winning the 1951 election, Churchill's Conservatives did begin to seriously prepare for any eventuality in terms of television's role in politics. The party was cautious in its approach, but realised that all levels of the party organisation would benefit from a richer understanding of the medium and how it compared to the more familiar broadcasting medium of radio. This was demonstrated by their production of a pamphlet named 'Taking on Television',²⁹⁴ which was written to give a comprehensive introduction to the world of television and included details of the location of the two British television studios one at Alexandra Palace, North London, and the other at Lime Grove, West London. The publication also detailed the practical considerations for television including matters like dress, make-up, microphones, cameras, gesture and movement, focus, lighting, programming, scripts and rehearsals. Again, the Conservatives' early approach to television was in line with their wider policy in favour of a more educated population. It also illustrates the commitment that the party had to understand, what was considered to be, a relatively unknown and mysterious medium, which, like the political world, had its own distinct working practices and culture. Here we witness the merging of these two cultures and more specifically, the Conservative Party's first steps to integrating television media culture into its own organisation and collective psyche. Furthermore, through the dissemination of this type of literature, the central-party was taking active steps to exert its influence throughout the party, thus signalling that its organisational and political culture was expected to adapt and change in line with the political inevitabilities which came with the evolution of broadcasting technologies.

In the process of adaptation, the training and rehearsing of party broadcasters became a priority. The facilities at CCO included recording equipment and coaching from the research and publicity departments. The party was intent on widening the pool of what was considered to be 'a small variety'²⁹⁵ of talented Conservative-broadcasters who were being used by the BBC. There was considerable discourse between the various levels of the party hierarchy with discussion and criticism of Conservative-broadcasters.²⁹⁶ The party was acutely aware that its broadcasting communications

²⁹⁴ CPA CCO 4/4/260 Pamphlet 'Talking on Television', August 1951.

²⁹⁵ CPA CCO 4/4/260 Note from M. Maxse to D. Maxwell-Fyfe with a list of potential speaking talent, 7 December 1950.

²⁹⁶ See, for example, CPA CCO 4/4/260 Memo from Hinchcliffe to M. Maxse, 7 December, 1950; Letter from M. Maxse to D. Maxwell-Fyfe, 28 November 1950; Letter from D. Maxwell-Fyfe to M. Maxse, 27

were lagging and needed to change. Using watching panels, the party began monitoring broadcasts in order to assess the performance of its speakers and the impact of the actions of the BBC monopoly.²⁹⁷ The process of self-monitoring and assessing speaker quality is a key example of how the party adapted in order to begin mastering television. The party was sensitive to how its collective voice sounded, appeared and was perceived. Therefore, broadcasting media impacted directly on party organisation and its awareness of self-image.

By 1952, the number of TV Licences had reached 1.5 million²⁹⁸ and the party was beginning to invest more extensively in developing its broadcasting talent. Although television was yet to surpass radio in the views of the CCO-elite, it was being placed on a more equal footing. In January, Woolton wrote to all Conservative and Liberal Unionist MPs to advertise its broadcasting facilities at CCO.

I want you to know about the facilities which the Central Office has to offer in the tuition and practice of sound and television broadcasting... The BBC hold very firmly to their right to choose the speakers for their programmes and the Central Office is rarely even consulted. The BBC are, however, influenced very considerably by broadcasting ability, and in their capacity of purveying entertainment they tend to repeat successes. It is therefore desirable for us to excel in broadcasting technique... We have recently set up a television studio equipped with a television set, mock camera, lights, etc. Mr Wyndham Goldie, who has considerable knowledge both as an actor and producer, will be available at this studio for advice on television technique and production.²⁹⁹

CCO began receiving a significant amount of correspondence from Conservative agents and supporters with concern for the poor quality of Conservative-speakers on radio and television.³⁰⁰ It was noted that Conservative-speakers were receiving criticism in the press for their lack of broadcasting talent. The CCO-elite were concerned about the widely held belief among the Conservative agents and supporters that CCO and the Parliamentary Party had some influence in the speakers who were put forward to the BBC. A communication was ordered to go out to the constituency associations in order to explain that it was not the case. The complexities of early

November 1950; Letter from T. H. Willis, 18 November, 1950; Letter from M. Maxse to D. Maxwell-Fyfe, 22 November 1950; Letter from Hinchcliffe to J. B. L. Thomas, 21 December 1950; Letter from J. B. L. Thomas to Hinchcliffe, 20 December, 1950.

²⁹⁷ CPA CCO 4/4/260 Memo from Hinchcliffe, 12 December 1950.

²⁹⁸ CPA CCO 120/1/1 Meeting minutes for Inter-Party Meeting on Political Broadcasts, 25 March, 1952.

²⁹⁹ CPA CCO 4/4/250 Letter from Lord Woolton to MPs, 19 January 1952.

³⁰⁰ CPA CCO 4/4/250 Memo from Chief Publicity Officer to the General Director, 22 March 1951.

television, like its relative newness, legislation and the monopoly of the BBC, meant that there was confusion about the roles of and relationships between the BBC, CCO and Parliamentary Party in the making of political television.

The BBC's choices in Conservative-speakers were fuelling suspicions within the Conservative Party that they were biased in Labour's favour.³⁰¹ Such suspicions had been raised for a number of years due to incidents like discrepancies over the allocation of audience tickets for political programmes. One occasion resulted in 250 tickets for a political programme being sent to both the headquarters of the Labour and Liberal parties, but a much reduced number allocated to Conservative supporters. Furthermore, unlike the other parties, the Conservatives were not given the opportunity to centrally distribute their tickets, which had to be collected from Southampton Borough Council.³⁰² Later, CCO 'made very strong protests to the BBC about the unfairness of the party-balance in the feature "In the News"'.³⁰³ It was because of incidents like these that there was a strained relationship, throughout the party hierarchy, with the BBC.

The BBC was keen to expand its coverage of politics to include the 'Ministerial Broadcast' on television, which was already a feature of their radio programming. It 'thought that at some stage ministers would find it necessary to use television to make their broadcasts fully effective, and wondered if the time had now come for an experiment to be made in this field.'³⁰⁴ Both the Conservatives and Labour felt that it was not time for ministerial broadcasts to be televised. However, within months of that consensus the Conservatives changed their mind and decided to take the lead on ministerial broadcasts. At a CCO meeting with the General Director and the officers of the Publicity Department, an action plan was put into effect to encourage ministers to participate in broadcasts and to adopt a style and technique suited to television.³⁰⁵

Attention had been given to the trends in broadcasting-techniques used in American presidential elections and CCO was keen to source copies of the scripts in order to learn from them. John Hare MP was tasked with addressing the matter of ministerial broadcasts with the Conservative Chief Whip in Parliament and to discuss who would be the best initial ministers to use in, what were considered to be, experimental television broadcasts. CCO arranged for television-technique demonstrations to be conducted with ministers at the Scarborough Conference. Mrs

³⁰¹ Kandiah, 'Television'.

³⁰² CPA CCO 4/4/250 News article, *Southern Daily Echo*, 27 November 1950.

³⁰³ CPA CCO 4/4/260 Unnamed letter, 7 September 1951.

³⁰⁴ CPA CCO 120/1/1 Meeting minutes for Inter-Party Meeting on Political Broadcasts, 25 March 1952.

³⁰⁵ CPA CCO 120/1/1 Meeting minutes with General Director and Publicity Department, 4 July 1952.

Crum-Ewing was tasked with providing the General Director with a costing for an instruction film on political broadcasting.

By this point, the advent of television had begun to have a significant impact in the culture of the party-elite. The leaders of the party engaged in regular communication exchanges in order to debate the matters related to television. The new medium had also created a sense of trepidation, even though there was a clear awareness that the trends the party was witnessing in American politics were inevitably coming to Britain. Television was not a passive medium for those involved in the making of the broadcast. It required action and significant resources by both the organisation and the individual. Therefore, the party-elite were required to work together in ways in which they were less accustomed. The party engaged in greater interplay between the various CCO departments, Downing Street and the Parliamentary Party in order to develop a culture in which the party would be fit to lead in televised political broadcasting. Increased exchanges of letters and internal memoranda on the subject of political television further intensified the bureaucratic-culture of the party in the early 1950s. The advent of political television roused and stimulated a broad interaction from individuals that represented all hierarchical levels of the party.

1953 was the year of the first televised Royal Coronation. By that time TV Licences had reached in excess of 3 million.³⁰⁶ It was also a significant year in the Conservative Party's relationship with television, with Harold Macmillan's appearance in the first televised-broadcast outside of an election period. Subsequently, other Conservative MPs were developing an appetite for appearing on the medium.³⁰⁷ However, the confusion among MPs over the selection process for BBC broadcasts continued, which suggests that, for all of the resources and bureaucratic procedures CCO was using to communicate with MPs on the complex matters of political television, the party was unable to effectively establish a cohesive understanding on the main aspect of the new medium that involved its political colleagues.

A comparative audit of the appearance of MPs showed that 84 Conservatives versus 91 'Socialists' were featured on BBC television in 1952.³⁰⁸ CCO and Churchill's Conservatives believed that the Labour Party benefitted from the BBC's television monopoly. Subsequently, CCO felt that 'commercial television ... [would] give a "platform" to free enterprise, capital and management' and that it was 'highly

³⁰⁶ CPA CCO 4/6/316 Memorandum notes on 'TV Can Tell It', 1954.

³⁰⁷ CPA CCO 4/5/290 Letter from Irene Ward MP, 15 April 1953.

³⁰⁸ CPA CCO 4/5/290 Memo from Chief Publicity Officer to Hare, 'Party Representation on the BBC', 20 January 1953.

desirable ... from the point of view of the party organisation' for commercial television to come into effect at least one year before the 1955 General Election.³⁰⁹ The Tories understood that the legislation and capital of commercial television would be outside the remit of CCO. However, with an emphasis on propaganda, Churchill's Conservatives saw an opportunity to use the advancement of television for the enhancement of their electoral strategy, believing 'that commercial television would be advantageous to the Conservative Party.'³¹⁰ In this instance, CCO demonstrated that, although there had been some reservation in respect to its approach to the development of political television, because of the potential impact on its organisational workload, it was prepared to exert the necessary change within its organisation as soon as it had identified an opportunity in the development of the medium that would allow a significant electoral advantage over its main opponent.

Churchill's Government took its time to deliberate and announce its stance on commercial television. Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Committee on Sponsored Television, chaired by Sir Robert Grimston, with the support of the 1922 Committee, asked CCO to publish and distribute to the wider Conservative Party their pamphlet in support of 'sponsored' (commercial) television.³¹¹ However, this placed CCO in a challenging position. Although the CCO-elite were in support of Grimston's proposal, it believed itself to be constitutionally-bound to 'propagate' only Conservative government policy. However, the Chief Publicity Officer did not want CCO to appear that it was not in support also of the Parliamentary Party.

CCO was under pressure from the Parliamentary Party to combat the Labour Party's 'monopolist' propaganda. Therefore, CCO printed an amended pamphlet, which Woolton believed did not commit Churchill's Government to supporting commercial television. 27,000 of these were distributed to associations.³¹² However, this was to the disappointment of Prime Minister Churchill who wrote to Woolton asking for the pamphlets to be recalled.³¹³ This highlights how the party organisation was in a state of flux over the developments in television; and how the major arms of power within the party can be in conflict on matters about which they disagree. In this case, the dilemma for CCO was its squeezed position between the wider-party

³⁰⁹ CPA CCO 120/1/1 Memo from S. H. Pierssene to Churchill giving the views of CCO on commercial television, 11 April 1953.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ CPA CCO 500/27/1 Letter from Chief Publicity Officer to the Chairman on 'Commercial Television', 22 June 1953.

³¹² CPA CCO 500/27/1 'Copy of Letter from Lord Woolton to the Prime Minister', 13 August 1953.

³¹³ CPA CCO 500/27/1 'Copy of Letter from the Prime Minister' to Woolton, 11 August 1953.

membership, the Parliamentary Party and Churchill's Downing Street administration. The debate surrounding the developments in television accentuated the dynamics between the different arms of the party organisation and displayed that sometimes their agendas could be out of sync.³¹⁴ The advent of television was creating tension within the party's organisation, which was indirectly contributing to a strain on its internal relationships.

Debating the role of television was not only to preserve the party-elites. The possible uses of television for political gain also occupied the minds of the constituency agents. At a meeting of the National Society of Conservative and Unionist Agents in 1953, television was discussed with extreme interest. Subsequently, the Conservative Agent's Journal published a section on the 'possibilities of TV', which described television as a powerful medium for propaganda.³¹⁵ The party believed that a higher density of the population had access to television in traditional 'Socialist' areas, with an estimate of two 'Socialists' to one 'Conservative'.³¹⁶ The Tories considered this to be to their advantage, figuring that it gave them a greater audience than Labour for the conversion of voters. Subsequently, in the mid-1950s, CCO encouraged an interactive television culture, especially among the party membership in domestic settings.³¹⁷ In addition to the film 'TV Can Tell It', which aimed to educate party supporters in the ways of television, Churchill's Conservatives planned an interactive scheme, in order to engage the national party, called 'Television Meetings'.³¹⁸

The purpose of the meetings was for Conservative supporters to show Conservative propaganda and programming on television, between general election periods, to those in their communities who did not own a TV set. Participants for the scheme were targeted using lists compiled by party activists in the constituencies. Television owning Conservatives were identified by local party activists, who went out into the constituency in order to note which Conservative-households appeared to have external television-aerials. The process was similar to the notation used in canvassing, except the letters 'TV' were used instead of an initial to denote voting preference. Conservative supporters were sent a letter seeking their participation. They

³¹⁴ Hajkowski, 1922-53, p. 13.

³¹⁵ CPA CCO 4/5/304 The Conservative Agent's Journal, No. 389, June 1953.

³¹⁶ CPA CCO 4/6/316 Memorandum notes on 'TV Can Tell It', 1954.

³¹⁷ For further reading on debates around the 'domesticity' of television in the 1950s, see, Milly Buonanno, *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (Intellect Books, Bristol, 2008), p. 14-15.

³¹⁸ CPA CCO 4/5/302 Confidential draft on 'Scheme for Television Meetings', 1 July 1953.

were asked to invite ‘a few electors’ into their homes.³¹⁹ Participants joined the scheme by sending a reply-slip to their respective Conservative association. They were subsequently contacted with dates and times of Conservative-broadcasts and encouraged to invite ‘a number of those who normally take little interest in politics or who while not being supporters are not convinced opponents.’³²⁰ According to Milly Buonanno, in 1950s Britain, there was a wider cultural trend in which people who owned television sets opened their homes to those families and individuals without.³²¹ Therefore, the Conservatives were responding to this wider trend and used it to their advantage.

The Tories had hoped to use the TV meeting scheme to gain some electoral advantage over Labour. However, their plans were confronted with a number of setbacks. The scheme was leaked to the press,³²² around which time the press were speculating that television had ‘killed the public meeting’ and encouraged a culture of ‘Fireside Politics’.³²³ The following day, the Labour Party announced in the press its ‘open-house plan’.³²⁴ It encouraged owners of TV sets to invite their neighbours into their homes to watch a Labour Party broadcast. The format of the production was in an innovative film-style that was in contrast to traditional broadcasts that usually centred on a specific political speaker. The leakage of information and the subsequent press attention created a flurry of activity and correspondence throughout the Tory organisation from the grassroots upward. An official at CCO found ‘...the original leakage of confidential matter’ of the TV meetings to be ‘disturbing’.³²⁵ However, the agent of the Blackpool Association was ‘not too surprised at this leakage’³²⁶ and had believed it impossible to keep a scheme of that nature secret. Another setback to the scheme included the limited television coverage in some parts of the country.

³¹⁹ CPA CCO 4/5/302 Confidential draft on ‘Scheme for Television Meetings’, Appendix A, 1 July 1953 .

³²⁰ Ibid., Appendix D.

³²¹ Buonanno, *Television*, p. 15.

³²² CPA CCO 4/6/328 Article ‘Hustings on TV – Tories Plan Home Groups to Win Unconvinced’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 15 February 1954.

³²³ CPA CCO 4/6/328 Article by Philip Goodhart, ‘Fireside Politics’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 February 1954. For reading on the origins of the concept of fireside politics, see, Douglas B. Craig, *Fireside Politics: Radio and Political Culture in the United States, 1920-1940* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2000).

³²⁴ CPA CCO 4/6/328 Article ‘Socialists to Show TV Film’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 1954.

³²⁵ CPA CCO 4/6/328 CCO Memo from Mr Homan to Miss Spencer, 17 February 1954.

³²⁶ CPA CCO 4/6/328 Letter from Agent of Blackpool Conservatives to Watson, 15 February 1954.

Consequently, not all associations were able to engage in the TV meetings scheme.³²⁷ Nevertheless the scheme went ahead as planned.

It is clear that television was beginning to rouse interests and excitement across the party organisation. Furthermore, the medium was playing a role in changing the activities of both individuals and groups within the party from the grassroots to the highest levels of the Conservative hierarchy. CCO demonstrated the all-encompassing cultural shift towards television by involving its general administrative staff in rehearsals for a television broadcast, to which they were invited to participate as a mock-audience.³²⁸ Labour had raised the bar with their innovative film-style political broadcast and, subsequently, the Conservatives soon began experimenting in similar ways. Lindsay and Harrington suggest that Labour's television broadcasts were largely superior to those of the Conservatives until the late 1950s.³²⁹ However, as early as 1954 the Conservatives were investing significant resources in the attempt to outperform Labour. The production of 'telefilms' for broadcast were particularly resource intensive. 'Almost the whole office staff' were required to contribute to the production of a 'political telecast'.³³⁰ Therefore, by 1954, political television had become a serious competitive consideration for political parties in Britain and, therefore, had begun to impact on changing party organisation and culture.

Eden's Conservatives 1955-1957

The 1950s were often characterised by the remnants of wartime rigour, which impacted also on political television. The development of the Fourteen Day Rule in 1944, which restricted the broadcasting of any matter debated in Parliament in the previous fortnight,³³¹ meant that political broadcasting, in particular political television, was governed by significant rules, regulations and acts of Parliament. In this manner the advent of television was having an impact on the affairs of state, Parliament and

³²⁷ CPA CCO 4/6/328 Letter to the Chief Publicity Officer from the Agent of Dover Conservatives, 12 February 1954.

³²⁸ CPA CCO 4/6/326 Memo from Chief Publicity Officer to Heads of Department on 'TV Broadcast', 25 February 1955.

³²⁹ T. F. Lindsay and Michael Harrington, *The Conservative Party 1918-1970* (Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1974), p. 208.

³³⁰ CPA CCO 4/6/326 Memo from Chief Publicity Officer to Heads of Department on 'Telefilm of Party Telephone TV Programme', 16 July 1954.

³³¹ For further reading on early television regulation, especially the Fourteen Day Rule, see, for example, Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume V: Competition* (Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 114-116; and Seymour-Ure, *Broadcasting; Ralph Negrine, Television and the press since 1945* (Manchester University Press, 1998).

broadcasters. But the process of regulating television, and its role in the political arena, also played a day-to-day role in the organisational culture of political parties. This was especially the case for the ruling party in the 1950s. As Labour before it in the late 1940s, the Conservatives Party of the 1950s held the mandate to steer the development of television broadcasting and, subsequently, its role in British politics and wider society. The subject of television brought together the organisational and political elites of the three main parties with their equivalents from the broadcasting institutions. Meetings were often held at Parliament in the form of inter-party committees.³³² Letters, memos and discussions were exchanged between the CCO and Postmaster General outside of the inter-party meetings.³³³ The Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting played also a role, as did the occasional backbench MP and broadcaster.³³⁴

Eden's Conservatives held regular internal discussions through memos and meetings in order to prepare for the external meetings on broadcasting. The topics concerning Conservative interests on broadcasting matters included: the training of party-workers to monitor broadcasts; appreciation indices relating to Conservative political broadcasts; regional political broadcasting considerations; the televising of Conservative Party conferences; the use of BBC and ITA facilities for making political broadcasts; the use of Ministerial Broadcasts and the annual quotas for Party Election Broadcasts and Party Political Broadcasts; how best to use political broadcasts to the party's advantage; and the training of Conservative broadcasting talent.³³⁵ Like other pertinent matters of the time, the debates, discussions and actions in relation to television were detailed in typed minutes. The party used and integrated its resources at the Chief Whip's Office, under Edward Heath MP at 12 Downing Street, CRD and CCO.

Intercommunication between these groups was managed with deliberate care in order to assess matters relating to the role of television in the party's operations. Lengthy deliberations were used to facilitate agreement between the three groups of the

³³² The CPA holds many examples of the these meetings, but in this case, see, CPA CCO 120/1/3 Minutes from Inter-Party Meeting on Broadcasting, 29 March 1956.

³³³ CPA CCO 120/1/3 Note and memo from The Postmaster General to Pierssene on the 14 Day Rule, 13 March 1956.

³³⁴ See, for example, CPA CCO 120/1/3 Series of correspondences between Pierssene, Heath, Boothby and Heald, 16 March 1956; CPA CCO 120/1/3 Minutes of Meeting on Broadcasting with representatives from the Government, Opposition, the BBC and ITA, 6 March 1956.

³³⁵ CPA CCO 120/1/3 'Minutes of Meeting on Broadcasting Held in GD's Room', 16 January 1956; CPA CCO 120/1/3 Minutes of meeting on 'Sound and TV Broadcasting', 24 January 1956; CPA CCO 120/1/3, Minutes of confidential meeting on 'Political Broadcasting', 6 February 1956; CPA CCO 120/1/3 Letter from Heath with minutes of meeting on 'Political Broadcasting', 28 February 1956; CPA CCO 120/1/3 Minutes of meeting on 'Political Broadcasting', 29 February 1956.

Conservative-sophisticate. The resultant collective argument or policy ensured that there was unity within the party-ranks and that there would be a course of action for effectively delivering on their objectives. This process ultimately ensured that the party moved the topic of television forward in order that the developments in the medium would serve best the interests of the Conservative Party and its senior administration. The time and resource intensive culture of bureaucratic-deliberation and debate, which was sometimes considered to be a cumbersome and an inefficient process for those dealing with the party-machine,³³⁶ was not exclusive to the issue of television. However, the party's investment in these matters reveals that Eden's Conservatives took a keen, but cautious, approach to the new medium, which in turn had an impact on the inner-working dynamics of the party. The suspicious nature of Eden's Conservatives towards the use of broadcasting as a political tool can be demonstrated by the words of Selwyn Lloyd MP who, on a BBC Home Service radio election broadcast, said that it was 'a risky occupation these days for politicians to broadcast'.³³⁷ Lloyd's statement reveals that there were individuals in the party, in addition to Eden, who believed that there were risks for politicians to engage in the art of broadcasting. It was also a symbolic admission of the party's anxiety towards changes in new media trends.

The developing nature of political television was playing a role in catalysing a debate within the party on regulatory matters. Externally the Government opposed Labour's argument against relaxing the rules on televised Ministerial Broadcasts,³³⁸ which would have allowed junior ministers to broadcast on television programmes on an ad hoc basis, in line with the allowance for such broadcasts on radio. However, there was a growing discourse on the matter between party-elites at CCO.³³⁹ By keeping to a minimum the television appearances of up-and-coming Conservative ministerial talent, Eden's Cabinet ministers would receive maximum airtime and publicity, albeit shared with backbenchers. The party leadership, and CCO, had less control over television appearances by backbenchers, because the broadcasters held the right to choose which parliamentarians or party representatives they intended to feature in their own programmes. The Conservative argument against maintaining the rigid attitude towards television appearances of junior ministers grew out of the concern that good backbench television performers might have begun to dominate political programming, and thus

³³⁶ CPA CCO 4/6/314 Letter From the BBC's Harman Grisewold to Buchan-Hepburn MP, 14 July 1955.

³³⁷ CPA CCO 4/6/313 General Election 1955 Sound Broadcast No. 7, 18 May 1955, p. 1.

³³⁸ CPA CCO 4/7/348 Document detailing tension between the Government and Labour over Ministerial Broadcasts, 8 February 1956.

³³⁹ CPA CCO 4/7/362 Letter from Schofield to the Party Chairman, 2 March 1956.

develop uncontrollable ‘egos’ that would have had the potential to work against party unity.³⁴⁰ The party-elite were reluctant to submit to the view that there were greater benefits to junior ministers informing the public through the medium of television than backbenchers. This Conservative-on-Conservative internal debate reveals a narrowcast Conservative-centric approach to the discussion of the development of political television and suggests that the party’s motives in relation to television were, at least in this case, egoistic.

Propaganda and General Election 1955

The general election of 26 May 1955 elected Anthony Eden as Churchill’s successor. As Prime Minister, Eden in the House of Commons benefitted from a Conservative increase, from the previous 16 seat majority in 1951, to a 59 seat majority in 1955.³⁴¹ The run-up to the election was characterised by a diverse use of propaganda and publicity techniques. Eden’s distinguished and photogenic portrait was used substantially in the artwork for the National Poster Campaign,³⁴² which espoused the message that Britain had improved significantly under the Conservatives. Printed leaflets, such as the first and second ‘Election Address’ and the ‘Introductory Leaflet’,³⁴³ and adverts in the press, called ‘stereos’, remained a significant part of the Conservative campaign.³⁴⁴ J. W. Hinchcliffe at Conservative CCO was responsible for the organisational process for gramophone records, which were used by candidates in order to distribute recordings of their own voices.³⁴⁵ Continuing the trend evident in Churchill’s post-war premiership the party’s communication with voters remained as a diverse mix of propaganda and publicity techniques. Television was merely a junior political medium in 1955, even though that very year ‘viewing exceeded listening for the first time’.³⁴⁶

Between 1951 and 1955, the party underwent a learning exercise, through which it changed and adapted its organisation. In learning from the party’s experience of the 1951 General Election, the Chief Publicity Officer, Chapman-Walker, reminded his team of Area Publicity Officers that their the role was to facilitate the work of the media

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ Rallings and Thrasher, *Facts*, p. 59.

³⁴² See, for example, CPA CCO 4/6/135 File on General Election Publicity, 1954-6.

³⁴³ CPA CCO 4/6/135 Document ‘Some general guidance on the production of General Election material’, ND, p. 2.

³⁴⁴ CPA CCO 4/6/135 Document ‘Some general guidance on the production of General Election material’, ND, p. 1.

³⁴⁵ CPA CCO 4/6/319 File on Propaganda - Gramophone Records, 1954-6.

³⁴⁶ Hajkowski, 1922-53, p. 13.

and frontbench MPs in promoting the party within their respective regions.³⁴⁷ The Area Publicity Officers were specifically assigned to the local newspapers and regional BBC Headquarters. At that time, the role of these regional BBC Headquarters was to provide local radio broadcasting rather than television. The Area Publicity Officers were encouraged to ensure that panels of party supporters were in place in order to listen to and report on the content of BBC regional sound broadcasts, with a special focus on news bulletins.³⁴⁸ At the constituency level, interaction with the media was the responsibility of the association agents. This demonstrates how during the period between elections, CCO identified its propaganda and publicity weaknesses; and it exerted significant central-control in order to reorganise the management of its publicity through its professionalised-workforce.

Eden's Conservatives and Understanding Television

After the 1955 election, CCO, particularly the Chief Publicity Officer, engaged in dialogues in order to analyse television's role in the election, and British politics in general.³⁴⁹ The impact of television was of interest to the party, the focus of which continued to centre on understanding public opinion and their reaction to specific election broadcasts.³⁵⁰ The party collated data from different polls including the Gallup Poll, the Daily Express Poll, the Viewers View, and the BBC's 'Audience Research', and compared the results. The data analysed included the views of party-workers and supporters. The report notes that 'TV critics judged Mr Macmillan as a TV star.'³⁵¹ This was timely because, through the party's earlier analysis of trends in American political television, finding new Conservative broadcasting talent was becoming increasingly pertinent to its interests. The party's extensive gathering of public opinion data served to further confirm its own predictions.

The party believed that the responses to surveys of party supporters were likely to be skewed due to bias. Therefore, the party subsequently factored that into the analysis of the results. The party attributed its election win to three areas: (1) the government's previous record; (2) the unity of the party, and (3) Eden's personality. It

³⁴⁷ CPA CCO 4/6/135 Confidential Memo from Chapman-Walker to Area Publicity Officers, 'Duties of Area Publicity Officers During a General Election', point 1ab, 20 April 1955.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, point 1c.

³⁴⁹ CPA CCO 600/14/3 Letter from David Butler, Nuffield College Oxford, to Chief Publicity Officer, 5 August 1955; Letter from Chief Publicity Officer to David Butler, 04 August 1955.

³⁵⁰ CPA CCO 600/14/3 Document 'estimating the impact of seven election television programmes' ND, c. 1955.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, paragraph 3.

was noted that it was not possible to discern the impact of the election publicity in general, like leaflets and posters. However, as the party's three televised 'election programmes' focused on selling the three aforementioned areas, the party felt that it was likely that television had played some role in their win at the general election. This new found confidence in and recognition of television's impact, in the party's election chances, was a significant factor in its approach to television in subsequent elections. The CCO report noted also the value of BBC television to its aims. This belief was due to the understanding that 75% of the audience, approximately four million viewers, were individuals who were unlikely to attend a political meeting and yet gained some exposure to politics through television. Therefore, the party believed that television was a valuable tool for capturing the political interest of potential future voters.

In addition to the CCO-elites, the influence of television on the 1955 election was a matter of interest for party members. For example, further to the speculation in the press prior to the election, some party supporters at the grassroots believed that television was impacting on the decline of the traditional public meeting.³⁵² Furthermore, the party-elites encouraged an integrated participation for the ordinary party member in their use of some CCO television-facilities. This development included, for example, a symbolic open-invitation to 'anyone' wishing to view political 'teafilms', at designated show times, at CCO.³⁵³ By 1956, a trend of letter-writing in the form of Conservative supporters expressing an array of viewpoints in their critique of perceived broadcaster-bias and confusion over the rules and allocation of political broadcasts had further developed into criticism of the broadcasters and the Government's broadcasts, with particular criticism of the Labour opposition.³⁵⁴ For some individuals the confusion over how the relationship between British politics and television was constituted evoked emotional-responses to which CCO responded with letters that explained the process and rules of political broadcasting.³⁵⁵

³⁵² CPA CCO 4/6/247 Letter from John Brown to Guy Schofield, 19 November 1955.

³⁵³ CPA CCO 4/6/312 Memo from Chief Publicity Officer to the party across London and the Home Counties, 'Party Television Election Broadcasts', 8 June 1955.

³⁵⁴ See, for example, an array of documents in CPA CCO 4/7/346 Propaganda, Broadcasting File, 1956-8.

³⁵⁵ CPA CCO 4/7/346 Letter from CCO to A. A. Hammond, 9 November 1956.

Television and Impact on Eden's Conservatives

Television coverage of the Suez Crisis,³⁵⁶ especially when Eden was criticised by the opposition leader Hugh Gaitskell, led to one Conservative association holding an emergency meeting to discuss the matter.³⁵⁷ Following the emergency meeting, a letter was written by the association agent to CCO to express the collective view held by the Conservative individuals present at the meeting. The party supporters of Harrow West Conservative Association strongly felt that the Labour opposition should not have been able to attack the Government via a broadcast at a time of national crisis. The party-elite considered this to be a 'spontaneous expression of support'³⁵⁸ for Eden's approach, from which Eden himself was said to have gained 'encouragement'. The letter was followed by a number of written interactions between CCO and the association agent. This case indicates that, by 1956, television broadcasts had the potential to motivate grassroots supporters into some form of action. Moreover, as Conservatives, their beliefs and loyalties could be stimulated by what they saw on television, e.g. an attack on their leader evoked an emotional response which, in turn, led to greater interaction between the association and CCO.

This consequence of the advent of television is further demonstrated by the central-party's actions to keep 'every' candidate updated on the content of election broadcasts. In the run-up to the 1955 election, CCO decided to use resources in order to send all candidates transcripts of broadcasts by 'all' the main parties.³⁵⁹ This indicates how the party-elites, as the dominant decision-makers within the party organisation, had recognised the importance of television broadcasts in the wider-party interests, which again led to actions that guided the dynamics of television's role and development in interrelationships throughout the party. The general social interest in the new medium is a potential explanation for why there was seemingly little resistance by the wider-party in adapting to the changes brought on by the onset of television. This resulted in an observable and active approach to television, at all levels of the party, with the party-elites steering the course and directions which the wider-party followed. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that, in this way, television played a role in contributing to a shift in the organisational culture of the party at virtually all levels of its hierarchy.

³⁵⁶ For further reading on the Suez Crisis and the role of the media, see, for example, Tony Shaw, *Eden, Suez and the Mass Media: Propaganda and Persuasion during the Suez Crisis* (I B Tauris, London, 1996); and Hugh Chignell, 'BBC Radio News and Current Affairs and the Suez Crisis', *Media History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2013), pp. 93-106.

³⁵⁷ CPA CCO 4/7/346 Letter from Harrow West Conservative Association to Mr Poole, 6 November 1956.

³⁵⁸ CPA CCO 4/7/346 Letter from CCO to A. A. Hammond, 9 November 1956, paragraph 1.

³⁵⁹ CPA CCO 4/6/312 General Election Memorandum No. 5, 27 April 1955.

However, culturally, the watching of political television in 1956 remained on the periphery of the lives of some groups within the party. For example, the General Director expressed concerns that the CCO Agents rarely had chance to view political television due to their evenings being taken up with Conservative functions.³⁶⁰ The party responded to this phenomenon in its usual bureaucratic manner. The matter was addressed in another CCO report on television.³⁶¹ Although Eden's Conservatives' recognised the importance of television, and considered ways to address any party-imbances against the medium, the party-elite continued its traditionally cautious and considered approach. CCO understood that it functioned as a catalyst for change in the wider-party and was, therefore, cautious about committing the wider-party to changes which might have had unknown consequences.

The new problems posed by television were followed by an ordered response which included a process of identification, thought, consideration, reflection, solution and action. The process was mediated by face-to-face human interaction through meetings, often at a committee level, and a prolific exchange of letters, memoranda and other paperwork. Although this included interaction between members representing all levels of the hierarchy, actions on matters concerning television were often centred-on CCO. The decision making was formulated through a discursive process between CCO and parliamentary elites. The lower levels of the hierarchy were led from the party's centre, and the rank-and-file were expected to fall-in-line via centralised instruction. The result of these processes was that the advent of television encouraged steady and considered changes in the party's internal-dynamics which in turn led to some cultural evolutions within the party organisation through sustained incremental change.

Eden's Conservatives and the Importance of Television

In general, television and radio broadcasting in the mid-1950s were organised by CCO in line with other political media of the time. However, there was beginning to be some differences between the use of broadcasting media and other forms of propaganda. This change was manifested through the party's bureaucratic dissemination of its ideas to the wider-party organisation. Throughout the 1950s period, most general communications to the wider-party, on publicity and propaganda matters, were disseminated via letters and memoranda.³⁶² However, in the case of broadcasting media, the party made also a

³⁶⁰ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Report on CCO Agent's Conference, 9 June 1956.

³⁶¹ CPA CCO 4/7/361 CCO Study on TV, 28 August 1956.

³⁶² See, CPA CCO 4/7/352 File on general propaganda, 1956-8.

special effort in the output of the 'TV and Radio Newsgram' publication, which symbolises, not only the increasing importance of television, but also Eden's Conservatives' commitment to a mass-party culture.³⁶³ They used the medium of the 'Newsgram' in order to disseminate updates, changes and developments in broadcasting to the wider-party, but made it clear that the publication was not to be distributed to the general public. Party communications on the subject of broadcasting via the Newsgram was not necessarily a one-way output. It was accompanied often by a two-way dialogue through paper-based written forms of communication between party-elites and the other party-groups, including letters from the grassroots.

In an example case, a number of Conservative MPs received complaints from constituents and party supporters relating to perceived bias against the Tories in BBC programming.³⁶⁴ MPs replied directly to the constituents and then passed-on the complaints to CCO. Donald Kaberry subsequently wrote to Sir Ian Jacob of the BBC and included one of the letters of complaint. Jacob responded stating that the 'difficulty about the letter you enclose is that its allegations are based on suspicions.'³⁶⁵ The suspicion surrounding politics, broadcasting and the potential for bias was a reoccurring characteristic of the 1950s period. Bias was difficult for the party to prove. Therefore, it led to bureaucratically-intensive exchanges between party supporters in order to lodge complaints with the broadcasters.

This type of dialogue was not entirely unique to the subject of television. However, the advent of the medium as a tool in the political sphere certainly led to an increase in the frequency and volume of the internal-interactions between party-groups. Through the production and dissemination of the Newsgram, the party-elite were signalling to the wider-party organisation that broadcasting media were indeed important tools for political communication and therefore worthy of greater attention and understanding. Furthermore, the developing prominence of television for CCO is demonstrated by the Chief Publicity Officer's comments to the Conference of Area Publicity Officers, in which he explicitly noted 'the growing importance'³⁶⁶ of television propaganda for the Conservative Party.

The growing 'importance' of television for the party was becoming a widely-espoused view, by 1956. The General Director was keen to reiterate the 'vital

³⁶³ See, CPA CCO 4/7/364 File on Propaganda, TV and Radio Newsgram, No. 42-66, 1956-8. For further reading on the Newsgram, see, Kandiah, 'Television'.

³⁶⁴ CPA CCO 500/27/2 Letter from Kaberry to Sir Ian Jacob, 17 October 1956.

³⁶⁵ CPA CCO 500/27/2 Letter from Sir Ian Jacob to Kaberry, 24 October 1956, paragraph 2.

³⁶⁶ CPA CCO 4/6/304 Minutes of the Sixteenth Conference of Area Publicity Officers, 5-6 October 1954.

importance of developing radio and TV talent among³⁶⁷ party supporters. MPs were also being encouraged to engage in political television. Selected MPs were invited to a luncheon at CCO in order to discuss ‘aspects of television in relation to party propaganda’³⁶⁸ and CCO-elites held cocktail parties for the BBC and ITA officials.³⁶⁹ Some party-elites believed that the importance of television was ‘increasing daily’³⁷⁰ and that the party needed to consider new ways of improving its television-techniques. This may have been a response to criticisms from its members that questioned the party’s ability to communicate effectively when appearing on television,³⁷¹ with concern that the Conservatives were underperforming against their ‘socialist’ rivals, who were often considered, by both friend and foe, as superior in their grasp of television-techniques.³⁷²

Subsequently, the Tories decided to further enhance their broadcasting abilities. This manifested itself in the training of its supporters, which included PPCs and their team members, like local constituency-elites. These included association officers, prominent activists and YCs. The ‘Radio and TV Course’ was used to administer training in ‘TV Opportunities’ and ‘Voice Technique’ for the selected participants.³⁷³ The party drew-up lists of individuals whom they considered appropriate for participation in the training.³⁷⁴ The process of selection encouraged discussions between CCO-elites about why particular supporters were chosen, and to question whether those who were not chosen for participation would become jaded and demotivated. The party believed that the savvier their supporters were in the ways of television, the more effective the party would become in representing itself on the small screen. However, CCO proceeded with caution as it realised that, as a mass-based party, it needed to maintain a dedicated workforce at the grassroots in addition to a resource of media-trained supporters.

CCO perceived television to be a new medium that would appeal particularly to the younger generation. This is demonstrated by the party’s action to feature the YCs

³⁶⁷ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Memo from the General Director to Central Office Agents and Area Publicity Officers, 22 May 1956.

³⁶⁸ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Invitation from Donald Kaberry of CCO, 21 April 1956.

³⁶⁹ CPA CCO 500/27/2 Memo from Kaberry’s secretary to Schofield, 27 January 1956.

³⁷⁰ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Letter from Oliver Poole to G. Duckworth, 28 March 1956.

³⁷¹ See, CPA CCO 4/7/361 the letter from Eileen Chantsui to CCO on the matter of the party not effectively communicating its policies on a panorama programme, 16 February 1957.

³⁷² CPA CCO 4/7/361 Letter to the Party Chairman and Mr Schofield, 3 January 1956. See, also, Lindsay and Harrington, *Conservative*.

³⁷³ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Document detailing the West Midlands Area ‘Radio and TV Course’, 19 June 1956.

³⁷⁴ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Document on Television and Broadcasting Training, 25 January 1956.

and their political school in the making of political broadcasts like the television film 'Come Our Way'.³⁷⁵ The film was designed to entice new younger-members to the party. The move to incorporate more party supporters in the making of television programmes was characteristic of Eden's Conservatives, when compared to the party at other times between 1951-1964. The broadcasting training which had been traditionally offered by CCO to MPs, was opened up to the wider-party like the young Margaret Thatcher who attended the one-day Radio and Television course, in 1956,³⁷⁶ three years prior to her election as the member for Finchley. The objective of this training was for Conservative participants to 'make the best use of any opportunity that is offered to them by the BBC and ITA... [and] to suggest how Conservatives can create their own opportunities for getting on air, by the submission of good and original ideas for programmes.'³⁷⁷

In this instance, it conflated the opportunities open to parliamentary politicians and general party supporters. Furthermore, the very acceptance of party supporters engaging in television suggests that there was a sentiment of trust held by the upper-levels of the hierarchy for those operating at the grassroots. This is particularly symbolic when considering the cautious nature of Eden's Conservatives towards the medium. The deference held by the party-workers for their leadership was rewarded by a relatively unsuspecting and trusting sentiment towards their supporters, which was held in balance through a type of cultural and organisational symbiosis. CCO staff were given permission to contribute to BBC and ITA political television programmes - although there were rules given by the party that limited their contributions to being in a private capacity; and on matters other than party organisation, unless they had gained permission from the General Director.³⁷⁸

The party's interactions with television encouraged increased discourse among CCO-elites. A process of self-reflection and self-criticism developed at CCO on the matter of the widely held belief that 'Socialist' TV personalities were dominant.

I am sure that the present situation does not result from any bias in the BBC and ITA, but is due to the personal activity of and enterprise of Socialist individuals, and it is this which we must

³⁷⁵ CPA CCO 4/7/362 Memo from Crum-Ewing to Kaberry, 17 August 1956.

³⁷⁶ CPA CCO 4/7/345 Radio and Television One Day's Course, 22 February 1956; see, also, Cockett, 'Publicity', p. 566.

³⁷⁷ CPA CCO 120/1/3 Memo from The General Director to Central Office Agents and Area Publicity Officers, 22 June 1956.

³⁷⁸ CPA CCO 4/7/345 Confidential memo from the General Director to Heads of Departments, 2 May 1956.

encourage among our own people. How best this should be done I would not know so far as members and candidates are concerned, but I am taking steps in my department to provide what help we can.³⁷⁹

The party responded to this matter of concern by enhancing further the training of its supporters. Eden's Conservatives held one-day courses in the regions for a range of party individuals from senior YCs to PPCs.³⁸⁰ The five-hour courses, which were instructed by Brigadier Hinchcliffe and Mrs Crum-Ewing of CCO, consisted of an intensive programme that included TV opportunities; voice technique; demonstration of TV; practical exercise; initiating programmes; and illustration in programmes.³⁸¹ Variations of these courses were used also to train association agents and Members of Parliament.³⁸² By 1957, CCO had coordinated a considerable programme of training events which had become referred to as the 'Radio and Television Schools'.³⁸³

For the very first training course, Conservative MPs were identified and selected, through a discursive process at CCO in which a 'cross-section' of 'likely types'³⁸⁴ were identified. Donald Kaberry and other CCO-elites handpicked the members in order to satisfy the objectives of the central-party. However, Kaberry stated his anxiety on the matter. He was keen to ensure that the first group were told that they were the first group, but that other courses would follow. Clearly, Kaberry was sensitive about offending other Conservative and parliamentary colleagues. It suggests also that television training was becoming viewed as a desirable opportunity.

By the end of 1956, Kaberry believed that it was important for CCO to focus its training away from agents and other non-MPs and give priority to MPs. This demonstrates an evolving process in which the party went from an open and inclusive stance on training in television-techniques; to a more considered and restricted approach in which the selection for training became more elitist.

Frankly I think we must concentrate on MPs. It is quite clear that more and more are being approached direct in the House of Commons by programming companies and the BBC. The

³⁷⁹ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Memo from Schofield to The Chairman and General Director on 'Television Activities', 3 January 1956.

³⁸⁰ CPA CCO 4/7/361 'Radio and Television One Day's Course for West Midlands Area', 19 June 1956.

³⁸¹ CPA CCO 4/7/361 'Radio and Television: Programme for One Day's Course', 19 June 1956.

³⁸² CPA CCO 4/7/361 Memo from the General Director to all Central Office Agents and Area Publicity Officers on 'Radio and Television Training', 22 June 1956.

³⁸³ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Memo from Hinchcliffe to Kaberry and Schofield on 'Radio and Television Schools', 7 December 1957.

³⁸⁴ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Note from Kaberry to Mrs Crum-Ewing on 'Television and Broadcasting Training', 25 January 1956.

sooner we get through the list of all the MPs the better it will be for us. I think they should have top priority. I should also like to get down to a selected list of candidates as soon as possible, after the MPs have been. I think the agents should come a long way down the list as soon after both the above.³⁸⁵

The party's hierarchical structure, which had until this point been relatively flexible in its approach to the role of television in the party's organisation is shown here to have tightened to some extent. The party based its priorities on a logic and order rooted in the importance of achieving its central aims. In the wake of Suez, the opposition party-personalities had begun profiting from their relative freedom to experiment with the new medium – and Eden's Conservatives did not want to be left behind.³⁸⁶

However, naturally, the Conservatives were confined by their role as the governing party in addition to a tendency to exhibit caution in the early stages of social and technological change. Although the Conservatives had been experimenting with television, the impact of the new medium had been most observed in the party's organisation and internal culture – a place where experimentation was contained. The heightened media interests in the Conservatives and the advances by their political rivals in their on-screen prominence was beginning to exert pressure on the party-elites. This in turn forced change in the party – to do what was necessary in order to compete on the small screen with the rise of 'Socialist' personalities. Therefore, in this manner television began to be assimilated pragmatically into the party hierarchy.

A greater concern for the CCO in relation to party agents and television, was not their training in the use of the medium, but their availability to watch political programming. For example:

I think the Chairman was a bit shaken at the Central Office Agents' Conference to hear that Central Office Agents rarely saw TV. I am sure it is becoming increasingly important that both they and Area Publicity Officers should regularly watch political and controversial programmes if they are to appreciate intelligently the growing importance of this medium.³⁸⁷

The Conservatives' reaction to this revelation was to produce, within the following three months, a document in draft which aimed to (a) 'enable CCO Agents to make a

³⁸⁵ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Memo from Mr Kaberry to Mrs Crum-Ewing on 'Radio and Television Schools', 11 December 1956.

³⁸⁶ Shaw, *Eden*.

³⁸⁷ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Memo from the General Director to the Chief Organisation Officer, 8 June 1956.

close study of the political aspects of TV'; and (b) 'promote the study of the art of television broadcasting with a view to establishing the party's ascendancy in the field'.³⁸⁸ The party proposed to achieve this in the purchase of TV sets for loan to CCO Agents and specific members of the CCO-elite. The use of the term 'ascendancy in the field' indicates to the early beginnings of the desire at CCO to master the medium for political gain. However, the reality of that prospect would not be realised for a number of years to come.

The advent of television was also impacting on the everyday role of the party-workers at the grassroots in the ways in which they conducted their activism in support of their local association and the wider Conservative cause. The first televised Party Political Broadcast to be shown on both the BBC and ITV (Independent Television) simultaneously was the Conservative election broadcast, 9 May 1956. Using the TV and Radio Newsgram³⁸⁹ to communicate with the constituency associations the CCO TV department requested canvassers to collect the names and addresses of TV set owners of all political persuasions in order that they could be sent a 'Viewers View' survey prior to the broadcast. Therefore, television was impacting on the ordinary supporter in terms of activist processes, which was largely at the command of the central-party.

The advent of commercial television had a significant impact at CCO. Although the Television Act 1954 was enacted under Churchill's Conservatives, the relationship between the Conservatives and ITV was initiated under Eden. ITV launched in the September, shortly after the General Election, May 1955. Churchill's Conservatives' aim for ITV to be a more favourable Conservative platform for political programming looked likely to be realised. Eden's Conservatives considered ITV to be seeking to do business with the party.³⁹⁰ However, by November 1956, CCO had begun to be concerned that ITV's representation of the Conservative Party was becoming unfavourable.³⁹¹ For example, the Granada Network Company, an ITV franchise, was accused by the Conservatives of making unjustified attacks on Eden's government during one of their programmes, named 'What the Papers Say', which opened with: 'This week has been dominated by trouble in the Tory Party'.³⁹² The programme was also transmitted in London by another ITV franchise, Associated Rediffusion. Therefore, the Granada programme was distributed to wider ITV audiences than some

³⁸⁸ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Confidential draft on 'The Study of Television', 28 August 1956.

³⁸⁹ CPA CCO 4/7/362 TV and Radio Newsgram No. 45, 20 April 1956.

³⁹⁰ CPA CCO 4/6/304 Minutes of Seventeenth Conference of Area Publicity Officers, 5 October 1955.

³⁹¹ CPA CCO 4/7/362 Report by Mr Brabin on Panorama, 12 November 1956.

³⁹² CPA CCO 4/7/362 Transcript 'What the Papers Say', 26 November 1956.

of its other productions, which enhanced the Conservatives' concerns. Eden's Conservatives were not simply interested in experimenting with television as a new form of mass communication. They were also acutely aware of its potential for influencing mass public opinion.

When comparing the party's concerns for BBC bias, at the time of Churchill's Conservatives, to Eden's Conservatives' concerns about ITV programming, the latter reacted rather more promptly. The party made a complaint to the Postmaster General, who subsequently replied to the Conservatives to inform them that the ITA itself 'had been seriously concerned about this programme and that, on their own initiative, they had already sent a letter to the programme company concerned drawing their attention to Section 3(f) of the Television Act - the need to preserve a due impartiality'.³⁹³ The speed with which the party reacted in this instance shows an increase in their sensitivity to the role of television in their interests. It demonstrates that, as television was developing, the party's awareness of the medium also expanded. In turn, this led to the party machine's reaction to be quicker to act on matters relating to the major broadcasters. The party was beginning to mature in its relationship with the medium. As the collective at the top of Eden's Conservatives became more confident to challenge the broadcasters, the less the party feared the potential consequences of those in control of television programming.

Conclusions

Churchill's Conservatives

When comparing the Conservative Party's attitude, behaviour and culture in relation to television at the beginning of the 1950s to those at the end of Churchill's premiership there are significant contrasts. Within a five year period, Churchill's Conservatives transitioned from being a political party which seldom recognised the importance of TV to incorporating opportunities, for active engagement in television as a mode of supporting the Conservative cause, at virtually all levels of the party's diverse hierarchy.³⁹⁴ Along the continuum between elections there were undulations of internal opinion on the matter of which media were deemed best for political use (and which were not), e.g. there were fluctuations in opinions and the use of film and television at different stages of Churchill's post-war premiership.

³⁹³ CPA CCO 4/7/362 Letter from The Postmaster General to Donald Kaberry, 23 November 1956.

³⁹⁴ Kandiah, 'Television'.

These undulations were often affected by a collective mood which in turn was influenced by a diverse range of internal factors. Through the deferential hierarchy, which was in keeping with the party's traditions, it was largely the elite decision-makers at CCO who held the power to influence the actions and directions of the wider-party, in which coercive methods were employed, rather than a dictatorial approach. However, the collective mood, which included the major groups within the party organisation and wider external-factors like social trends, required general consensus in order for the party's internal stasis to remain. In assessing the changing moods of the party and the public through surveys and analysis of correspondence, the party took an introspective approach to itself awareness in order to understand what changing external social factors meant for its internal organisational and technological operations.

The perceived poor performances by Conservative-broadcasters on television eroded the confidence the party-elites had in its performers, which in turn led to the party taking a cautious and tentative approach to the use of television at the early part of the decade. Repeated suspicion of BBC bias against the Conservatives, and confusion among party members and politicians over the rules and allocation of opportunities for speakers, impacted further on the propaganda choices of the party-elite. This ultimately led to television playing a relatively minor role in the early part of Churchill's Conservatives, whose propaganda was characterised by a mix of publicity techniques. The party's distrust of the effectiveness of the new medium meant that it continued to focus on growing its membership, as a workforce to mobilise its propaganda with the aim of reaching the electorate. Its reliance on its membership meant that the party maintained its traditional approach to embracing a mass-party culture.

Generally, Churchill's Conservatives' external communications and publicity developed through steady and incremental change. However, 1954 was a prominent year in terms of the observable sudden and dramatic change within the party's organisation and culture. The significance being that the following year was a known election year and the party had looked closely at the trends in political television in the United States. The party furnished its election preparations with the symbolic establishment of a separate Radio and Television Section at CCO; and in turn there were significant cultural, behavioural and attitudinal changes towards the incorporation of television in the party's affairs at virtually all levels of its organisation. The general interest in developments in political television meant that CCO had to process new levels of correspondence. It became a hub for communication and interaction within the party on matters of television, thus acting as a type of Conservative information-

exchange. Television had begun occupying the minds of individuals at virtually all levels. This had begun to impact on the party in terms of driving practical change in the behaviour of activists at the grassroots and the daily work of CCO staff by the time Eden succeeded to the premiership.

Eden's Conservatives

There were a number of continuing characteristics mutually evident in both the Churchill and Eden periods in relation to the role of television. An unbroken seven years of Conservative governance, with an increased parliamentary majority for Eden, meant that the party continued to hold a strong mandate on which to steer the course of television in Britain. Broadcasting regulations continued to impact on the bureaucratic organisation and daily processes for the top-tier party-elites. Time and other CCO resources were taken-up with committee meetings in order to frequently deliberate over TV rules and broadcasting ratios. Furthermore, a lack of understanding remained throughout much of the party hierarchy over how political TV culture was constituted and what that meant for Conservative individuals and collective groups, from the ordinary supporter to MPs.

Television played a minor role in the General Election of 1955. It was significantly more dramatic in its impact as a driver of change in party organisation than it was in terms of the party's communications with the electorate. Eden's Conservatives had an acute awareness of the influence that TV could have on the public. The internal use of the TV and Radio Newsgram shows that the party was preparing for, what many considered to be, an inevitable cultural-shift towards the use of television for political gain. This was shown by the steps that the party had begun to take in training its participants at all levels of the hierarchy. However, although Eden's Conservatives better understood the political relevance of television than their predecessors and embraced a new-found confidence in it, like in Churchill's time, there remained a cautious and tentative approach to using innovative television techniques in its external communications. In the early to mid-1950s, it was not a case of anticipating television trends and then acting to innovate and lead the propaganda battle, but rather the party maintained what appears to have been a process of anticipating; and then observing to see whether their theories were proven through the party's research. Then, if they found themselves to have anticipated correctly, the party would think further about whether or not to take any action in relation to the innovation of its external uses of television.

The party's motivation to understand the medium through extensive opinion surveys and analysis was another symbolic milestone. This was accompanied by increased debate about the party's use of television as a political medium. Internal interactions using paper-based communications between different Conservative groups increased also during Eden's premiership, especially over matters of broadcasting controversy, like Gaitskell's Suez broadcast. The emotional responses to the Suez broadcasts demonstrate the potential that television had to catalyse chain-reactions within the party's internal-dynamics. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that the advent and development of television was impacting on the party's culture throughout its hierarchy in that it catalysed greater interactions between individuals. The collective realisation that broadcasting was an important medium in the party's objectives meant that it was catalysing change in the ways in which supporters assisted the party in their activism, like the use of listening panels to monitor broadcasts at the regional level.

It is clear that although the party between 1951 and 1957 was in the process of transitional change towards a television-centric CCO it maintained a mass-based culture. As such, its internal processes and culture, although adapting to technological changes in television, reflected that which one would expect of a mass-based party. In addition to the traditional deference and mutual respect that was evident in the party at the time of Churchill, Eden's Conservatives at CCO demonstrated an added trust for the wider-party. In opening-up opportunities for 'anyone' to become involved with certain aspects of television, the party's culture was becoming more fluid in its approach to its interaction with the new medium. Therefore, wider television-culture was beginning to synthesise with aspects of the party's organisational culture. This was symbolic when one considers the otherwise cautious approach taken by the party towards television. Furthermore, it would suggest that Eden's party-elites held a genuine respect and trust for the wider-party, which was evident in a type of cultural-symbiosis in the wider-party organisation.

FOUR

Television in Macmillan's and Douglas-Home's Conservatives 1957-1964

The circumstances under which Harold Macmillan succeeded Anthony Eden's premiership were a torrid affair in the wake of the Suez Crisis.³⁹⁵ Eden's resignation on health grounds, 9 January 1957, led to Macmillan being appointed by cabinet ministers of the incumbent Conservative Government. During his time as the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, Macmillan had utilised his American connections and political prowess in order to rise in the eyes of his contemporaries as the right man to take forward the Conservative Party. In the 1959 General Election, 8 October, 20 months after Macmillan formed a government, the British electorate got their opportunity to endorse the Conservatives' choice of leader, who had been dubbed 'Supermac'. Macmillan's Conservatives defeated Gaitskell's Labour Party with an increase from a 59 to 99 seat majority in the House of Commons.³⁹⁶ The new prime minister, aged 63, became known for his approach to a mixed economy,³⁹⁷ and for his use of the political media of his time.³⁹⁸

In the last chapter, Churchill's and Eden's Conservatives' transitional approach to the new medium of television was presented. Therefore, this chapter continues the chronology, beginning with a section on Macmillan's Conservatives, 1957-1963. This is followed by a brief, but pertinent, section on Douglas-Home's Conservatives, 1963-1964. The chapter argues that the party's organisational culture continued to adapt in line with advances in wider television-culture and that the party underwent rapid evolution between the 1959 and 1964 elections in taking a more professionalised television-centric approach and attitude towards television and its mass-membership.

³⁹⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the role that the Suez Crisis played in the leadership of the Conservative Party see, especially, the chapter on 'The Economic Consequences of Colonel Nasser, 1956-1957', in D. R. Thorpe, *Supermac: The life of Harold Macmillan* (Chatto & Windus, London, 2010).

³⁹⁶ Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *British Electoral Facts* (Biteback Publishing, London, 2006), p. 59.

³⁹⁷ Andrew Boxer, *The Conservative Governments 1951-1964* (Longman, London, 1996), p. 6.

³⁹⁸ Richard Cockett, 'The Party, Publicity, and the Media', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.) *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p. 565.

Macmillan's Conservatives 1957-1963

Macmillan's historic television appearance in 1953, in the first political broadcast outside of an election, was described by D. R. Thorpe as 'a tightly controlled and rehearsed operation'.³⁹⁹ This style of broadcasting was emblematic of the on-screen political communication of the time. The Conservative Party distributed praise for Macmillan's performance through the dissemination of a 'TV and Radio Newsgram' to all levels of party hierarchy. It included a quote from a headline in the *Sunday Express*, which read: 'The Tories Find a New Star'.⁴⁰⁰ Macmillan's early embrace of the new medium of television was emblematic of the recognition in the party that Britain needed to modernise.⁴⁰¹ For example, research and development 'was high on the Conservative political agenda, especially from the late 1950s, and was a central part of the "modernising Britain" rhetoric'.⁴⁰² This modernising agenda extended also to changes in party organisation. Charmley suggests 'that under Macmillan the Conservative Party had successfully adapted itself to the new age of affluence.'⁴⁰³

Throughout his career Macmillan embraced the use of political television as a publicity tool from its earliest developments. However, like his predecessors, Macmillan was suspicious of, and at times concerned about, the potential negative impact that television, and particularly the BBC, could have on British affairs. In relation to the Suez Crisis, Thorpe suggests that a

...worry for Macmillan was the information the BBC might broadcast, no wartime censorship being in place. On 3 August [1956] ... Macmillan saw Sir Ian Jacob, Director-General of the BBC, to argue for restraint. Jacob was sympathetic to his concerns; but Macmillan was convinced that the BBC and the press could only be managed through a reimposition of wartime controls.⁴⁰⁴

Macmillan was practiced in using his influence in attempts to manage broadcasters, in advance of him becoming the Premier. However, whereas Churchill's and Eden's Conservatives took a tentative approach to the medium, Macmillan's suspicion of

³⁹⁹ Thorpe, *Supermac*, p. 284.

⁴⁰⁰ CPA CCO 4/5/305 TV and Radio Newsgram, 15 May 1953.

⁴⁰¹ Nick Tiratsoo and Jim Tomlinson, *The Conservatives and Industrial Efficiency, 1951-1964: Thirteen wasted years?* (Routledge, London, 1998), p. 163.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁴⁰³ John Charmley, *History of Conservative Politics 1900-1996* (Macmillan, London, 1996), p. 164.

⁴⁰⁴ Thorpe, *Supermac*, p. 340.

television led him and his party's organisation to make attempts to, firstly, control and, secondly, master it. However, Colin Seymour-Ure tempers this in arguing that, although Eden and Macmillan were 'sensitive' to the potentials of political television, Labour's 'Harold Wilson was the first TV prime minister'.⁴⁰⁵

Party Organisation and Macmillan's Conservatives

In the months following Eden's resignation, there were a number of changes in the operations and key personnel at CCO.⁴⁰⁶ Guy Schofield resigned as Chief Publicity Officer in order to return to his former career in journalism, thus making way for his deputy, Ronald Simms, to succeed him.⁴⁰⁷ In August 1957, Stephen Pierssene resigned due to ill health⁴⁰⁸ from his position as general director and was replaced by W. Urton. Less than a month later, Viscount Hailsham became the Chairman of Party Organisation after Oliver Poole submitted his resignation to Macmillan.⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, expenditure cuts led to the general staff being asked to help save the office resources.⁴¹⁰ Financial concerns had been expressed already at the 'General Meeting of the South Eastern Branch of the National Society of Agents on 29 May 1956'.⁴¹¹ The party was experiencing difficulties in fundraising both at the constituency and national levels.

One of Poole's final acts as party chairman was to appoint a 'committee under Lord Colyton's chairmanship'⁴¹² in order to examine the structures and functions of party organisation at the branch and constituency levels; and to understand the roles of individuals at those the levels. At the constituency level, there was a mood for change towards a simpler and more streamlined organisation for the associations. The West Midlands Union of Conservative Associations at the Conservative Central Council,

...noting the difficulties in finding suitable men and women to undertake the duties as officers and committee workers in the constituency and branch organisations, and recognising that people today are often not able to give unlimited time to politics, [called] upon the Executive

⁴⁰⁵ Colin Seymour-Ure, *The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1996), p. 191.

⁴⁰⁶ John Ramsden, *Winds of Change: Macmillan to Heath, 1957-1975: A History of the Conservative Party* (Longman, New York, 1996).

⁴⁰⁷ CPA CCO 4/7/298 Memo from the General Director to Heads of Departments and CCO Staff, 11 April 1957.

⁴⁰⁸ CPA CCO 4/7/298 Resignation letter from Pierssene to Poole, 26 August 1957.

⁴⁰⁹ CPA CCO 4/7/298 Memo from Poole to Heads of Departments and Central Office Agents, 18 September 1957.

⁴¹⁰ CPA CCO 4/7/298 Memo from the General Director to All Departments, 28 February 1957.

⁴¹¹ CPA CCO 500/1/23 National Society of Conservative and Unionist Agents – South Eastern Area Branch, Report on Party Re-Organisation, 1957, p. 2-3.

⁴¹² CPA CCO 500/1/25 CCO memo from S. T. Powell regarding the 'Committee on the Party Organisation', 15 August 1957.

Committee of the National Union to consult with the Chairman of Party Organisation with a view to setting up a committee to examine the structure of the party organisation so as to bring it into line with present day requirements.⁴¹³

This demonstrates a clear desire and willingness at the grassroots levels of the party for an organisational change in the Conservative Party that would ease the responsibility of individuals at local levels and modernise the party's national operations.⁴¹⁴

A subsequent report assessed the roles of committees, at all levels of the party, including advisory committees and those in the provincial areas, cities, boroughs and the National Union, with the exception of organisation matters at Parliament, Downing Street and CCO. The committee used the Bexley Conservatives as an example to model the structure and functions of a Conservative association. The role of activists at the grassroots was described as

...being responsible for basic election activities such as the distribution of literature, canvassing and the like, the Street System normally undertakes the distribution of the monthly "Conservative News" and other leaflets (confined if possible to one delivery per month), the collection of subscriptions and collection and distribution of books to all members in Divisional Draws.⁴¹⁵

The party's agents held a collective awareness that post-war campaigning and fundraising had been intensified and that this change in the culture of activism was placing a great strain on the voluntary party, many of whom had been overloaded and consequently become disengaged from party activism 'entirely'.⁴¹⁶ Therefore, natural changes in the mass-based culture at the grassroots had begun around the time that the uses of political television had begun increasing.

In addition to street activism, the strain of expectation and responsibility on the voluntary committee member and the mass-based party culture was becoming evident in testimonies sourced for the Colyton Committee. For example,

Mr Tranter began by saying that in Birmingham they have been concerned by the number of people who were involved in more than one committee. It seemed that there were two types

⁴¹³ CPA CCO 500/1/25 Hugh Fraser 'Speech to Conservative Central Council', 2 March 1957.

⁴¹⁴ Ramsden, *Winds*.

⁴¹⁵ CPA CCO 500/1/25 Bexley Conservative Association – The 'Street System', ND, box 6.

⁴¹⁶ CPA CCO 500/1/23 National Society of Conservative and Unionist Agents – South Eastern Area Branch, Report on Party Re-Organisation, 1957, p. 3-4.

of person: the professional committee attenders to whom it has no burden at all but who were not a great help, and the people who were prepared to be on a committee but found two or three committees a burden. This was too much for the right type of person to cope with under modern conditions, particularly in big cities... In Birmingham they had decided that it would be better if a large number of people worked for a short time and concentrated on the activity in which they are interested, whether it the political, financial or social aspect.⁴¹⁷

However, the committee culture of the 1950s was not unique to the Conservative Party. The press had begun to recognise that there had been a change in the culture of wider civic society. One article entitled 'We're All Committee Men Now'⁴¹⁸ depicts how Napoleon's earlier observation of Britain as a nation of shopkeepers would have been better expressed in the 1950s as a nation of 'committee men'. The article claimed that this proliferation of committees was spawning from the political culture at the House of Commons. This committee culture was advancing simultaneously with developments in British broadcasting culture and TV regulation. Therefore, television became a widely debated medium in the very committee meetings that were playing an integral role in the changing life of the party. In turn, this array of factors had begun to integrate and form a new type of culture at the heart of the party's bureaucratic organisation.⁴¹⁹

The party's awareness of and sensitivity to the influence of bureaucratic trends in its organisational culture is shown in the Colyton Committee Report, which was disseminated to constituency chairmen. It sought to strike a balance between the role of committee work and political activism in the lives of party supporters. The report was accompanied with a letter from Oliver Poole,⁴²⁰ in which he urged Conservative associations to focus on 'doorstep' activities and interaction with the electorate rather than wasting the time of party-workers in unnecessary committee meetings. For example, in underlined text, the report stated that: 'We cannot emphasise too strongly our opinion that...chairmen should cancel or postpone any meeting for which there is no reasonably important business.'⁴²¹ The party was demonstrating its consciousness for the need to streamline its resources across its organisation from the budgetary-cuts at

⁴¹⁷ CPA CCO 500/1/24 'Summary Verbal Evidence No. 4', Committee on the Party Organisation, 4 October 1957, p. 5, paragraph 1.

⁴¹⁸ CPA CCO 500/1/24 W. F. Deedes MP, 'We're All Committee Men Now', *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1957, p. 8.

⁴¹⁹ This fits well with the Weberian theoretical explanation in political sociology of 'the bureaucratic trend', see, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Routledge, Abingdon, 1991), p. 51.

⁴²⁰ CPA CCO 4/7/94 Letter from Oliver Poole to constituency chairmen, 7 March 1958.

⁴²¹ CPA CCO 4/7/94 Report of the Committee on the Party Organisation, March 1958, section 1., point c.

CCO to the efficient use of manpower at the grassroots.⁴²² This suggests that the party's consciousness, led by CCO-elites, was realising that the party needed to modernise aspects of its organisational approach in the face of a declining mass-party culture.⁴²³ Although there was no mention of party publicity and TV in the report, television was presenting itself as a medium which, as a tool for reaching-out to the mass electorate, could emancipate the party from the old resource-intensive ways of the past.⁴²⁴

Nevertheless, the party was in the transition of change. Therefore, it continued to act like a mass-based party in a number of ways. For example, CCO led initiatives to expand the party's dominance at a local level through a national membership campaign.⁴²⁵ It was executed in tandem with the party's 'Roll-Call for Victory', which Macmillan urged party supporters to sign in order to 'affirm their belief in Freedom and Opportunity and their opposition to the creation of a Socialist State in Britain.'⁴²⁶ Furthermore, following the events surrounding Suez, the membership drive acted as a mechanism for boosting the party's self-confidence, which had been less surefooted in the wake of the crisis:

It was claimed at Conservative Central Office yesterday that the membership recruiting campaign launched on 16 September 1958 has been "remarkably successful"... The object was not only to recruit new members but to give existing members an opportunity to "confirm their faith" in the party.⁴²⁷

This highlights how external events that influenced the public opinion of the party contributed to an impact on the internal nature of the party's organisation. Suez not only knocked the party's confidence, but led to the party responding with the use of pragmatic tactics in order to strengthen and boost its belief in itself.⁴²⁸ The party's collective self-belief was symbolic for the party-elites, because, although the party was

⁴²² See, CPA CCO 4/8/124, the document, dated 12 October 1959, which outlines the party's push for greater efficiency. It demonstrates the party's self pride when it is well organised at the local, regional and central levels.

⁴²³ Ramsden, *Winds*.

⁴²⁴ Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 170-171.

⁴²⁵ CPA CCO 500/11/7 File on the 1958 Membership Campaign.

⁴²⁶ CPA CCO 500/11/7 Message from The Rt. Hon. Harold Macmillan MP, Leader of the Party to the National Union of Conservative & Unionist Associations, ND.

⁴²⁷ CPA CCO 500/11/7 'Conservative Party's 3 Million Recruiting Success', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 January 1959.

⁴²⁸ John Ramsden, *The Age of Churchill & Eden, 1940-1957* (Longman, Harlow, 1995).

transitioning towards a wider use of political television to meet its electoral aims, it was yet to understand how to fully manage the medium; or to experience the extent to which television could be used as a tool for mass political communication.⁴²⁹ Conversely, reaching the voter through the mobilisation of traditional mass-activism, to which it had become accustomed, was, in the run-up to the 1959 General Election, a known and reliable resource that the party had become proficient in controlling in order to achieve electoral success. Colin Seymour-Ure argues that 1959 was a ‘watershed’ year for British political television because of advances in the approaches of the broadcasters.⁴³⁰ This suggests that the Conservative Party’s organisational approach to political television was lagging behind wider developments in the medium, even though it ‘had always been positive about the political influence of television on the electorate’.⁴³¹

Television and Transition under Macmillan’s Conservatives

In the transition from Eden to Macmillan, CCO used a television broadcast to attract young people to membership of the party. The political broadcast, called ‘Come Our Way’, was developed by Eden’s Conservatives and, after significant delay, finally aired, 7 February 1957, 7:05-7:30pm, on BBC television – a month after Macmillan became Prime Minister. The party-elites, especially those at CCO and 12 Downing Street, were becoming increasingly interested in viewing figures and appreciation indices. For example, the BBC viewing figures for ‘Come Our Way’, 7 February, reached almost 4 million, and the broadcast received a strong audience appreciation rating.⁴³² The power of television was also becoming apparent to CCO by the hundreds of written requests from young people wishing to join the YCs.⁴³³ In order to manage the interaction between the young viewers and the party, CCO organised a structured process that involved incoming letters being passed to the Organisation Department for reply by the Chief Organisation Officer to the sender.⁴³⁴ The enquiries were also forwarded to the respective constituency agent with a covering letter that outlined the course of action to be taken. CCO kept a record of the names and constituency of the individuals in the

⁴²⁹ Seymour-Ure, *Broadcasting*.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 181-188.

⁴³¹ Mark Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain, 1957-64* (Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 137.

⁴³² CPA CCO 4/7/363 Confidential letter from Edward Heath of 12 Downing Street to Donald Kaberry of CCO, 3 April 1957.

⁴³³ CPA CCO 4/7/355 Numerous examples of correspondence following the YC broadcast, February 1957.

⁴³⁴ CPA CCO 4/7/355 A reply from the Chief Organisation Officer to Mr Caines of Bristol on the matter of becoming a YC, 14 February 1957.

Organisation Department.⁴³⁵ This case shows how the impact of television broadcasts had begun filtering-down from CCO to the day-to-day role of the constituency agent.

Furthermore it demonstrates how a number of factors influencing party organisation were beginning to conflate. Firstly, television was being used by the party in ways that actually enhanced the mass-based party culture. The Conservatives may have begun to understand the uses for television in relation to reaching the voter, but, before that realisation had any significant impact in reality, television was being used as a tool to develop the party's traditional organisation of a significant mass-membership managed by a type of bureaucratic process of control from central and constituency offices. However, the advent of television and its use in this way had begun to mean that the structure of the party required internal cooperation between the different bureaus at CCO. 'Come Our Way' grew from collaboration between the Publicity Department's Radio and TV Section and the Organisation Department, which ultimately resulted in some integration of their bureaucratic functions.

The audience figures of another political broadcast 'House to Let', 14 March 1957, which featured the Conservative MP Henry Brooke, a founder of the CRD, presented a significant development for Macmillan's Conservatives. The party had begun to compare the efficacy of the two broadcasters, the BBC and ITV,⁴³⁶ to their needs and aims, which, in this particular case, showed that just over half a million viewers watched the broadcast on the BBC compared to over 4 million on ITV.⁴³⁷ The party-elite was beginning to understand why this might be the case and how it could work to their advantage. In a letter to Edward Heath, the ITA explained that

...ITA audiences per home are larger than the BBC audiences per home. Broadly, this has been the case from the beginning, and applies more or less to all types of programme, the average ITA audience being 2.9 people per set and the BBC figure being 2.6 people per set.⁴³⁸

The party was developing a significant appreciation for the understanding of television. In turn, this influence is evident in its perception of the impact of television. A 'Report on Party Political Television Broadcasts',⁴³⁹ claimed that the role of the press was

⁴³⁵ CPA CCO 4/7/355 Memo "'Coming Our Way" Television Broadcast Procedure for dealing with letters', ND.

⁴³⁶ See, Jarvis, *Morality*.

⁴³⁷ CPA CCO 4/7/363 'Comparative Audiences in the three million homes able to view both BBC and ITA', 14 March 1957.

⁴³⁸ CPA CCO 4/7/363 Letter from ITA to Edward Heath, 10 April 1957.

⁴³⁹ CPA CCO 4/7/363 'Report on Political Television Broadcasts: January to March 1957'.

diminishing because political television was ‘no longer news’⁴⁴⁰ and therefore the press was no longer a resource for the party to use in their pursuit to elucidate itself on the impact of television in society. Moreover, the report claims that there had ‘been a marked improvement in the interest taken in programmes by party- workers, professionals and volunteers.’⁴⁴¹ Therefore, the party in general was beginning to develop a wider interest in the role of TV.

The party’s greater understanding of television meant that CCO could improve its assessment of television broadcasts. It considered its own weaknesses and devised practical ‘remedies’.⁴⁴² The main weakness was deemed to be the pressures on any given government minister to perform in the moment for a broadcast, thus resulting in an unconvincing performance because of little preparation time and lack of confidence using the medium. The party’s solution to this problem was to focus on consulting with the minister prior to broadcast in order that he may be aware of the central message of the broadcast with an appreciation for the target audience. Also, the party was beginning to understand the need for their politicians to be brief, and thus speaking in bullet points (later known as sound bites). Some of the self-identified weaknesses in Tory television culture were unique to the Conservatives, because of their status as the governing party. Therefore, it had become incumbent upon Macmillan’s Conservatives to master the medium and set the precedent for future governmental broadcasting in Britain.

By mid-1957, CCO attentions had turned significantly towards television. The Conservatives had devised integrated methods for assessing the impact of political television on audiences. It was considered that: ‘While measuring the size of the TV audience is a mathematical problem, measuring impact is more complex and largely a matter of judgement.’⁴⁴³ The party had taken resource intensive steps in order to understand such ‘impact’, which included analysis of the ‘BBC Audience Research’ (that came to the party by covert informants working at the BBC); ‘Viewers View of [political] Personalities’ and ‘Viewers View of Programmes’ (both used surveys on political broadcasts); ‘Press Cuttings’ (although it was noted that the ‘novelty’ of reporting about television was wearing-off); ‘Gallup Poll’ and ‘Daily Express Poll’ data (that covered election periods only); and views of the ‘Party Workers’ (this was encouraged through the Radio and TV Newsgrams. Party-workers fed-back their views

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, point 1.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, point 2.

⁴⁴² CPA CCO 4/7/363 ‘Improving Party Television Programmes’, ND, c. early 1957.

⁴⁴³ CPA CCO 4/7/363 CCO report on the ‘Impact of Television’, 26 June 1957.

on broadcasts to association agents and Area Publicity Officers who subsequently relayed the information and their own thoughts to CCO). The party used seven questions for analysis in order to devise their conclusions, but noted that in all cases more evidence was desirable. The findings of these analyses were significant in the organisation of the party and in the educational development of the party, because the Conservatives used them as ‘the basis of everything’ they taught in their ‘Radio and TV courses’.⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, the party used pamphlets entitled ‘How to Utilize Radio and Television Effectively.’⁴⁴⁵ This shows how, like film previously, television was becoming integrated significantly into political education agendas and party TV programmes.⁴⁴⁶

The medium also gained growing interest from the party outside of CCO. Conservative MPs continued to take a keen interest in how the party was being perceived on television. One example was Robert Allen MP, who wrote a long and detailed letter to Donald Kaberry MP, of CCO, stating that the subject of Conservative-speakers on television arose during a dinner. Allen argued that there were too few Conservative TV-personalities and that the best known were ‘Socialists’. He believed that:

It was therefore highly desirable that the Conservatives should build-up expendable TV-personalities, i.e. people who might become well known to the public for non political broadcasts, but who would be prepared to sacrifice their reputation in the interests of the Conservative Party at the time of a general election.⁴⁴⁷

Allen proceeded to argue a case in which he encouraged CCO to consider training him to become a Conservative TV personality and admitted that it sounded ‘rather vain’,⁴⁴⁸ but that his self-promotion was on the advice of anonymous sources. This case would suggest that Allen’s ego was being enticed by the medium and that he would have liked to have received special treatment. However, this was tempered by a policy at CCO that gave equal opportunities to MPs for interaction with television and training.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 3, final paragraph.

⁴⁴⁵ CPA CCO 4/7/363 Memo from Kaberry to Hinchcliffe ‘How to Utilise Radio and Television Effectively, 21 February 1957.

⁴⁴⁶ Timothy Hollins, *The presentation of politics : the place of party publicity, broadcasting and film in British politics, 1918-1939*, Doctoral Thesis, University of Leeds (1981); Tiratsoo and Tomlinson, *1951-1964*.

⁴⁴⁷ CPA CCO 4/7/363 Letter from R. A. Allen to Donald Kaberry, 9 October 1957, point 3.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

Kaberry's reply acknowledged the dominance of 'Socialist' broadcasters, but argued that some TV personalities were indeed Conservatives.⁴⁴⁹

Concerns about the domination of 'Socialist' TV-personalities had been developing for some time and was related to the ongoing debate within the party-elite about allowing junior ministers to participate in television broadcasts. This is illustrated by the dialogue surrounding a letter to Lord Hailsham from Sir Toby Low MP.

I have been worried for sometime about some of the TV programmes in which MPs are asked to appear. Last Friday I was cajoled and bullied into appearing in the Granada "Under Fire" half hour on unemployment and neglect in Wales. Alan Green was with me and did as well as anyone who is not immersed in the problems could do. I did not do well: I was unhappy before the programme and unhappier after. But that is not the point I wanted to make. The real point is this – why do ministers, junior or senior, not take the opportunity of these programmes to stand up for their policies and explain them thoroughly and also to get themselves known? I know the risks, and can well understand why Sir Winston Churchill made rules about Ministerial TV performances four or five years ago. But though the risks may not have decreased the advantages of ministers appearing on TV – indeed the vital importance of it – have increased enormously. Front bench Labour men do not miss these opportunities.⁴⁵⁰

Sir Toby's narrative describes the contrast between the Conservative frontbench's cultural approaches to television when compared to that of Labour. Prominent Labour politicians, while in opposition, had experienced a freedom to explore the exploitation of television. However, most Conservative political-elites had not because of the culture that had been instigated under the Churchillian rules that restricted Ministerial Broadcasts. This is another example of how television played a uniquely different role in the Conservative Party, as the governing party 1951-1964, when compared to other British political parties at that time. Seymour-Ure identifies this as an 'historic tension' that has been evident between broadcasters and governments, both Conservative and Labour, since the advent of political television.⁴⁵¹ But television was at its newest as a political medium throughout this continuous 13 year period of Conservative governance. Therefore, throughout 1951-1964, the suspicions surrounding broadcasters in the psyche of the Conservatives, as the governing party, is, naturally, incomparable

⁴⁴⁹ CPA CCO 4/7/363 Letter from Kaberry to R. A. Allen, 24 October 1957.

⁴⁵⁰ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Letter from Sir Toby Low MP to Viscount Hailsham, 17 February 1958.

⁴⁵¹ Seymour-Ure, *Broadcasting*, pp. 179-181.

with Labour's experience, because by the time Labour were in government in the 1960s, political television, and the parties' understanding of it, had matured considerably.

Deeper comparison of Allen's and Sir Toby's discourse reveals that the advent of television had the potential to both enhance and diminish the egos and confidence of politicians. Both MPs used colourful language like 'expendable' and 'sacrifice'; and 'worried' and 'bullied' in order to express their very different attitudes towards the role of television in the party and how it was impacting on the life of a Conservative MP. This vivid and symbolic language illustrates how television remained, for some Conservative politicians, a very new medium.

The dialogue on the matter of ministers appearing on TV was continued within CCO:

I understand that there is quite a lot of feeling among Members of Parliament in agreement with what [Sir Toby] says. In this particular programme it had been hoped that Robert Carr would put the Government's case, but he was either unable to do so or not allowed to take part in the programme. The feeling is that it is a pity that junior ministers are sometimes denied the opportunity of appearing on the programmes because they are considered unsuitable either by Dr Hill, the minister or the Chief Whip, and their places have to be taken by backbench Members of Parliament who are not really in a position to know all the answers.⁴⁵²

In an effort to maintain control of output and in order to protect their own interests, the Conservative governing-elite were cautious not to take 'risks' in using ministers liberally on television. However, it was becoming apparent that their approach might not be in the best interest of the party.

As Lindsay and Harrington write, the Conservatives were appearing to fall behind Labour in adapting to wider social-trends and the changing political and media culture of the time.⁴⁵³ Consequently, the status quo of the hierarchy, organisation and structure of the Parliamentary Conservative Party was being challenged by the developments in political television. The top-elites in the parliamentary party appeared to be out of touch on matters of political television. Many of those below them in the parliamentary hierarchy, and the CCO-elites, had been contemplating the modernisation of the party's approach to political broadcasting for a number of years. In this case, there was discord between the position of top government-elites and a collective of

⁴⁵² CPA CCO 4/7/361 Note to Viscount Hailsham, 25 February 1958.

⁴⁵³ T. F. Lindsay and Michael Harrington, *The Conservative Party 1918-1970* (Macmillan Press, Basingstoke, 1974), p. 208.

individuals within the parliamentary party, which demonstrates that issues relating to how political television was constituted at the government level had the potential to unsettle relations between different party groups.

In addition to MPs, Conservative supporters continued to write to CCO in relation to political television, as was the trend in the earlier parts of the period. For example, Chief Publicity Officer, Ronald Simms, wrote to Charles Hill MP, March 1958, to report that the party had received ‘two spontaneous reactions to’ a Party Political Broadcast by Sir David Eccles.⁴⁵⁴ Simms explained that ‘the first came from the Women’s Chairman of East Grinstead, who felt she had to tell someone how good Sir David Eccles was last night, and added that she thought it the best thing since Iain Macleod on Skipton.’⁴⁵⁵ This illustrates what appears to have been an inherent impulse for some party members and officers within the mass-based culture to communicate with CCO and express their views on matters of interest.

Although it was changing, the mass-party culture of the 1950s remained characterised largely by its tradition as a party of activism.⁴⁵⁶ A nature of action was imbedded deeply in the party’s norms and customs. Individual members and supporters were inclined and encouraged to engage in aspects of the political life of the party. The visual nature of political television brought the day-to-day politics of political leaders into the living rooms of the ordinary party supporter, and thus provided a novel reality that sound radio and printed media had not.⁴⁵⁷ It made the party leadership feel tangibly close to those at the grassroots who watched political TV. Therefore, this new found tangibility of television held the potential to act as a catalyst for party supporter engagement. In the 1950s, it was the cultural default-setting of party supporters to interact in the political process. In the grassroots’ transitional phase, from a face-to-face politics to one of armchair politics, in which political television impacted on a redundancy of mass-campaign activism,⁴⁵⁸ some of the TV-viewing party membership were prompted, by what they saw on TV, to engage in written discourse, as a method of showing support to their new on-screen party personalities. Therefore, the act of letter writing became a symbolic gesture of active party support in the transitional complexities of culture-change in the party.

⁴⁵⁴ CPA CCO 4/7/363 Letter from R. E. Simms to Charles Hill MP on ‘Sir David Eccles’s Party Political Broadcast’, 26 March 1958.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.* paragraph 1.

⁴⁵⁶ Tim Bale, *The Conservatives since 1945, The Drivers of Party Change*, (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴⁵⁷ Lawrence, *Masters*.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

This ritual of paper-based communication-exchange was a two-way affair. By the end of 1957, Macmillan's Conservatives were recognising the significance of the role of television in politics and the incremental impact that it had had on its party's organisation overtime. The Radio and Television Section at CCO continued to use the TV and Radio Newsgram as a medium to disseminate such matters to the wider-party organisation.

TV and Radio Newsgram was started in April 1953, six days after the political parties agreed with the BBC that television should be used for party political broadcasts. The impact of television on politics and the effect on political organisation was even then considerable. It has grown daily ever since. This short Newsgram has been a means of enlisting the interests and help of constituency agents throughout England, Wales and Scotland in the new responsibility assumed by the Central Office since entering the field of television production. At the same time, sound radio remains an equally important factor in politics. The Newsgram – as its name implies – covers both. Because television is comparatively new and sound is something which has become an accepted part of normal communication since the 1920's, it is very easy to neglect sound. It is worthwhile to put the relative importance in perspective. The number of licences taken out by October 1957 is 14,677,612. This includes 7,524,071 TV licences. That means that 7,153,541 receive sound but not TV.⁴⁵⁹

This extract shows how the Radio and Television Section intended to present the party as an organisation which had submitted to the continual changes that it believed had been brought about by the impacts of and developments in television.

Therefore, CCO was signalling to its party the importance of the sustained adaptation to television culture for both the central and regional organisations. The party was no longer resisting the inevitable, and thus realised that television culture was bigger than its own. However, the party was clear to place the role of television in perspective. Shown in the extract, CCO tempered its own embrace of television. It did this by assessing the medium in terms of its popularity, which the party based on a comparison of the public's uptake of television, and radio, licences. Therefore, Macmillan's Conservatives in 1957, like the party of the earlier 1950s period, had not quite reached a point at which television had become an omnipotent medium with precedence over all-others. This placed significant pressure on organisation at CCO, because, while in transition, it maintained the old-methods of propaganda output while embracing newer approaches to communicating with the electorate through TV. The

⁴⁵⁹ CPA CCO 4/7/365 TV and Radio Newsgram, No. 61, 27 November 1957.

party had remained in a state of steady transition and change since the early 1950s, but by 1957 the party was engaging with radio and television on a relatively equal footing.⁴⁶⁰

The above Newsgram extract mentions how the party had entered into ‘the field of television production.’⁴⁶¹ The intensive processes involved in creating and amending broadcast scripts for programming is an example of how TV had begun impacting the daily life at CCO.⁴⁶² Before television, the party had engaged with cinematic-film and radio broadcasts. To some degree, the party was prepared for television, because film, as an audiovisual-medium, and radio, as a broadcast sound-medium, both held characteristics in their productions which were similar to some of the characteristics in the field of television production. For instance, all three media required a political idea or theme; central message or information; creative planning; script; speaker/political personality; rehearsal; dissemination; and audience. In order to remain politically competitive, CCO assigned specific tasks to professionals in those fields.⁴⁶³ Film and television shared the obvious characteristics of both using moving visual-images and sound, which involved the use of camera and microphone technology.⁴⁶⁴ Films could be, and were, used for broadcast on television, but not on radio. Film and radio were relatively formal media in comparison to the conversational style of television. As illustrated in Chapter Three, film was used to draw an audience at political social-gatherings in the constituencies. Television and radio were used in a similar manner in the form of the aforementioned Tory TV-meetings. However, the nature of these were comparatively intimate when evaluated against the publically-open tradition of hustings and film gatherings, which further highlights the symbolic domesticity of television.⁴⁶⁵

Radio as a broadcast medium shared many characteristics with television. It usually required a studio setting, and broadcasting facilities. Unlike film, political broadcasts were restricted by strict legislation and rules, which meant lawyers were used by the party to consult on legal aspects of broadcasting. The party’s internal deliberations in preparation for inter-party meetings on political broadcasting grew-out of a custom which was first grounded in radio, and later evolved to incorporate the role

⁴⁶⁰ Jarvis, *Morality*.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² See, for example, CPA CCO 4/7/361 Draft scripts, 17 March 1958; and 19 March 1958, which was amended on 20 March.

⁴⁶³ Bale, *Drivers*.

⁴⁶⁴ For further reading on the convergence of television and film 1965-1962 see, Su Holmes, *British TV and Film Culture in the 1950s: Coming to a TV near you* (Intellect Books, Bristol, 2005).

⁴⁶⁵ Lawrence, *Masters*; Milly Buonanno, *The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories* (Intellect Books, Bristol, 2008), p. 14-15.

of television in political broadcasting. The focus on voice for radio meant that the party's presentation style had to be adapted for television broadcasts.⁴⁶⁶ Political television was often a visual broadcasting-medium that was transmitted live, which meant speakers needed to be well-trained in the art of television performance, and well-briefed and rehearsed. Like radio, TV had the potential to reach large numbers of the electorate. Therefore, the potential for impact was greater than the more limited dissemination of political films. Furthermore, unlike film, live broadcasts could not be carefully edited. Therefore, scripts and speeches required a great deal of attention. However, as the demands of political television grew over time, the party, in order to achieve the successful transition of its use of political television to reach the voter, underwent a process of observing, learning, understanding and executing the aspects of political television production. This led to a more professionalised-party⁴⁶⁷ that in turn synthesised with the more intensive occupation and culture of television production.

By 1958, it is observable that the Conservative Party had invested great time, thought, resources, energy and passion in the development of its television operations. The party's significant investment in its broadcasting endeavours led to a sense of pride in its achievements. Therefore, the CCO-elites, who had channelled much of their skills and ideas into developing the party's television presence, could be sensitive to misrepresentations of it. This is evident in a letter from the party's Chief Publicity Officer to the Editor of the Observer:

I was amused to see that Maurice Richardson expects the Conservative Party to follow the lead of the Labour Party in providing a studio with closed circuit for television training. Some 200 Conservative MPs as well as hundred or so candidates and others, will doubtless share my amusement, as, for the past two years, they have been enjoying precisely those facilities in the studio in the Conservative Central Office. It is just over ten years since our first studio was equipped for sound radio training, and six years since we extended the service to cover television. Your readers may be interested to know that it has taken the Labour Party quite a time to follow us.⁴⁶⁸

Although the party initially took a cautious approach to political television, which, at times, meant it was slow to adapt and change to the new technology and its culture, it was naturally competitive and especially sensitive to advances by the Labour Party.

⁴⁶⁶ See, Colin Seymour-Ure, *Prime Ministers and the Media: Issues of Power and Control* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2003), p. 132.

⁴⁶⁷ Bale, *Drivers*.

⁴⁶⁸ CPA CCO 4/7/361 Letter from R. E. Simms to the Editor of The Observer, 29 January 1958.

Not only did Macmillan's Conservatives want to win the next election, they wanted to be seen as a modern and progressive party in terms of their organisation and publicity. Therefore, the party was balancing between (1) its caution in embracing change and (2) its competitiveness to be ahead of its opponents.

By mid-1958, the CCO-elite were paying greater attention to building stronger relationships with ITA broadcasters and the advancements in their broadcasting technologies. The party-officials began taking opportunities to socialise more closely with ITA producers, which involved dinner parties and other 'suitable social gatherings'.⁴⁶⁹ For example:

Sir Wavell Wakefield arranged a dinner at the House of Commons ... The chief guest was Mr Adorian of Associated Rediffusion. The latter is also going to a dinner given by the Labour Party in the near future. He stressed that his political sympathies were with us although he has of course to give a fair amount of time and consideration to the other parties.⁴⁷⁰

The party had held on to its belief that there was socialist bias in the BBC and other media, therefore the party began combating the phenomenon through an active hospitality of schmoozing with ITA broadcasters. In making the effort to build the relationships, the party found that it gained tangible benefits, especially in terms of information relating to advancements in broadcasting technologies that could be used for the benefit of the party. Kaberry had been informed of the

...development made recently in regard to the recording of sound and vision programmes on tape. It will be possible to make a recording on a tape of the programme in question, which can then be played back on the air within a matter of minutes if necessary. ITA have got the first two camera recorders of this type in the country. The BBC expect to get one at the end of September. They are all imported from America. This process completely overcomes the necessity of filming for TV purposes and enables complete editing to be done on any tape. It would be an ideal process for use in Party Political Broadcasts particularly for the type we have in mind for the Prime Minister. It means that quite a long shot can be taken of a free discussion. This can be reasonably quickly edited and a fresh tape taken and put out on sound and vision.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ CPA CCO 600/3/11/1 Report on 'Television' by Kaberry sent to the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, General Director and R. E. Simms, 26 June 1958, point a.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., point b.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., point b, i.

Officials at CCO were now immersed in the culture of television and the processes of television production had become an everyday aspect of their understanding.

Macmillan's Conservatives, Television and General Election 1959

An insight into one Conservative individual's perspective of the role that 'The Advent of Television' was playing in British politics can be gleaned from, Councillor for Kensington, Robert S. Orme's unsolicited memorandum on political propaganda entitled 'A New Approach in the TV Age'. This was followed by a similar memorandum on 'Political Television' from Richard Hornby MP.⁴⁷² Orme sent his ideas to CCO and received a reply from Lord Hailsham,⁴⁷³ which declared that the party's TV staff agreed with Orme's perspective on television. Orme's document stated that

...the lesson remains for any party that it must so revise its methods of approach to the electorate as to take full advantage of any new medium. Considering that a TV audience for a popular programme can now number up to 10 million viewers, but writing that number down by three quarters because a political programme can never be "popular", one could hope, with the right approach, to influence some two and a half million people. Thus a thousand pounds, or a thousand hours, spent in preparation of such a programme are more worthwhile than ten times that money or time spent in preparing local events. The full significance of these facts has not yet been appreciated by any party. To us Conservatives, the significance should be doubly applicable, for we are handicapped against our principle opponents in that, through the influence of shop stewards and by the generally more intensive campaigning of the Socialist fanatic, they more easily penetrate to the inner ear of the electorate.⁴⁷⁴

The act of Orme sending his memorandum to Hailsham demonstrates that there was an active awareness outside of CCO operations that the party could be doing more with the medium of television in the pursuit of connecting with the electorate – and using it to win Conservative votes. Orme uses the word 'influence' which suggests that there was a belief that the medium could be used as an instrument of power. He also indicates that he believes the Labour Party rhetoric of the time was more effective in reaching the voter than that of the Conservatives. It is a belief consistent with that of earlier periods in 1950s Conservatism. Views such as this may well have contributed to changes in

⁴⁷² CPA CCO 4/8/326 Memo from Richard Hornby MP on 'Political Television', 31 July 1958.

⁴⁷³ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Reply from Hailsham to Orme, 6 March 1958.

⁴⁷⁴ CPA CCO 4/8/326 'A New Approach in the TV Age', January 1958, p. 2.

approaches to television in Macmillan's Conservatives in the run-up to the 1959 General Election.⁴⁷⁵

One aspect that influenced Macmillan's Conservatives' approach to political television, especially in the run-up to 1959, was the developments in their relationships with the BBC and ITA. After many years of inter-party committee meetings that had formed an integral part of the behind-the-scenes political television culture in Britain, the relationships between the broadcasters and the Conservative Party elites were becoming less formal. Rather than simply complying with the rules, ideas and acts of Parliament, which were laid down by the political parties of the past, the broadcasters, who had become empowered by the popular uptake and normalisation of television viewing in wider British culture, were developing confidence. The broadcasters used this to exert influence on the direction of political television culture and the political parties were required to adapt.⁴⁷⁶ Naturally, this shifted the dynamics between broadcasters and political parties.

Following Macmillan's succession to the premiership, the inevitability of a general election was an opportunity for the broadcasters to begin putting their case to the Conservative-elite both at CCO and 12 Downing Street for changing the status quo of political TV coverage. By mid-1958, serious, formal discourse on the matter had begun within the party-elite. Hailsham wrote to Heath:

On 25 June, you wrote to Donald Kaberry with a memorandum prepared by the BBC and the ITA on broadcasting at elections. I have had a small office meeting about this memorandum and what follows is partly the result of my own thinking and partly of their advice. I will deal first with the proposal for the General Election. I would think that the main objects of any programme of broadcasting for an election are three fold. The first is that the election is news and needs to be covered by reporting. The second is that the parties will legitimately require to use part of the broadcasting time for their election party political broadcasts. The third is that the election being topical will give both to the Authority [ITA] and the Corporation [BBC] an opportunity to clarify and discuss some of the issues at the election in programmes of their devising and production.⁴⁷⁷

Some Conservative-elites believed that the status quo of TV legislation was a disadvantage to the Conservative Party. There was therefore some appetite within

⁴⁷⁵ Bale notes that in terms of broadcasting 'the Conservatives were generally thought to have performed poorly in 1959.' See, *Drivers*, p. 66.

⁴⁷⁶ Lawrence, *Masters*; and Seymour-Ure, *Broadcasting*.

⁴⁷⁷ CPA CRD 2/20/9 Confidential letter from Hailsham to Heath, 4 July 1958.

Macmillan's Conservatives to amend the legislation, but the party realised that the legal position meant that all parties would need to be in agreement before any change could be enacted in law.⁴⁷⁸ Hailsham, representing CCO, was beginning to bend to the 'advice' from the broadcasters. This demonstrates that the broadcasters had some impact on the thought patterns and broadcasting policies of the party-elites; and that Macmillan's Conservatives were open to allowing the broadcasters more freedom in their coverage of elections. Hailsham used written discourse as a tool to outline his arguments in order to persuasively convince Heath. Heath played a mediatory role between both the party-elites and the broadcasting elites. As Chief Whip his responsibility was to represent the best interests of the Government and, therefore, the Conservative leadership. Heath's incumbency in this unique mediatory role at that specific point in the history of political television meant that his inclinations and choices played a significant role in broadcasting events in the run-up to the 1959 General Election.

On 14 July 1958, Heath chaired a meeting on 'Political Broadcasting' at the House of Commons, which focused its discussion on the matters of regional political broadcasts for minor parties; broadcasting of general elections and by-elections; and election coverage involving comment and opinion.⁴⁷⁹ Heath was joined by other party-elites including Hailsham, Kaberry, Urton and Simms, who debated external pressures in relation to political broadcasting.

Mr Heath pointed out that the new factor with regard to Regional Broadcasts was that the BBC had now joined with the Scottish and Welsh national councils in pressing for regional party political broadcasts and had asked to bring the two national governors to a meeting with the parties. While the Conservative and Labour parties had been united in their opposition to such broadcasts, the Labour Party were now beginning to waver, especially in regard to Wales.⁴⁸⁰

Although television was becoming more familiar to the Conservative Party, and was, therefore, less of a new medium, the evolving nature of television in the 1950s and early 1960s meant that the party was continually affronted with 'new' factors. The changing dynamics of the party's relationship and interactions with the broadcasters led to these factors being addressed through the party's tradition of bureaucratic discourse and committee meetings, which included a process of thought, deliberation and potential

⁴⁷⁸ CPA CCO 20/17/2 Letter from Hailsham to the Chief Whip, 26 May 1959.

⁴⁷⁹ CPA CRD 2/20/9 Confidential meeting minutes on 'Political Broadcasting', 14 July 1958.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1, paragraph 1.

action. Actually, regional broadcasts were not a new factor in terms of their concept. But the prospect of them becoming a reality was a new concept for the Conservative Party. Moreover, it was made all the more pertinent an issue as it was one that their opponents were beginning to favour. This shows how the Conservatives filtered-out issues for attention on the broadcasting agenda, until the time came for it to engage fully with the subject matter. Furthermore, it demonstrates how a once weak broadcasting-elite, were beginning to gain greater powers of persuasion over the British political elite.

The ITA broadcasters demonstrate their new found confidence in a letter to Lord Hailsham:

We have been discussing the most helpful and effective way of handling the next general election in our programmes. We feel that it would not be sufficient for Independent Television just to relay official party political broadcasts. I hope you agree that the millions of voters who will not go to meetings but will be ready to follow the election campaigns on TV should be given every incentive to do so, and that the programmes must therefore be as varied and stimulating as possible.⁴⁸¹

Macmillan's Conservatives reacted to these external pressures from broadcasters by developing a paper 'to enumerate and describe the different sorts of broadcasts which the BBC and the ITA may wish to make (i) at the time of an election and (ii) at the time of a by-election.'⁴⁸² The paper suggests that the party's understanding of the broadcasters' motives behind the expansion of election coverage was 'to inform the public.'⁴⁸³

Macmillan's Conservatives both at Downing Street and CCO proceeded to formally deliberate their position through written dialogue. In January 1959, Simms, Chief Publicity Officer, wrote to Heath stating that the 'question of regional broadcasts as proposed by the BBC and ITA will be difficult to oppose, and it seems to us that there is some danger of the public being satiated by political broadcasts during the election period.'⁴⁸⁴ CCO-elites had considered that the voting public may be overwhelmed by too much political broadcasting and, therefore, presented their

⁴⁸¹ CPA CRD 2/20/9 Letter from Val Parnell of Associated Television Ltd to Lord Hailsham, 13 August 1958.

⁴⁸² CPA CRD 2/20/9 Paper on 'Broadcasting and Parliamentary Elections', 15 December 1958, p. 1, point 1a.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ CPA CRD 2/20/9 1958 Letter from R. E. Simms to Heath 'As promised I am giving you my notes on the proposals set out in the minutes of the inter-party meeting on broadcasting held on Monday, 15 December', 16 January 1959.

proposed allocation for ten television broadcasts to be shared among the Conservatives, Labour and Liberals: 5:4:1. By April 1959, Macmillan's Conservatives had submitted to the inevitability of regional broadcasts. The party prepared itself for this with a set of procedures:

A list of persons suitable to appear in regional programmes produced by the BBC and ITV companies was circulated. Mr Kaberry stressed the importance of selecting candidates with local connections in each area. Guidance to MPs, candidates, Central Office Agents and constituency agents about consulting Central Office before accepting invitations to appear in regional broadcasts would be issued by the General Director when the date of the General Election was known.⁴⁸⁵

Macmillan's Conservatives' approach to regional broadcasts was in keeping with the cautious approach evident in the party under Churchill and Eden. However, the new found power of broadcasters forced the party to finally break with their traditional attitude towards political television and begin preparing for the new broadcasting challenges of the upcoming election.

This attitudinal change within the party is evident in a number of other documents that addressed the matter of television from early 1958 onward. For example, correspondence between party-elites at CCO and Downing Street were becoming more explicit in their understanding of the importance that television was expected to play in election proceedings.⁴⁸⁶ Furthermore, the party's continued research on matters of television became more heavily focused on the matter of getting the best use out of the medium as a mass communication tool for reaching the voter.⁴⁸⁷ This was a significant shift in the party's focus on television, which had been before largely centred on three organisational aspects: (1) the engagement of party individuals with television; (2) their interaction with the medium; and (3) the adaptation of the party organisation in line with developments in television culture. As the election approached, the party also began to demonstrate a commitment to improving its collective television technique, in the belief that 'every time our ministers appear on TV

⁴⁸⁵ CPA CRD 2/20/9 1958 Meeting minutes 'To Discuss Broadcasting at a General Election', 7 April 1959, point 2.

⁴⁸⁶ See, for example, CPA CCO 600/3/11/1 Letter from Hailsham to Heath, 4 July 1958.

⁴⁸⁷ CPA CCO 600/3/11/1 'Notes for Meeting on Radio and Television', 16 July 1958.

and answer questions in a situation contrived by the programme companies they become better known to the public as great personalities and leaders.’⁴⁸⁸

Party supporters had noticed improvements in the party’s small screen presence and praised, in particular, Macmillan for his broadcasting skill in a television programme.

Several people have spoken both to Mr Hearn and to myself in the most glowing terms about the recent television programme in which the Prime Minister was interviewed by Ed Murrow. It undoubtedly seems to have given great encouragement to our own supporters. The suggestion has already been put to me that we ought to use a similar technique in presenting the Prime Minister to the public in one of our own party programmes.⁴⁸⁹

Television had become an important tool for party morale. Improving the party’s broadcasting talent enhanced confidence in the political arm of the organisation. The party’s self-perception of its broadcasting abilities had become of importance to the wider-party organisation - under the assumption that greater confidence in its leadership would produce a more dedicated workforce at the grassroots.

In February 1959, at the Area Publicity Officer’s Conference, it was highlighted that a list of marginal and non-marginal seat candidates with the potential to become ‘TV personalities’ should be put forward for coaching.⁴⁹⁰ Subsequently, the party continued to encourage its candidates⁴⁹¹ and MPs⁴⁹² to partake in television training courses and regional television conferences for candidates.⁴⁹³ The party had become concerned about the imposition of travelling distance and time for candidates outside of London and the South East regions, and that it might hinder the attendance on the courses. Therefore, a number of training courses were scheduled and held in the regions. In April 1959,

...a special television course was held in Manchester by the Television Department of Central Office under the auspices of the North West Area. This took the form of a reproduction of the

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 5, final paragraph.

⁴⁸⁹ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Memo from Maurice Chandler, Central Office Agent of East Midlands Area, to R. E. Simms, 30 May 1958.

⁴⁹⁰ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Confidential note from Hinchcliffe, 5 February 1959.

⁴⁹¹ CPA CCO 4/8/326 ‘Television Coaching for Candidates’, 23 July 1959.

⁴⁹² CPA CCO 4/8/326 Letter from Howell Thomas, Television Liaison Officer, to MPs, 24 June 1959.

⁴⁹³ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Memo from C. J. Lindsey to Central Office Agents on ‘Television Conferences – Candidates’, 27 May 1959.

studio, with complete closed circuit television, lights, sound etc., such as exists at Central Office. This was considered to be a highly successful venture...⁴⁹⁴

The party had begun to ‘strongly’ emphasise also the importance of attending these training sessions.⁴⁹⁵ When compared to the earlier periods, the language used by CCO to address the television matters was taking a more confident and coercive approach to the medium. Furthermore, the focus of the training had changed to place more emphasis on practice and giving good performances on camera. The courses lasted for two hours and consisted of ‘instruction, with opportunity for individual practice in the three principle aspects of television appearances – talking to the camera, interviews, and question-and-answer programmes.’⁴⁹⁶ As well as innovation in the manner in which it administered its training, the party maintained its approach to networking selected MPs with TV officials.

I have arranged with Donald Kaberry to hold a cocktail party, 6 pm to 8 pm at St Stephen’s Club, on Thursday 4 June, so that a selected number of Members of Parliament may have an opportunity to meet informally some radio and television producers of current affairs, news and feature programmes. I am sure this will be of great value and interest to both sides and will serve to create a happy relationship between Members and the production side of radio and television.⁴⁹⁷

These examples suggest that in the run-up to 1959 CCO was beginning to take a more assertive approach to leading the party’s involvement with television. 1959 is considered to have been the party’s most sophisticated campaign in terms of strategy and marketing techniques when compared to those elections before it.⁴⁹⁸ The focus had moved from educating the party on matters of political television and introducing the organisation to the culture of the new medium; to equipping the party with the necessary skills and opportunities to win-over the voters in the impending general election. Furthermore, there was an active intention for the party’s collective face to be improved on the small screen.

⁴⁹⁴ CPA CCO 4/8/326 CCO letter, 14 May 1959.

⁴⁹⁵ CPA CCO 4/8/326 CCO letter to candidates, ‘Last month the Television Department...’ 3 July 1959.

⁴⁹⁶ CPA CCO 4/8/326 CCO letter to candidates, ‘Last month the Television Department...’ 3 July 1959, paragraph 2.

⁴⁹⁷ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Letter from Howell Thomas, Radio and Television Liaison Officer, 26 May 1959.

⁴⁹⁸ Cockett, ‘Publicity’, p. 567.

The party's advancements in preparing, coaching and training its politicians to perform effectively on television were beginning to receive praise from those to whom it had given support. For example:

Last Friday, I was on the television programme, "Who Goes Home?". I do just want to write and tell you how helpful and efficient Central Office were in briefing and preparing me for this frightening ordeal. Hinchcliffe's coaching was quite invaluable, and Michael Fraser and his staff produced for me with incredible speed all the information I could possibly need. I think you, as Chairman of the Party, and the rest of us as party members, can be very proud of our organisation at Smith Square and Old Queen Street.⁴⁹⁹

It would appear that CCO-operations had reached a confident stage in preparing politicians for interaction with the new medium. But its approach to offering its resources to 'anyone' was changing.

CCO had a relatively liberal and open policy towards access for staff and visitors to view its television studios in the run-up to 1959. However, evidently due to the party's increased and sustained proud advertisement of its television facilities, demand by the ordinary individual had begun to overwhelm the Television Section's operations. This led to the General Director restricting access to the studio⁵⁰⁰ and indicates that the television culture of the party was reaching another phase. This is also evident in CCO's decision to cease informing Area Publicity Officers of the political programmes that were expected to be monitored, '...we should now have reached the stage where you are well aware of the various programmes upon which it is necessary to keep a watch.'⁵⁰¹ The television culture of Macmillan's Conservatives had reached a point of relative maturity.

As TV was beginning to rise significantly to challenge the party's mass-party culture, film was certainly in its final decent. In January 1959, the chairman of the Conservative Film Association wrote to notify the party that the Film Association was going to cease its operations due to the increase in television.⁵⁰² During the 1959 General Election, a campaign memorandum suggested that canvassing of homes should be discontinued during television hours.⁵⁰³ Therefore, political television was being

⁴⁹⁹ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Letter from Sir Wavell Wakefield MP to Lord Hailsham, 10 March 1959.

⁵⁰⁰ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Memo from the General Director to Heads of Departments and Central Office Agents on the 'Television Studio', 13 April 1959.

⁵⁰¹ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Memo from C. J. Lindsey to all Area Publicity Officers, 8 April 1959.

⁵⁰² CPA CCO 4/8/56 Letter from Leonard Ropner, 30 January 1959.

⁵⁰³ CPA CCO 4/8/116 General Election Memoranda No. 4, 16 September 1959, point 43.

given priority over the traditional grassroots' activity of canvassing. Television's precedence over traditional face-to-face activism signalled the beginnings of the decline for the mass-party and the proliferation of TV-centricity in the party's organisational culture. However, there is evidence to suggest that although television was maturing in the party's strategy, radio remained on equal terms. As early as April 1958, the party was using the TV and Radio Newsgram for advertising internally to its supporters the upcoming broadcasts of political programming. But both radio and television continued to be portrayed as equals in the Newsgrams until at least November 1961.⁵⁰⁴

Macmillan himself took a keen interest in the developments in television broadcasting and its uses as a party propaganda tool in the run-up to the 1959 General Election.⁵⁰⁵ In May 1959, five months before the election, Macmillan wrote a personal note to his chief whip, stating: 'I would like to have a word with you before we leave for our holiday about television broadcasts at the General Election. They ought to be carefully tied in with the pamphlets and general propaganda.'⁵⁰⁶ He also suggested content for televised party political broadcasts⁵⁰⁷ and personally 'approved the choice of speakers...to represent the party in BBC Hustings programmes', i.e. regional broadcasts.⁵⁰⁸ This shows that Macmillan was engaged in the propaganda process and that he had some understanding of the place of television amid a number of other political media in the election. It also indicates Macmillan's desire to be in control of the medium.

The Prime Minister took the time to write personally to Lord Hailsham on television matters.

I have read with great interest your minute of 30 December. I altogether approve of the line on which the programme should be prepared. In the "2. Standard of Living", I hope a good deal of emphasis will be put on housing – it is a good story and has a certain opportunity, as I shall try to prove in my speech in Newcastle next week. I would only observe that none of these programmes is related to the Commonwealth or Foreign Affairs. It might perhaps be worthwhile having a Commonwealth programme. I think some material on these subjects ought to be got ready in case it is of vital importance to use it. With regard to speakers, I agree

⁵⁰⁴ CPA CCO 4/8/329 Propaganda - television, TV and Radio Newsgram No. 67-125 - 1958-61.

⁵⁰⁵ Seymour-Ure, *Prime Ministers*.

⁵⁰⁶ CPA CRD 2/20/9 Prime Minister's Personal Minute to the Chief Whip, 9 May 1959.

⁵⁰⁷ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Letter from Kaberry to R. E. Simms on 'Party Political Television Broadcast, 27 January 1959', 9 December 1958.

⁵⁰⁸ CPA CCO 4/8/106 Memo from R. E. Simms on 'General Election Regional Broadcasts', paragraph 1.

that you could take decisions nearer the time. The important thing is that they should be lively, modern, up-to-date people.⁵⁰⁹

Macmillan understood that in order for political television to be successful, the choice of performers or ‘speakers’ was an essential aspect of the party’s broadcast strategy.⁵¹⁰ He made attempts to ensure that there was consistency in both his public messages and party broadcast on television. Furthermore, he held a meeting ‘in order to consider how the provisional broadcasting arrangements [fitted] in with the manifesto.’⁵¹¹ In contrast to Churchill and Eden, Macmillan took an interactive hands-on approach to the party’s TV output. This divergence from his predecessor is described by Jon Lawrence as ‘Macmillan’s slick “makeover” for the television age’.⁵¹²

Macmillan’s Conservatives and Mastering Television

In the aftermath of Macmillan’s Conservatives’ win at the 1959 General Election, the central-party understood that it would not be able to ‘control the production’⁵¹³ of political programming, but that it could ‘do a great deal to ensure that the right type of person represents the Conservative Party, and that he or she is adequately coached.’⁵¹⁴ In the run-up to the election, the Tories had already begun to submit to the reality that they could no longer exert control over the broadcasters. The North West Area Agents reported⁵¹⁵ that, after the General Election, the BBC and Granada ITV made ‘very high’ demands ‘often at short notice’.⁵¹⁶ The 1959 election had demonstrated to Britain that the prominence of political TV-culture was on the rise. There was now general acceptance that the time had arrived for greater use of television as a tool for reaching the mass electorate; and that used effectively the medium could yield significant electoral advantages. The broadcasters became empowered by this and the dominance of the political elite over political broadcasting began to be diminished.⁵¹⁷ Those who were involved in politics were beginning to find themselves being more shepherded by the broadcasters than in previous elections. This transition and change was an irritant

⁵⁰⁹ CPA CCO 600/3/4/1 ‘Copy of a letter from the Prime Minister to Lord Hailsham’, 5 January 1959.

⁵¹⁰ Seymour-Ure, *Prime Ministers*.

⁵¹¹ CPA CRD 2/20/9 Confidential document on ‘General Election Broadcasts’, 28 May 1959, p. 1, paragraph 1.

⁵¹² Jon Lawrence, ‘The Culture of Elections in Modern Britain’, *History*, Vol. 96, No. 324 (2011), p. 463.

⁵¹³ CPA CCO 120/1/4 Memorandum for the Chief Publicity Officer for Television Meeting, 7 December 1959’, p. 1, point 1.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ CPA CCO 4/8/107 North West Area Agent Report, 22 October 1959.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, point 7.

⁵¹⁷ Seymour-Ure, *Broadcasting*.

for some individuals in the Conservative Party and meant that, at times, tensions built between the local party-professionals and regional broadcasting-officials during the election campaign.

An example of this was when the North West Area Conservatives were asked to provide Granada's 'Last Debate', which was held two nights before polling day, with 120 Conservative audience members. It was the agents' responsibility to organise the speakers, questioners, commentators, audience members and questions for the regional broadcasts. These types of broadcasts were a new and extra responsibility in the role of a Conservative agent at election time. Furthermore, 'all the Area Publicity Officers agreed that during the general election the arranging of audiences, questioners and questions for television had taken-up more than half their time.'⁵¹⁸ This placed added pressures on the party-professionals. The testimony of the North West Area Agents, demonstrates their realisation that the behind-the-scenes election time TV-culture was a cumbersome process with high demands on the resources of those who were expected to engage with it. The nature of the election game was changing and the ordinary association members and officers were ill-equipped to manage the broadcasting process. Regional Broadcasts were new and, therefore, had not been factored into the party's pre-election TV training. The responsibility for regional broadcasts was placed within the remit of the professionalised-party staff at the local level. However, many of them had little or no experience of managing broadcasts of this nature during an election.

The advent of regional broadcasts played some role in integrating further the two cultures of television broadcasting and Conservative organisation. How this transpired is evident in the following extract:

As arranged between the parties and the BBC these names have been submitted direct to Broadcasting House, London, who will in turn notify the regional producers. So as to ensure that no party takes advantage of the knowledge, the parties' nominations will be kept in confidence by the BBC and ourselves until late on Nomination Day... With regard to ITV, details of party speakers approved will be notified as soon as possible, and arrangements left to the relative Central Office Agent. In the meantime Central Office should be advised of approaches received and arrangements made.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁸ CPA CCO 600/2/2 Minutes of the 'Meeting of Area Publicity Officers', 17 December 1959, p. 4, paragraph 1.

⁵¹⁹ CPA CCO 4/8/106 Memo from R. E. Simms on 'General Election Regional Broadcasts', paragraphs 2 and 9.

Although Macmillan's Conservatives realised that it was a futile activity to attempt to control the broadcasters of political television, it would appear that the central-party understood that its hierarchical deference remained and, therefore, it was better equipped to control the collective individuals who made-up the party and, in particular, those who represented the party on television.

The party had reached the realisation that, if the medium of TV could not be controlled, then, the party should make every attempt to master it through controlling output and training its speakers and audiences. Therefore, a centralisation process of control was beginning. In January 1960, learning from the election of the previous year, CCO decided to resume 'Television Training' and made direct contact with Members of Parliament on the matter.⁵²⁰ Provision for the training of candidates in general was made also, but, unlike MPs, the party did not plan to contact the candidates individually.⁵²¹ Television sessions for ordinary association members now became limited to training in audience participation. This shows a clear hierarchical pattern with correlation between the levels of seniority and the provisions for television training. Furthermore, CCO's steps to further centralise party broadcasting operations resulted in the attempt to influence the performances of Conservative participants in political television audiences.

By 1961, the term for television training had changed to the more casual 'TV Practice',⁵²² indicating that developing one's political broadcasting technique was becoming an established feature of the life at CCO for middle-tier Conservatives. The process of mastering the medium had been in early development from the time of Eden, with the repeated drive to train its members, staff and politicians in the ways of television culture.⁵²³ However, there became distinct differences between the party's interaction with television culture before and after the 1959 election period. Under Eden, the party presented to all levels of the party hierarchy opportunities to interact with political television. Engagement at all levels of the party in the earlier periods of the 1950s was openly encouraged by CCO and the associations. However, towards the end of the decade, the opportunities for the ordinary member to actively engage with television on behalf of the party became fewer and fewer. Activities that fed into the production and broadcasts of political television programmes, on which Conservative-

⁵²⁰ CPA CCO 4/8/326 Letter from Donald Kaberry to MPs, 26 January 1960.

⁵²¹ CPA CCO 120/1/5 Letter from Simms to Central Office Agents, 6 January 1960.

⁵²² CPA CCO 4/8/326 Letter from Howell Thomas, Radio and Television Liaison Officer to MPs, 4 July 1961.

⁵²³ Lawrence, 'Culture'.

speakers were featured, largely became the preserve of professionalised CCO-staff and organisational and political elites.⁵²⁴

The change in attitude towards the views of the party membership on political broadcasts is evident in a reply from the party to William Boven, an ordinary Conservative supporter from Stafford. Boven wrote to CCO to suggest a topic for broadcast. Simms replied stating that there was a structure in place for the election broadcasts and that it was 'impossible' for Boven's idea to be considered.⁵²⁵ Boven may very well have received a response with a similar conclusion had he written a letter of this nature in the run-up to the 1955 General Election. However, what is quite different is the tone of the reply. Under Eden the party officials welcomed, if not encouraged, discursive correspondence, creativity, and innovation, from its membership on the use of television - and the language used in written correspondence often reflected that intent. But by 1959, in signalling that a contribution by a supporter was 'impossible', the party had begun to block from its membership the creative flow of ideas for political broadcasts.

By 1963, the General Director of the party was signalling to the wider membership that the CCO was no longer interested in receiving correspondence from individuals in the constituencies on the matter of perceived broadcaster bias – whether it indicated bias for or against the Conservatives. In a letter to association and CCO agents, the General Director notes that writing to the party is not the most effective method, because broadcasters 'are generally most sensitive to public criticism'.⁵²⁶ The role of CCO was changing to a more centralised organisation under the influence of wider television-culture. Therefore, its resources were better invested in broadcast production rather than handling general correspondence on political programming. No longer would its focus be to serve the interests of its mass-membership as a hub for information exchange. In the new TV age, the medium of political television was substituting much of the traditional methods that the party used to communicate with the public.⁵²⁷ Therefore the party membership, which had been the party's traditional medium to connect with the voter, was becoming less valuable to the needs of the Conservative Party. Consequently, some of the focus shifted from engaging the

⁵²⁴ Bale, *Drivers*.

⁵²⁵ CPA CCO 4/8/106 Reply from R. E. Simms to William Boven, 14 September 1959.

⁵²⁶ CPA CCO 4/9/373 Letter from the General Director to Central Office Agents and Constituency Agents, 4 December 1963.

⁵²⁷ Lawrence, *Masters*.

membership to centralising and professionalising the party's television output and operations.

Throughout the 1950s, CCO had attempted to develop better relations with the BBC. By 1960, it seems the relationship was developing positively.

I had lunch today with Carleton Green and Harman Grisewood. Carleton was kind enough to say that they have never known a time when relations between the BBC and the Central Office were smoother and more friendly. However, he felt that since the resignation of Mr Heath as Chief Whip there was a vacuum in the relationship between the BBC and Government circles. His feeling is that they used to have very close relations with Mr Heath, and that they would like to have equally close relations, either with the present Chief Whip or Dr Charles Hill, whichever you would prefer.⁵²⁸

This extract suggests that the relationship between the party and the broadcasters was dynamic in that it changed over time. Furthermore, the party's relationship with the broadcasters could be simultaneously close or distant dependent on the individual relations between specific party groups. In this case, and at that specific point in time, there was a dichotomy between the BBC's relationship with CCO, and Downing Street.⁵²⁹ The good relations the party held with the BBC were largely dependent on specific individual-elites in mediatory/liaison roles. The BBC's claim, that it had a strong relationship with Heath as Chief Whip supports the aforementioned assertion that Heath's mediatory role was pivotal in the party's relationships with the numerous actors which together constituted British political television. Again, in this case, it is evident that the same could be claimed for Downing Street's direct relationship with the broadcasters.

Another example showing the range of Conservative Party attitudes towards TV in the 1960s is illustrated in a pamphlet, by the Conservative Political Centre, which was published and sold for two shillings:

Television is the domestic symbol of the decade, and it may be making the greatest impact on human thought since Caxton's printing press. It has grown in the last ten years from a luxury which gave a modest performance to a comparative few to an accepted service which brings a remarkable range of programmes into about two-thirds of the homes in Britain. In June 1950,

⁵²⁸ CPA CCO 600/3/11/2 Strictly Private & Confidential letter from R. E. Simms to the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and General Director, 28 September 1960, paragraph 1 and 2.

⁵²⁹ Seymour-Ure, *Broadcasting*.

there were only about 400,000 television licences, but by the middle of 1960 the number had reached the 11 million mark. Television has a powerful impact on the family.⁵³⁰

This endorsement of the medium from proponents within the Conservative Party was significant. The publication aimed to influence British television policy. It called for a more aggressive approach to the exportation of British TV in line with what was being witnessed in the United States at that time. But as Tim Bale writes, this perspective was rather more favoured by Conservative backbenchers than the party's political-elites.⁵³¹ For some Tories, television was the future and required significant investment to ensure that Britain was competitive in a developing global market. Therefore, although some political-elites remained cautious, television had begun entering the imaginations of other Conservative Party members and, in this case, it led to a collective group of Conservatives forming in the attempt to influence the direction of the medium outside of the party's organisation.

Selwyn Lloyd's Report on Party Organisation

In 1962, Selwyn Lloyd was asked by the Party Chairman, Iain MacLeod MP, to conduct a report on the state of party organisation akin to the 1948 Maxwell-Fyfe Report.⁵³² There was some concern that there had become disconnect between the upper-ranks of the party and the ordinary members at the grassroots.

I have been very impressed wherever I have been so far, by the feeling that the loyal party workers never get near senior ministers. It is certainly not a case of one or two isolated grumblers putting this view. I have heard it from almost everyone. They feel that ministers are remote, out of contact, they never hear what the officers in the constituencies think, and are completely under the thumbs of their permanent officials.⁵³³

By the 1960s, the newly professionalised-ranks in the party were embracing change. The wider-party had noticed this change and was feeling a sense of redundancy from traditional political action. Therefore, MacLeod, in discussion with Macmillan, thought

⁵³⁰ CPA PUB 168/22 Sir Eric Edwards et al., *Broadcasting: The Next Steps* (Conservative Political Centre, London, December 1960), p. 4.

⁵³¹ Bale, *Drivers*, p. 95.

⁵³² CPA CCO 120/4/1 Personal and Confidential letter from Iain MacLeod to Selwyn Lloyd, 28 September 1962.

⁵³³ CPA CCO 120/4/1 Personal and Confidential letter from Selwyn Lloyd to Iain MacLeod, 23 November 1962.

it timely that the party undergo an assessment in order that it may become more self-aware of its efficacy as a political organisation in the modern world.

Political television was a one-way method of communicating with the masses and its embrace by the central-party had an impact on party organisation. While television had been part of a mix of communications that the party used in the early to late 1950s, it did not have much impact until the 1959 General Election. Political television was becoming a substitute for meeting ‘the people’ in person. Therefore, with the increasing focus on the party’s political elites, like senior ministers, and their appearances on television, the CCO officials were slow to realise that the workers at the grassroots had become disconnected from the traditional organisation.⁵³⁴ Therefore, Lloyd came to the opinion from his meetings with ordinary Conservative members that they were beginning to feel forgotten and silenced.

Lloyd’s final report⁵³⁵ provided a clear and concise one-man’s insider perspective on the state of party organisation in the early 1960s. His comprehensive plan, which was informed by extensive interviews of party individuals at all levels of the hierarchy and in many roles within the party organisation, included a number of criticisms and corresponding recommendations that had direct relevance to the role of television in the party. Lloyd criticised that ‘the Conservative Party broadcasts should be much more hard hitting’ and with ‘more facilities for training of potential contributors to political programmes. More Conservative women should appear on them.’⁵³⁶ He recommended that ‘there should be more contact between ministers and leading party-workers’ and ‘more training in television techniques.’⁵³⁷ He worded these examples in terms of organisational functionality.

Additional unpublished memoranda show that the final report was in fact sanitised from Lloyd’s full opinion on television and the Conservative Party. The final report, published by CCO, was intended for open distribution, for the price of one shilling. Lloyd’s act of sanitising the public version of the report demonstrates that the party’s cautionary approach to output was not necessarily limited to new media.⁵³⁸ In a draft copy, he suggested that the party should be investing in more (1) TV advertising

⁵³⁴ CPA CCO 120/4/1 Personal letter from Iain MacLeod to Selwyn Lloyd, 30 November 1963, in which MacLeod describes how Lloyd’s revelation about the disconnect between party-workers and ministers set off a chain of correspondence between the Prime Minister’s office, the Chief Whip and himself.

⁵³⁵ CPA CCO 120/4/24 ‘The Selwyn Lloyd Report 1963’, released 6 June 1963.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵³⁸ CPA CCO 120/4/25 Personal & Confidential letter from Lloyd to Lord Poole, 28 May 1963.

than traditional literature; (2) women speakers on TV; (3) broadcasts aimed at women; (4) and broadcasts referring to 'Tory trade unionism'.⁵³⁹

It is important to place these in context, because Lloyd's ideas for television were amid a range of other improvements in the party's communications strategy. However, the arrangement of his contributing notes demonstrates that he considered 'Press and Television'⁵⁴⁰ to be distinctly separate from 'General Communications',⁵⁴¹ suggesting that he believed the former deserved special attention. MacLeod charged Lloyd with the task of investigating the party in terms of its organisation. It is interesting that Lloyd's approach was holistic when compared with the traditional view of party organisation at that time, as, unlike the earlier Colyton Report, it did not simply identify the structures and functions within the party. It assessed the testimony of individuals which contributed to analysis of the working and living culture of the Tory Party. Moreover, Lloyd incorporated into his assessment the role of party publicity to a significant degree, showing that, although there was great affection for the loyalty of party members, the role of the traditional mass-party organisation was declining, and a Conservative Party of mass communication was rising.⁵⁴²

Television and Douglas-Home's Conservatives 1963-1964

In the early 1960s, the Tories were plagued by a new type of scandal that was broadcast across the nation in a manner that had not been experienced before in Britain. The 1963 'Profumo Affair' broke at the same time as the release of the Selwyn Lloyd Report, thus resulting in the coverage of the report being dropped by broadcasters.⁵⁴³ Moreover, the Profumo scandal, which followed a handful of additional political challenges for Macmillan, contributed to a decline in public confidence in the party.⁵⁴⁴ Subsequently, Macmillan resigned due to ill health, on 13 October 1963, and was succeeded by Alec Douglas-Home, 18 October 1963.⁵⁴⁵ Douglas-Home served as Prime Minister for one

⁵³⁹ CPA CCO 120/4/24 Confidential document for 'The Selwyn Lloyd Enquiry into the Party Organisation: Press and Television', ND c. 1962-3.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴¹ CPA CCO 120/4/24 Confidential document for 'The Selwyn Lloyd Enquiry into the Party Organisation: General Communications', ND c. 1962-3.

⁵⁴² Helen Margetts, 'The Cyber Party', in Richard Katz and William Crotty (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics* (Sage, London, 2006), pp. 528-535.

⁵⁴³ CPA CCO 120/4/25 Letter from Lewis Rudd, Assistant Editor of Associated-Rediffusion's 'This Week' programme apologising to Lloyd for dropping his interview due to 'the Profumo case', 7 June 1963.

⁵⁴⁴ See, Bale, *Drivers*, p. 54.

⁵⁴⁵ David Butler and Gareth Butler, *Twentieth Century Political Facts* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000), p. 26.

year and, at the 1964 General Election, on 15 October, was defeated by the Labour's Harold Wilson, who held a small majority of five seats in the House of Commons.⁵⁴⁶ This marked the end of thirteen years of continuous Conservative Party governance, during which time Britain had experienced significant economic, social, political, technological and cultural changes.

Consequently, the Conservative Party that Douglas-Home inherited was markedly different to the party under Churchill. In terms of television culture alone there was a stark difference in the focus of the party's communications. In 1952, c. 1.5 million homes held television licences. By 1963, the number of television licences in the UK had reached 12, 290, 173,⁵⁴⁷ which was an increase of c. 5 million since 1957. This is compared to a significant decline in radio licences holders from c. 7 million in 1957 to 3, 304, 098 in 1963.⁵⁴⁸ The even balance between the number of radio licence and television licence holders in 1957, which had so influenced the organisation of Conservative publicity in the early days of Macmillan's premiership, had changed significantly within a six year period. Therefore, the Conservative Party was required to undergo continual changes in order to keep pace with the developments in wider television trends.

In the run-up to the 1964 General Election, one of the party's three vice chairman, Paul Bryman, sent a memorandum to all MPs and candidates noting that 'television coverage of the coming election is expected to be more intense and more regional than it was in 1959'.⁵⁴⁹ Therefore, members and candidates were encouraged to use the TV coaching facilities at CCO for refresher courses. They were expected to make early appointments with the studio director, John Lindsey, in order to avoid the same type of congestion which was considered to have spoilt the TV training in the run-up to the 1959 election. The party politicians were coached in 'straight-to-the-camera talk' and 'interview' technique. Television training was a top priority for Douglas-Home's Conservatives, who increased their training operations significantly when compared with earlier elections.⁵⁵⁰ CCO continued to take pride in their television operations and believed that their training provided 'opportunities for people to acquire some knowledge of the medium and to practice and rehearse for possible and probable

⁵⁴⁶ Rallings and Thrasher, *Facts*, p. 59.

⁵⁴⁷ CPA CCO 4/9/380 TV and Radio Newsgram, 15 March 1963.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ CPA CCO 4/9/387 Letter from Paul Bryman to MPs and candidates, 30 July 1964.

⁵⁵⁰ See the extensive file on television training: CPA CCO 4/9/387 - Propaganda - television, general - 1961-6.

appearances.’⁵⁵¹ Therefore, they invested resources in sending-out repeated reminders for TV coaching to party politicians whom they expected to gain from the training.

Furthermore, in learning from the party’s television experiences at the previous election, the party adapted their procedures. An insight into the CCO-elite’s thoughts on the matter is given in a confidential document from Lord Poole, another of the party’s vice chairman, to the Chairman, Viscount Blakenham, in relation to election tactics in post-1959 elections.

Our first TV must be a surprise and a complete success. It must be flexible and put together in the last few days. This can only be done by careful preparation and many trials at which ministers and others must take part. Certain selected ministers must be asked now to be ready to cooperate over this. It will take much time and effort. The Prime Minister must take much more part in the conduct of the campaign than has been the practice in the past. It will not be enough for him just to make a tour of the country, leaving the control of the campaign in Central Office. A small “Tactical Headquarters” ... should accompany him everywhere, leaving Central Office as a sort of “Main Headquarters”... The Prime Minister should do the last broadcast himself – if possible alone – but should be prepared to take part in at least one other as circumstances demand. The manifesto must be launched with a major press conference which should be taken by the Prime Minister at which there should be a number of other cabinet ministers to answer questions on their own subjects. This should be on TV if this is possible and must of course be at the beginning of the campaign. The details of this press conference must be carefully worked out... You will see that what I am recommending is that we fight the campaign on the exact opposite lines that we did in 1955 and 1959.⁵⁵²

The most striking aspect of this extract is the sense of confidence and knowingness that radiates from the language. The party appears to have matured in its approach to its publicity and television techniques to the extent that members of the now experienced CCO-elite began addressing these matters with greater authority than in previous elections. Furthermore, the party hierarchy appears to have changed to some extent. No longer did the party-elites pay absolute deference to their leader and prime minister. In fact, the CCO-elites were beginning to assume greater control over the process of mastering TV and publicity techniques. At almost every level of the party hierarchy, including the highest ministerial-elite, the maturation of political television culture was

⁵⁵¹ CPA CCO 4/9/387 Memorandum from John Lindsey, Head of Radio and Television Section, to MPs and candidates, 30 July 1964.

⁵⁵² CPA CCO 20/17/4 Confidential letter from Lord Poole to the Chairman, 30 December 1963, p. 3.

being experienced. Political participants were now required to fall in line under these developments, which in turn influenced significantly the Tories' organisational culture.

Conclusions

The Conservative Party underwent a significant process of change 1957-1964. Its culture and organisation developed gradually and continuously during the period, through which it assimilated aspects of wider-changes in political culture and television culture. However, the party experienced periods of rapid change prior to and after the 1959 General Election.⁵⁵³ In the early part of Macmillan's Conservatives, the party maintained much of its attitudes, approaches and traditions toward television and publicity, as observed in Eden's Conservatives. The party in the run-up to the 1959 General Election invested much of its time and resources in understanding the role of political television in both its internal and external interests. However, it maintained a competitive but cautious attitude to the use of television as a mass communication tool for reaching the voter. This led to an evenly balanced approach to the organisation of the party's publicity; and a continued investment in the party-workers at the grassroots. The party largely continued to behave like a mass-based party, using methods to motivate its membership. The impact of TV regulation and wider committee culture in Parliament continued to contribute to the culture of the Conservative-elites. The Tories, as a dominant partner in the processes of broadcaster regulation maintained an observable degree of control over the direction of political television in Britain.

As Macmillan's Conservatives approached the 1959 General Election, the status quo of the party's hierarchy and organisation was being challenged. There was a realisation that the party needed to do more to integrate itself in the growing dominance of wider television-culture. This led CCO to implement some significant changes that required the party to make observable adaptations. These developments had the potential to cause tensions between main groupings within the party organisation, e.g. the divisions between Downing Street and the Parliamentary Party over Ministerial Broadcasts. At all levels of the party organisation, an understanding and appreciation for the role of television was maturing to a degree that the party began addressing and investing in (1) improving its broadcasting weaknesses; (2) adapting its publicity procedures; (3) managing its messages specifically for television broadcast; and (4) training its speakers in line with its richer understanding of the medium and developing

⁵⁵³ See, Schein's theory for the impact of leadership in speeding-up change in organisational culture in Chapter Two.

on-screen Conservative personalities. These steps contributed to a trend towards a tighter and more pronounced professionalised-culture at CCO. MPs in particular displayed a keen interest in how the political class appeared on TV, which manifested itself in new avenues for debate, interaction and training with individuals at CCO. As the party leadership, the Parliamentary Party, CCO and the regional and local party-professionals adapted to new advances in political television, e.g. Regional Broadcasts, the party's focus and thinly stretched resources began to shift from engaging its membership for campaign activism at the grassroots; to the elite political activity of television production and election broadcasts.

Furthermore, amid these organisational adaptations there was a change in the relationship between the broadcasters and Macmillan's Conservatives, which manifested itself in significant changes in the working-life of the party. Party-professionals were required to devote more time during general elections to satisfy the needs of the broadcasters. This contributed to a shift in the power relationships between the central-party and the BBC and ITA, which came with the realisation that the party could no longer exert control over television or the broadcasters. However, the increasingly professionalised-operations at CCO and Downing Street took steps to master the medium of television through implementing greater centralised autonomy and control over the wider-party operations relating to television publicity output. The centralisation of the party's television broadcasting reached new heights in Macmillan's act of personally approving speakers for Regional Broadcasts. However, Heath, as Chief Whip, played what would seem the most pivotal mediatory role in the dynamics of the party's internal and external relationships with television. His personality, experience, connections and skill in tandem with his leadership role – mediating between the media, the Government, the Parliamentary Party and CCO – was a powerful position in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At that time, he was one of the most influential individuals in steering Tory television culture. His decisions greatly contributed to the course of Eden's Conservatives' relationship with political broadcasting and its role in the party's organisation and culture.⁵⁵⁴

As the party's TV-culture continued to mature in the early 1960s, the organisational focus gradually moved from Eden's Conservatives' approach to educating the wider-party on matters of political television; to equipping specific individuals in the party with the necessary skills to use television for assisting the

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

party's aim of winning voters in elections. The party learnt from its experiences in the 1959 General Election on which it structured its TV practice. Moreover, the realisation that television had become the dominant method for mass communication at election times led to the administering of its training being ranked in order of political seniority, which was quite different when compared with the party's open-to-all policy that was generally characteristic of the party in the first half of the 1950s decade. This further demonstrates the observed trend of the progressive tightening of the central-party's attitude to the party hierarchy. CCO became less interested in the views and ideas of the party membership in relation to political television. As television grew in its social omnipotence, its role as a tool for reaching-out to the public grew also in the Conservative Party. Therefore, in that transition, a degree of redundancy was experienced by the party's traditional activists. The newly professionalised-operations at CCO focused on serving the aims of the party through television. Therefore, the need for a mass-membership became less important. TV became an increasingly greater substitute for the traditional methods of communicating with the voter and the party became more grounded and defined as a TV-based party, rather than a mass-based party.

Under Douglas-Home's Conservatives, the pace at which the party moved toward greater centralisation intensified significantly. Party publicity in general was carefully managed and sanitised, and integrated with its television operations. The training of MPs and candidates in relation to performing on political television became a priority at CCO, which in turn impacted significantly on the nature of the life of middle-tier Conservative politicians. The CCO-elites reached a new peak in their understanding of the developments in wider political culture and television culture. It appears that in turn this manifested itself in a confident command of political strategies, in which television had taken centre stage. Douglas-Home was a new and relatively inexperienced party leader in terms of his command of political publicity techniques in the television age. Therefore, the power-relationship between the new premier and CCO-elites was weighted favourably towards the role of party-professionals. It manifested itself in some erosion of the traditional deference given to the party leader by CCO-elites. This significant development meant that Douglas-Home's CCO-elite assumed greater authoritative control over the prime minister's role in TV and publicity output in the run-up to the 1964 election.

Part III
The Research: 2005-2012

FIVE

Conservative Associations and the Internet

2008-2010

Richard Fenno suggests that while there is academic interest in the study of political parties and politicians ‘some of us will want to collect data through repeated interaction with these politicians in their natural habitats.’⁵⁵⁵ In Part II of this thesis, archival research informed an examination of the role of the advent of the new medium of television in the Conservative Party 1951-1964. Now in Part III, the thesis takes a four decade leap toward contemporary times in order to examine the role of the advent of specific internet technologies in the Conservative Party 2005-2012. The following two chapters present evidence collected in the natural habitats of the Conservative Party using an approach inspired by ethnographic methods and, although Part III is a continuation of the comparative history, it is written with an increased ethnographic sensibility, which was permitted by the virtue of my privileged access to the object of interest; and my unique roles as an active participant and researcher in the field with Cameron’s Conservatives.

The case studies presented in this chapter are focused on the role of the internet from the insider’s perspective and is influenced by ‘autoethnography’, in which the autobiographical narrative of the researcher’s memoirs, of more subjective experiences, are embraced in addition to the observation of others.⁵⁵⁶ My role as a Conservative candidate is featured along with additional testimony from the oral history of interview respondents. The chapter includes some key findings based on my firsthand observations as a Conservative participant in the cohorts and clusters of the Runnymede, Weybridge & Spelthorne Conservative Group (RWSCG) and in Conservative Future (CF). In later sections of this chapter, I detail descriptively richer

⁵⁵⁵ Richard Fenno, *Watching Politicians: Essays on Participant Observation* (Institute of Governmental Studies, Berkeley, 1990), p. 56.

⁵⁵⁶ See, for example, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, ‘Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject’, in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage, London, 2000), pp. 733-768; Stacy Holman Jones, ‘Autoethnography: Making the Personal Political’, in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds.), *The Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage, London, 2005), pp. 763-792; Leon Anderson, ‘Analytic Autoethnography’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (2006), pp. 373-395; Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as Method* (Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, 2008); and Salma Siddique, ‘Being in-between: The relevance of ethnography and auto-ethnography for psychotherapy research’, *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2011), pp. 310-316.

accounts of specific observations that I made during Conservative campaigns. It includes a firsthand account of my experience as the candidate for the Virginia Water Ward for the Runnymede Borough Council local by-election in 2009. This is followed by a more focused analysis of my experience as a parliamentary candidate in the Anglesey Conservatives' general election campaign, 2010.

The aim of these accounts is to take a critical stance while embracing my personal and emotional experiences within Cameron's Conservatives; insofar that the accounts seek to unearth what is 'anthropologically strange'⁵⁵⁷ about the Conservative Party's contemporary new media culture. The narratives are often formed out of combined perspectives that include both 'self' and 'other'. In the process of presenting these narratives together, this chapter becomes more closely related to the ethnographic methodology that has been described as the 'observation of participation', in which the ethnographer both experiences and observes 'their own and others' coparticipation within the ethnographic encounter'.⁵⁵⁸ This emerged as a type of proto-autoethnographic method and is in contrast to the more dispassionate approaches to observing 'others' in participant observation, like, for example, the political ethnographies of Lorraine Baynard de Volo,⁵⁵⁹ and Alexander Smith.⁵⁶⁰ The case studies below are written with the aim of communicating to the reader some ethnographic realism. In this sense, they are similar to Smith's ethnographic account of the Scottish Conservatives.

⁵⁵⁷ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2009), p. 9.

⁵⁵⁸ Barbara Tedlock, 'From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The emergence of Narrative Ethnography', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (1991), p. 69.

⁵⁵⁹ Lorraine Baynard de Volo, 'Participant Observation, Politics and Power Relations: Nicaraguan Mothers and US Casino Waitresses', in Edward Schatz (ed.), *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 2009), pp. 217-236.

⁵⁶⁰ Alexander Smith, *Devolution and the Scottish Conservatives: Banal activism, electioneering and the politics of irrelevance* (Manchester University Press, 2011).

The Contemporary Case Studies

As identified in Part I, the role of individual leadership is significant in relation to the trajectories of political and organisational culture.⁵⁶¹ In this thesis, the role of leadership is especially pertinent in terms of explaining the directions taken by local associations and campaign teams in their use of the internet as a political tool. Furthermore, this ethnography has been fortunate to gain privileged access to the culture of interest; and develop close relationships with informants. Therefore, it is important to recognise that, as a candidate in leadership roles during the ethnographic process, my personal choices and leanings will have had some impact on the nature of the outcomes. However, without being in these positions of leadership, I would not have gained such rich access to artefacts and informants. Any trade-off in this scenario is outweighed by the significant benefits of deeply infiltrating Tory culture. Ultimately, the autoethnographic accounts are specific historical perspectives that are generated from my personal experiences that will have been undoubtedly influenced, to some extent, by my own interpretation of the sources and data. The specific case perspectives that are given in the remainder of this chapter provide dense foundations on which to place the more generalised analysis of the national Conservative Party that is presented in Chapter Six.

Anglesey and Surrey: The Geographic Case Studies

Comparing Conservative culture in Anglesey and Surrey reveals some differences. Surrey is largely a location that serves as a commuter belt for employment in London and the surrounding areas. Anglesey is, traditionally, an agricultural island community, which, due to its remote location, has struggled to maintain buoyant alternative industries and employment for the islanders. Surrey is known as one of the most affluent counties in the UK, and Anglesey one of the poorest.⁵⁶² The RWSCG had significantly greater pooled-resources and facilities than Anglesey Conservatives in terms of membership figures; fundraising potential; the number of hours worked by

⁵⁶¹ Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (John Wiley, San Francisco, 2010); Tim Bale, *The Conservatives since 1945, The Drivers of Party Change*, (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁶² See, for example, Dylan Jones-Evans, 'Anglesey suffers more economic woe', *Western Mail*, 3 October 2009, online: <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/business-in-wales/business-columnists/2009/10/03/anglesey-suffers-more-economic-woe-91466-24840228/> [accessed, 12 December 2012]; and Saba Salman, 'Is Cameron's 'big society' reserved for the rich?', *The Guardian*, 18 May 2011, online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/may/18/camerons-big-society-rich-surrey> [accessed, 12 December 2012].

employed staff; the number of volunteers; value, condition and size of property assets; and the age of and access to computer-mediated technologies. The RWSCG had a relatively large and inviting two storey, four bedroom, detached property, which housed their joint association operations and was valued at £375,000 (shared equally between the two associations) in December 2010.⁵⁶³

Until 2009, the Anglesey Association office had been located for a number of months in a domestic village-residence belonging to one of the association officers. However, by 2010, a property that was owned by Anglesey Conservatives was opened in Llangefni town centre for use by the Conservative PPC. According to an informant on the association executive, the property was valued at approximately £50,000 in 2010. The ‘two-up-two-down’ mid-terrace was in poor decorative and structural order and had a number of visible areas of damp. In comparison with RWSCG, the office was poorly maintained and uninviting. The computer and printing facilities of Anglesey Conservatives were aging and significantly inferior to those shared among the RWSCG. The upper-floor of the Anglesey property was rented to a live-in tenant. The public entrance-door opened on to the Llangefni high street. The office-users and the domestic-tenant shared the main access-way. The one-room ground floor Anglesey office was used for administration; a campaign headquarters; and the advertised location for surgeries in which constituents were invited to meet with the Conservative PPC. However, during my 117 days as the candidate, no more than four members of the public visited the office during surgery hours, despite regular advertisements in the local newspaper. A greater number of individuals called the office landline, which was manned by a part-time employed office-administrator and an ageing answering machine. In contrast, the RWSCG shared both a part-time agent and a part-time administrator, in addition to the group’s two MPs’ parliamentary staff. It appears that my experience of the Anglesey association is similar to Alexander Smith’s view of the Conservatives’ local office on Castle Street, Dumfries, c. 2003, which he reports as suffering ‘from a lack of modern equipment and resources.’⁵⁶⁴

In 2009, in terms of membership and voluntary support, individual Surrey Conservative associations had significantly greater numbers of paid-up members than Anglesey. RWCA had 678 registered members, and Spelthorne 403. The Surrey

⁵⁶³ RNA ‘Runnymede & Weybridge Conservative Association (RWCA) Annual General Meeting’, Notes to accounts for the year ended 31 December 2010, p. 8, point 2. On 29 November 2011, during a scheduled research interview, this document was presented to me for use in this thesis by Hugh Meares, who was the RWCA chairman in the run-up to the 2010.

⁵⁶⁴ Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*, p. 91.

Conservative association with the largest membership was South West Surrey. Its 1,382 registered members represented 13.5% of the total 10,223 Conservative Party members in Surrey.⁵⁶⁵ Out of 11 Surrey associations, Spelthorne was ranked lowest in terms of membership numbers, with 4% of the total Surrey membership. RWCA ranked two places higher with 6.7%. According to an informant with access to Anglesey Conservatives' membership data, Anglesey's association had 134 paying members. This indicator alone demonstrates how the lowest ranking Surrey association in terms of membership had considerably more members than the Anglesey association. Moreover, the Anglesey membership total was less than a tenth of Surrey's highest ranking association. This illustrates the wide-ranging scale of membership figures from the higher performing associations like Surrey to the lower-performing associations like Anglesey. The membership figures in a Conservative association indicate the fundraising potential and therefore the financial strength of an association. Stuart Ball relates the strength and weakness of associations, and their degree of 'autonomy' from the central-party, to the financial independence of the local party. He suggests that these factors can have a significant impact on the culture in which an association operates and the nature of its relationship with CCO/CCHQ.⁵⁶⁶ However, it is important to note that in 2010, the financial health of an association was not necessarily an indication of how much support a candidate had in terms of grassroots-workers during a campaign. Anglesey was a relatively poor Conservative association, but the campaign drew activists on action days in excess of 25 participants. This was reasonably high in comparison with other local campaigns, such as the Conservative target seat of Aberconwy.

Each individual campaign illustrated in this chapter is unique. They are constituted by a range of variables which include, but are not limited to, the candidate; the geographical location; the election type; the individuals within the campaign team and the Conservative association; and the point in history in which the campaign is being fought - which in turn influences the technologies used, the pertinent policy issues of the campaign and the economic backdrop for funding the campaign. Whiteley et al. describe influences on campaign outcomes as 'controls'. Their generic controls include constituency: 'social characteristics', 'percentage of owner-occupiers', 'incumbency',

⁵⁶⁵ RNA RWCA, Report, p. 3.

⁵⁶⁶ Stuart Ball, 'Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p. 263.

‘marginality’, and national and local socio-economic and political events.⁵⁶⁷ These factors have a dynamic relationship with the macro-level culture of the national Conservative Party organisation; and also the sub- and micro- cultures of regional and local specifics both inside and outside the Conservative Party. For example, the conditions under which my personal campaigns in Virginia Water and Anglesey were fought were in some respects similar and in other respects quite different. Whiteley et al. describe the ‘fragmentary nature of the Conservative’ Party’s associations and relate this to each being historically autonomous.⁵⁶⁸ Therefore, naturally, being a Conservative local government candidate in Surrey is different in many respects to being a Conservative Parliamentary Candidate in Anglesey. This is especially the case in terms of public profile; the local impact of the candidate; the daily role of the candidate; and the candidate’s relationship in relation to the organisational and hierarchical aspects of the Conservative Party. Therefore, one could argue that the two examples do not make a logical or appropriate comparison. However, in terms of the cultural basics of campaigning in the two locations, in many respects, the approaches and traditions of the two associations were found to be remarkably similar. There were both cultural and organisational characteristics of my campaign as the Conservative PPC in Anglesey which felt very familiar because of my prior experiences campaigning as a Conservative candidate for a seat on Runnymede Borough Council, e.g. canvassing door-to-door and delivering leaflets in groups of Conservative participants, and the rituals and customs these entailed.

Becoming an Initiated Member of Cameron’s Conservatives⁵⁶⁹

Before becoming actively involved in the Conservative Party, I joined the party membership for a number of consecutive years using the party’s online sign-up function on its website at Conservatives.com. On each occasion, I was sent a national membership card attached to a welcome letter. In 2006, the membership welcome letter read:

I warmly welcome you as a member of David Cameron’s team, as we take forward David’s message of change, optimism and hope... By joining us nationally you also become a member

⁵⁶⁷ Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd, and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2002), pp. 204-206.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁶⁹ See, also, Alexander Smith’s description of becoming an insider of the *Scottish Conservatives* in Chapter Two.

of your local party. I am forwarding your details to them and expect they will be in touch with you shortly. If you need details about your local party you can go to the home page of the party website www.conservatives.com and enter your postcode. Many of our members feel they want to do a little more to help us to win elections, even if it's just by delivering a few leaflets from time to time. It would be great if you could help in anyway.⁵⁷⁰

At that time, I resided in Devon and Worcestershire and, although my membership had declared me as being a member of 'Cameron's team', I was not contacted by any member of a local Conservative association. Therefore, my affiliation with the Conservative Party remained tenuous in that, for a number of years, I had no physical face-to-face contact with any individual actively involved in the party. Between September 2007 and August 2008, I became a resident of the Spelthorne Borough. Subsequently, I updated my address details using Conservatives.com. However, as a Spelthorne Borough resident, I was not automatically reassigned to the Spelthorne association by CCHQ. The association had no record of my party membership and were not informed by CCHQ in good time that I had moved to Spelthorne. The convenience of using the internet for membership subscription meant there was a degree of trade-off in which my expectations of being a party member were not being met.

The view of one Conservative association chairman offers a deeper perspective on the impact of changing social trends and internet technologies within the membership organisation of the party.

I think one of the many reasons why the party has had a membership crisis over the last 10 to 15 years is that the whole nature of politics and membership, and people's attitudes to parties, have changed. One of the things that used to happen before membership was computerised was that the branches had responsibility for, and ownership for membership, so that every October they would go out and knock on the doors. They knew the people. They said, "Hello Doris, how's the dog, are you going to renew?" This kept the branches in a healthy state of mind. Once the membership was computerised, we moved to a situation where the association would send out standard mail-merge letters, that's an impersonal form of communication, and it may not be followed up in a timely way. That probably was the only way to do it because this army of volunteers that we had in the 90s was gradually disappearing, so I don't think there was any option about that change.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁷⁰ RNA Membership welcome letter from Francis Maude MP, Conservative Party Chairman, to Anthony Ridge-Newman, 2 November 2006.

⁵⁷¹ RNA Hugh Meares Interview, 29 November 2011, Appendix 3, p. 69.

This suggests that these changes in the party's approach to organising party membership were inevitable and that the party has followed a wider-trend due to changing attitudes towards political parties. It indicates that individuals ranging from central party-elites to local association-elites hold the view that this shift in the party's culture, away from face-to-face relationships between party and member, are 'impersonal', but a necessary organisational evolution.

Two years after becoming a 'paid-up' member of Cameron's Conservatives, and before beginning this research in October 2008, I made the personal decision to become more actively involved in Conservative Party activism and events. Therefore, in October 2007, I took the step to contact by email an officer of Spelthorne Conservatives. However, the process of being recognised as a paid-up Conservative member was challenging. In a reply to the initial email I received from the Spelthorne officer, I wrote:

I am a little confused by the process of joining Spelthorne Conservatives. I recently paid my party membership online, which will take me through to November 2008. I am not sure what you mean by my joining in January. Will I have to pay another subscription then? Should I be returning the membership form that you attached even though I am already a party member?⁵⁷²

As a Conservative member who had not yet been initiated in the particulars of active Conservative Party membership, I did not understand at that time that the party was running two different membership systems that were out-of-sync. Online membership was renewable 12 months from the date it was purchased. As a national membership, it was indirectly associated with the local Conservative association. Although the system did automatically assign national members to their local association, it was for officers of that association to act in terms of making contact with the member. However, if a member paid their membership subscription directly to an association, there was greater likelihood that the association would make some contact with the member. Association membership ran on an annual basis and was collected in January every year, but, as an internet member who had not yet been involved with an association directly, I did not realise it.

This example demonstrates how at that time the party's online-membership operations had not been smoothly integrated within the wider organisation of party

⁵⁷² RNA Email reply to a Spelthorne Conservatives officer, via ant@politician.com, 4 November 2007.

membership. Therefore, relatively new and peripatetic members, especially those who had joined the party online only, and had no previous formal contact with a Conservative association, were at a significant disadvantage if they were interested in becoming actively involved in the party. Internet membership appeared, on the surface, to be representative of Cameron's Conservatives' approach – that all were 'warmly welcome' in the Conservative Party. However, the reality was that becoming involved with some local Conservative associations was more in-keeping with joining a closed social club.⁵⁷³ Already initiated individuals with prior experience of the cultural workings of the Conservative association were at an advantage for active entry into any newly approached association. As an internet member, I had to actively seek out ways of making contact with the party at the grassroots. Therefore, although the party's website was a convenient tool for attracting new members and donations to the Conservative Party, its role had not been expanded within the organisational processes to a point at which it fully facilitated active engagement for online members.⁵⁷⁴

Now that I am a fully-initiated party member, in retrospect, I would suggest that the party's lack of integration of its two types of membership organisation in the early run-up to the 2010 General Election was a significant hindrance to it integrating new members and potential activists into its workforce at the grassroots. Therefore, this suggests that CCHQ's strategy and interest, in terms of membership subscriptions, were focused on raising central funds via the internet, thus leaving the associations to their own initiatives in terms of nurturing a local support base. The extent to which this was achieved was largely dependent on the approach and leadership style of each association. In 2010, the membership welcome letter read:

I hope you will get involved in your local Conservative association. Whether it's volunteering to deliver leaflets, taking part in one of our Social Action projects, assisting with fundraising activities, or encouraging your friends to join, you can help build our movement for change.⁵⁷⁵

However, unlike in 2006, the letter lacked any indication of, firstly, whether an association would be in touch with the member and, secondly, how the member could research the location of their association or where the information could be found.

⁵⁷³ RNA René Kinzett Interview, 12 March 2011, Appendix 7, p.123.

⁵⁷⁴ See Kavanagh in Chapter Two, with reference to this initiation process and political socialisation, through which, in the Conservative case, the new participant undergoes a learning of the party's cultural and hierarchical ways.

⁵⁷⁵ RNA Membership welcome letter from Eric Pickles, Conservative Party Chairman, to Anthony Ridge-Newman, 25 March 2010.

Although the central-party and many Conservative associations had their own websites in the run-up to the 2010 General Election, it appears that there was the assumption that potential supporters of the party would intrinsically understand the complex organisational intricacies of British Conservatism; and, therefore, that the individuals interested in joining the party via the internet in the pursuit of grassroots activism would eventually find their own way to active engagement from a generic online national party application process. In a society which had become increasingly fragmented by technologies, with hundreds of channels of communication through the ever-evolving internet, television, radio and mobile technologies, it would seem that it had become incumbent on the individual political-neophyte to journey their way through a process of discovery in order to make first contact with their local association. I experienced this process firsthand on four different occasions in locations within the counties of Devon, Worcestershire and Surrey. It is not plausible to claim with any certainty that such experiences of becoming actively involved with local associations were, at that time, widespread. However, it does indicate that the Conservative Party's approach to internet subscriptions fits a changing political culture away from one that is rooted in traditional mass-based characteristics. Conversely, survey research by Ana Cardenal on party activism in Catalonian parties suggests that other parties elsewhere have used effectively party websites to engage members in offline political activity.⁵⁷⁶

Before I became initiated into the Conservative-fold, I interacted regularly via email with an association officer of Spelthorne Conservatives, which eventually developed from a more distant exchange of electronic text, in the form of an email, to a more personable mobile telephone conversation in which we began to develop some trust and rapport.⁵⁷⁷ It is important to note that, at that time, I was an unknown entity for the Conservative Party, both nationally and in the individual locations around Britain in which I had lived. In this case, the Spelthorne Conservatives officer was cautious of embracing a new aspirant activist and politician who, at least seemed to have, appeared from nowhere into an email inbox. This is an example of how email and other electronic-exchanges are an inferior substitute for initial face-to-face

⁵⁷⁶ Ana Cardenal, 'Party Activism in the Internet Era: Testing for Reinforcement and Mobilization,' UOC working paper, URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/10609/8763> (2011).

⁵⁷⁷ For theory on the challenges of rapport and internet participation, see, Sharlene Hesse-Biber and Amy Griffin, 'Internet-Mediated Technologies and Mixed Methods Research: Problems and Prospects', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2012), pp. 43-61.

interaction for a Conservative participant with the aim of becoming engaged to some degree within the party's organisation.⁵⁷⁸

In the New Year of 2008, the Spelthorne officer began advising me of how I could engage in the association on matters of activism and how I could develop my personal political aspirations. Once trust and rapport had been established mutually through telephone conversations and face-to-face contact, my progress in the process of developing my standing within the party accelerated considerably. Later, I was interviewed by the association and placed on the Surrey County Council Candidates List, 30 April 2008.⁵⁷⁹ However, I made the personal decision not stand for selection at the Conservative branch level of Spelthorne Conservatives.

In August 2008, I became a resident in the Runnymede & Weybridge Constituency and subsequently joined RWCA. As both the RWCA and Spelthorne associations were operated in the same building, using the same staff and technology, I had made already the inside connections with the relevant administrators who subsequently made easier my transfer of membership to RWCA. I was by that point an initiated member of the Conservative association class and, therefore, had a greater understanding of the culture in which it operated. Therefore, my transition of integration to the somewhat different culture of RWCA was smoother and more welcoming. However, it is important to note that personalities were a factor in that transition. For whatever reason, I felt more naturally-aligned with the approach and culture of the RWCA. In Spelthorne, I felt like an outsider and responsible for integrating myself. In RWCA, perhaps by the virtue of the fact that through my interaction with Spelthorne I had become a known entity to the party, I felt more at home with the officers running the association and within my local branch of Virginia Water & Thorpe.

Runnymede, Spelthorne & Weybridge Conservative Group

In early 2008, I was an under 30s member of Spelthorne Conservative Association. Subsequently, via email, I was put in touch with, and invited by, another 'young/er member'⁵⁸⁰ of Spelthorne Conservatives to attend a CF event in London, 5 March. The

⁵⁷⁸ Martin Tanis and Tom Postmes, 'Two faces of anonymity: Paradoxical effects of cues to identity in CMC, *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2007), pp. 955-970.

⁵⁷⁹ RNA Letter from Spelthorne Agent to Anthony Ridge-Newman, 30 April 2008.

⁵⁸⁰ These terms are used informally and regularly by members of the Conservative Party to describe those members under the age of thirty who usually belong to a CF (formerly the Young Conservatives) branch. It was popular for members of CF to belong to multiple branches and associations in a range of

event by its very nature was social and hosted in a public London bar. It quickly became apparent to me that the central interest for most of the individuals at the event was to network socially within a Tory cohort. Therefore, I participated in the customs that I was observing. I met a large number of 'CFers',⁵⁸¹ many of whom were young professionals who freely disseminated their business cards to individuals with whom they had developed a rapport. By the end of the evening, I had collected 12 business cards. Likewise, I reciprocated by giving-out a personal card that I had had professionally-printed with my name and email address.

A number of individuals suggested that we should 'find each other on Facebook'. This phrase was used as a social cue, in order to indicate a mutual interest in connecting with other young Conservatives. Therefore, the advent of Facebook, as a networking tool used by the CFers, had begun to facilitate social interactions in both off- and on- line Tory social gatherings. Alexander Smith describes his first networking interactions in Dumfries c. 2003, before the advent of Facebook, as a challenge, because the most enthusiastic individuals he encountered were those whom created barriers to him 'meeting local Tories'.⁵⁸² In contrast, I found connecting with CF networks through the use of Facebook comparatively fruitful and immediate.

I had been a member of the social networking website 'Facebook' (Facebook.com) since 2005. Therefore, on my return home to Spelthorne from the London event, I checked my Facebook account online, via a personal laptop-computer. In the two hours it took for me to travel home, I had received nine Facebook 'Friend Requests'⁵⁸³ from individuals I had met at the event. I subsequently reciprocated by 'accepting their friend requests'⁵⁸⁴ via my personal computer, and sending friend requests to a number of other individuals whom I had met at the event. Unlike Smith's Scotland experience, Tories seemed, unsurprisingly, abundant in South East England. Following my first networking event, I was invited to a number of Facebook groups that were used by young Conservatives. In the following two months, the number of CF Facebook events and CF friend requests I gained grew significantly. Through that process, I made an influential contact in Surrey CF. The Surrey CF Area Chairman,

geographical locations, whether the individual did or did not have a connection to the local area, either formally through paying a subscription or informally by joining the many CF Facebook groups.

⁵⁸¹ CFers is a term used by Conservative insiders to describe members of CF.

⁵⁸² Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*, p. 19.

⁵⁸³ 'Friend Request' is a term is used by the creators of Facebook.com as an application that allows a member to search for other members.

⁵⁸⁴ This is common Facebook phraseology.

Alexandra Swann,⁵⁸⁵ had been appointed to oversee the organisation of the CF branches in the county. In mid-2008, I was invited by Swann to join her team on the Surrey CF Area committee as the branch development officer. I accepted the position and became involved in a number of Surrey CF events. However, my role in Surrey CF did not mature until I moved residence and switched my membership to RWCA in August 2008. This indicates how, although Facebook was a useful tool for the organisational aspects of CF, my growth as a Conservative participant was reliant on having roots imbedded within a fertile Conservative association.

I had developed already face-to-face relationships with the chairmen of both RWCA and Spelthorne Conservative associations by the time Swann and I had decided to develop a new CF branch to serve the geographical area covered by the RWSCG. Therefore, I announced the proposal of the branch to the chairmen in an email and was subsequently invited to the home of the RWCA Chairman, Hugh Meares, in order to discuss founding a CF branch. Then, via email, I proceeded to announce the following to a number of Surrey Conservative officials:

When I met with Hugh Meares (RWCA Chairman) at his home on 3 September 2008, I bumped into Nick Wood-Dow (Surrey Chairman) who said he would like to connect with Surrey Conservative Future. As Surrey CF Branch Development Officer, I said I would put Nick in touch with Alexandra Swann (Surrey CF Chairman). Alex [Swann] has suggested meeting before she returns to university. I have also discussed branch development in Virginia Water & Thorpe with Hugh [Meares] and Geoff Woodger (Virginia Water and Thorpe Branch Chairman (of which I am now a member)) and Alex would also like to meet to discuss the CF plan...⁵⁸⁶

After the meeting took place on 23 September, I sent to the same recipients an email stating:

I wish to thank Nick Wood-Dow (Surrey Chairman), Alexandra Swann (Surrey CF Chairman), Hugh Meares (Runnymede Chairman), Geoff Woodger (Virginia Water & Thorpe Chairman) and Joshua Burge (Runnymede & Spelthorne CF Deputy Chairman) for their attendance and contribution to yesterday's meeting in Runnymede. I am sure we all agree it was a worthwhile meeting and a productive one at that. In summary, we have formed a new Conservative Future branch of which I am chairman. "Runnymede & Spelthorne Conservative Future" (RSCF) will serve young Conservatives with strong links to the area. This branch will run independently of

⁵⁸⁵ Alexandra Swann has since defected to the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and been given a Telegraph blog [online]: <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/author/alexandraswann/>.

⁵⁸⁶ RNA Email sent to nine Surrey Conservative officials, via ant@politician.com, 15 September 2008.

the collegiate branch of Royal Holloway, University of London. Although, we hope, the two will run in a complementary capacity. We are planning a membership drive over the coming months which will culminate in a drinks reception for prospective members. This is likely to be held on the evening of Thursday 22nd January, 2009, at the Runnymede Hotel with a prominent Tory politician as speaker ... We intend that invitations will be sent out two weeks prior to the event. The event will be free to attend... This event has been modelled on the recent success of the Elmbridge CF membership drive in which 29 new members were recruited... I will soon produce a Facebook group for members to join.⁵⁸⁷

As Smith notes, organising something along these lines using the internet in Dumfries, in the run-up to the 2003 Scottish Parliament elections, would have been virtually impossible, because ‘the communications infrastructure that was needed to support broadband and internet connections was very poor’.⁵⁸⁸ In fact, broadband was a generally absent medium in much of the area at the time.⁵⁸⁹

In the Surrey case, the discourses and interactions that surrounded events noticeably differed in terms of the preferred methods of communications used by the individuals involved. My dialogues with the younger members occurred almost exclusively using some form of internet application like email or Facebook. However, the older members preferred to be either called via telephone or to have a face-to-face meeting. This indicates that there was some division in the communication cultures between the younger and older members. There is further evidence for this in the response that the RWCA chairman gave in an interview:

The internet means different things to different people. There is an age divide here and there is a digital divide. The internet started off as a means of sending email messages, and to the younger generation now it’s an enormously powerful communication device using new media tools, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter and so forth. The difficulty that we have in the Conservative associations is that they tend to be populated by two sorts of people. There are the young and enthusiastic political volunteers, who join in their twenties, they work hard and they pass through. We then have a cadre of people who are there always. These are people in their fifties and sixties and seventies. The difficulty that many of these people face is that they may struggle when it comes to putting a new cartridge in their laser printer. So, they’re perhaps not entirely hands-on. The internet, to an association that is run by this older cadre, is

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁸ Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*, p. 53.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

probably going to make less effective use of what the internet offers than might be the case, for example, in a young business or with some of the younger volunteers.⁵⁹⁰

Generally, this would suggest that the use of internet in the wider-membership of the RWCA was, at that time, relatively generation specific. Similarly, in his ethnography Smith notes that ‘elderly’ volunteers’ were less willing to canvass urban areas.⁵⁹¹ The ‘cadre’ of older members in Runnymede, who are suggested to have been the controlling body of the association in the run-up to the 2010 General Election, had an already established tradition and culture in terms of their uses of communication technologies.⁵⁹² Therefore, the use of new internet media by younger members was a divergence from the already established organisational culture of their associations.⁵⁹³

However, in the case of RWCA, there is evidence to suggest that, although the cadre of the party were less inclined to adapt their behaviours and practices in line with technological advances, the roles of organisational-elites, like the chairman himself, benefitted when useful internet technologies were embraced.

As far as Cherry Orchard is concerned, which is our association office in Staines, I do work on the Cherry Orchard computers, probably one to two hours every day, but I probably only visit Cherry Orchard, apart from meetings, about four or five times a year, so almost all my work is done remotely and I suspect that this will be the model going forward which will have a series of agents who travel around the patch hot-desking from where they go. The internet has been such an enormously powerful force over the last ten years and what fast broadband links, or relatively fast broadband links, both where I live in Englefield Green and in Staines, mean is that I can sit at my desk in Englefield Green, I can use something like ‘Remote Desktop’ or ‘LogMeIn’ to log straight on to the Cherry Orchard computers. I can print material out on the Cherry Orchard printers or I can print it out at home. I just don’t have to travel every day down to Cherry Orchard.⁵⁹⁴

This suggests that the role of internet technology in the daily working-life of an association chairman is dependent upon personal choice; technical knowledge; access to

⁵⁹⁰ RNA Hugh Meares Interview, 29 November 2011, Appendix 3, p. 65-66.

⁵⁹¹ Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*, p. 92.

⁵⁹² For a definition of a ‘cadre’, see, Chapter Two.

⁵⁹³ This can be explained by Schein’s theory (see, Chapter Two) of divergence in traditional hierarchy in the postmodern context. The ‘traditional’ being the more unified model of the mass-culture generally exhibited in late modernity and demonstrated in Part II of this thesis. In RWCA there was the emergence of Schein’s ‘contemporary networks’. Further observations of this dichotomous trend are presented also in Chapter Six.

⁵⁹⁴ RNA Meares Interview, p. 64.

the relevant technologies; and inclination towards the use of technology. These leadership qualities and choices are likely to impact on the manner in which the association and local campaigns are organised.

In comparison with my observations of the Anglesey association chairman the approaches of Conservative chairmen can vary significantly. For example, the Anglesey chairman did not use the internet whatsoever; delegated all administrative activities to association officers; and answered a mobile telephone only on rare occasions. Furthermore, Meares' testimony suggests that, during his chairmanship, his grasp for technological knowhow enhanced and changed his personal working experience within the party in a practical way. The use of internet applications had reduced considerably the frequency of his journeys to the association office. Stuart Ball writes that in Conservative associations, historically, 'the crucial position has always been that of the chairman: he or she effectively ran the association on a day-to-day basis.'⁵⁹⁵ A lack of current scholarly perspectives on contemporary local organisations means that this traditional view of local leadership is possibly dated.⁵⁹⁶ However, the RWCA case does suggest that there are, at least, characteristic remnants of the traditional role of the chairman extant in present day associations, which can be the deciding factor for the impact of the uses of new technologies in some local settings.

The use of internet by the RWCA for campaigning in the run-up to the 2010 General Election remained limited in the early stages of development as a communication tool for reaching the voter.

We made very little use of email. We only have around 1,000 email addresses. We did try to work up some quite thoughtful email letters but it was early days for us. It's a full-scale endeavour communicating in this way, as it's also a full-scale endeavour in maintaining a web presence. It's easy enough to create a web presence but you then have to maintain it and that requires continuing effort, which you are not necessarily going to get from a voluntary party.⁵⁹⁷

The applications of internet technologies vary significantly in terms of the level of specialist knowledge needed to integrate them into the needs of an organisation like a Conservative association. The RWCA chairman was indicating that, unless an

⁵⁹⁵ Stuart Ball, 'Local Conservatism and the Evolution of the Party Organisation', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p. 268.

⁵⁹⁶ Paul Whiteley, Patrick Seyd, and Jeremy Richardson, *True Blues: The Politics of Conservative Party Membership* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 40.

⁵⁹⁷ RNA Meares Interview, p. 67.

association could have afforded to pay an internet specialist or had a willing volunteer with the technological knowhow and creative abilities to maintain the local party website, the use of a website at the association level for campaigning becomes significantly limited. Furthermore, his testimony suggests that, in order to have made direct contact with voters in the Runnymede & Weybridge Constituency via email, the association would have had to have taken a more innovative approach in order to have harvested email addresses from electors.

There were limits to the services, like website initiatives, provided to associations by the central-party in the run-up to 2010. Meares claimed that:

The party has quite an effective central website and they have put a lot of energy into this over the last two years. They have improved it considerably. Central Office made a content management website product available to the associations. It was pretty clunky, it looked pretty old-fashioned, it was just about adequate for putting up factual material. I think that the Conservative product that we had last year was a very old-fashioned, passive, fact-based website. It's going to be difficult for associations because everyone enjoys setting up websites, but they do not enjoy maintaining them so much. I think the energy for this will come from Central Office.⁵⁹⁸

My observations of RWCA noted how Meares made at least four attempts to secure voluntary assistance of younger members for the running of the website at Cherry Orchard; and that turnover of the volunteers was high due to individuals being unable to commit the time required to the frequent demands of the role. This and Meares' testimony suggests that unless an association had an able and committed webmaster within the local organisation, it would have had to invest significant funds into website development, and ongoing maintenance, or make use of the limited facilities provided by the central-party in the run-up to 2010. Moreover, the digital and age divides contributed to attitudinal barriers within the local party organisation that were likely to have slowed the developmental progress of RWCA's online presence. Research by Whiteley et al. indicates that 'age' and 'attitudes' of Conservative Party members have been longstanding variables that impact on the nature of local associations.⁵⁹⁹

Meares' testimony suggests that campaigning via websites at the local level was not a significant concern for investment by the central-party in the 2010 election. Although CCHQ had invested in a sophisticated parent website at Conservatives.com,

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁹⁹ Whiteley, Seyd, and Richardson, *True Blues*, pp. 147-149.

the aspiration to have a contemporary web-presence at the association level had to be initiated and developed by the associations themselves. However, in the case of the RWCA, the likelihood of that occurring was low due to its traditional and ageing cadre. Furthermore, with Runnymede & Weybridge being seen as a Conservative ‘safe seat’⁶⁰⁰ in the 2010 election, investing in a website was not such a priority as it was for other Conservative associations and their PPCs in more ‘marginal seats’,⁶⁰¹ like, for example, Laura Sandys⁶⁰² who contested and won the South Thanet Constituency from Labour; and Robin Walker,⁶⁰³ who did the same in Worcester. Unlike safe seats and ‘non-marginal seats’,⁶⁰⁴ marginal seat candidates were likely to be the recipients of Lord Ashcroft’s £3 million marginal seat fund. This enabled Conservative PPCs in marginal seats the opportunity to invest greater resources in a more sophisticated campaign.

When asked about the role of the internet in party organisation, Meares claimed that the association ‘used it extensively’.⁶⁰⁵ This is in contrast to his response on the use of the internet in terms of reaching the voter in the 2010 campaign. Meares described how internet technologies impacted in changing the association’s campaign procedures. He began by outlining the association’s traditional approach before the use of the internet in 2010:

During the course of an election, the branches will collect canvass information that has to somehow get onto the central Merlin⁶⁰⁶ system. Fresh canvass cards have to be handed back to the branches and then, on Election Day, this information has to be married up with the

⁶⁰⁰ ‘Safe seat’ is a term is used widely in political culture to refer to an elected position that represents a geographical area in which the voting constituents historically vote for a particular party, thus meaning that the likelihood of an incumbent party being voted out of office is low.

⁶⁰¹ The term ‘marginal seat’ generally refers to seats in which the number of votes from previous elections is more evenly distributed among the main contenders, thus meaning that those parties sharing the highest portion of the votes have a good chance of winning the seat at an election. The Conservative Party calculates the chances of winning certain seats and targets those seats it deems most probable to become Conservative by investing greater organisational and financial resources. The party calls these ‘Target Seats’.

⁶⁰² Dods Guide to the General Election 2010, p. 594.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., p. 679.

⁶⁰⁴ Non-marginal seats are also referred to as ‘un-winnable seats’ in Conservative Party vocabulary. Un-winnable seats are usually in reference to a group of seats known as the ‘city seats’ - the safe Labour held constituencies in cities like Liverpool and Manchester. However, there are also a number of seats in agrarian communities that, historically, the Conservatives have a very low likelihood of winning, like, for example, the Rhondda Constituency.

⁶⁰⁵ RNA Meares Interview, p. 68.

⁶⁰⁶ Merlin was a centralised database system that was networked nationally via the internet from CCHQ to the associations in the run-up to 2010. The associations required specific technology to use the Merlin network. The central-party instructed that it had to be located in an association office. The database was the successor to the former Blue Chip database, which was an autonomous and un-networked computerised system. Both systems manage canvass and membership information. According to Meares, Merlin contains information for 40-50 million electors.

telling results coming from the polling stations, so that in the evenings we can identify the people who are our supporters and who have not voted. This is a classic 'get-out the vote' campaigning technique. In the past, this has all been paper-based. The branch would fill in the canvass card, it would then motor the canvass card over to the association office and this was the reason why you wanted an association office that was relatively nearby and relatively accessible. Volunteers would then put this into the computers and that information would then go out to branches.⁶⁰⁷

Meares went on to describe how this was different in 2010 and how the association utilised an innovative internet-facilitated application in their campaign organisation.

We built an internet application that sat on top of Blue Chip, so that our branches were able to enter in their canvass information directly from their branch office, which was usually a bedroom or an office in somebody's home. They were able to pick up the results immediately, they could enter the telling results in immediately and they could then see who the people were who needed to be knocked up. Because this was all networked into the servers at Cherry Orchard, the telephone team at Cherry Orchard was able to see the same information in real time. We were able then to direct the telephone team at Cherry Orchard to back up the key stress points in our constituency and in the neighbouring constituencies that we were supporting.⁶⁰⁸

This demonstrates the heterogeneity of Conservative associations, which traditionally has been attributed to their 'autonomy'.⁶⁰⁹ Furthermore, Meares' testimony shows how individuals can impact on the direction and culture of each campaign. The system described above was unique to RWCA because it invested the highly-developed computer-programming skills of the chairman. In doing so, Meares used the internet as a platform to assist in innovations over and above that which had been supplied to the association in the form of the centralised Merlin database.

Unlike Merlin, its predecessor 'Blue Chip' was not designed with the potential for internet networking capabilities. Both databases were designed primarily for managing canvass information.⁶¹⁰ In turn, this data is used to 'get-out the vote',

⁶⁰⁷ RNA Meares Interview, p 68.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., pp 68-69.

⁶⁰⁹ Ball 'Evolution', p. 262.

⁶¹⁰ Blue Chip and Merlin technologies have, historically, played a significant role in the organisation of the party campaigns at the grassroots. Both systems produce canvass cards with voter and polling

specifically Conservative voters, on election days through a process called ‘knocking-up’, whereby Conservative activist from local associations and branches target declared Conservative voters to ensure they have used their vote at their local polling station. Alexander Smith notes that in Dumfries, c. 2003, ‘Blue Chip could only be accessed through one machine ... this computer often crashed while volunteers were inputting Blue Chip data’.⁶¹¹ Merlin was different to its predecessor in that it allowed the potential for the data to be used also centrally through a national Merlin network which fed directly to a central database at CCHQ via the internet.

The extent to which the advent of political internet technologies had shifted the canvassing culture of RWCA is illustrated in the following narrative:

The traditional approach from about 1997, when Blue Chip was first issued to associations, was that each branch would have its own little committee room on campaign day. There would be one PC operating there, the telling results would be coming in to the committee room and then that computer in the committee room would be printing out lists for people to go out and actually bang on doors to get out their vote. In some ways it is the same but in the pre-internet days every branch committee room was its own little silo of information. In the 2010 context everybody’s connected, which means there’s mutual sharing of support and support can be directed to the point at which it is most needed.⁶¹²

This shows how for RWCA the internet loosened to some extent the otherwise isolated approach to the sharing of campaign information. However, Meares’ experience in 2010 was in stark contrast to the organisation and campaign techniques I witnessed in the Anglesey association as their candidate on election day. Anglesey Conservatives did not have the political-will, resources, volunteers or organisation to conduct even the simplest telling/get-out the vote operations and, therefore, there was comparatively very little use of internet technologies by Anglesey Conservatives in election day procedures. The comparison of the Anglesey and RWCA cases demonstrates further the extent of the heterogeneous nature of each Conservative association.

An example of how individual associations can be different in their use of internet technologies is demonstrated by the approach of the Spelthorne association, which constitutes the other half of the RWSCG. Unlike RWCA, the chairman of the

information. In door-to-door canvass teams the cards are coded (e.g. ‘C’ for a Conservative voter; and ‘S’ for ‘socialist’ to denote a Labour voter). The information is collated at the association level.

⁶¹¹ Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*, p. 91.

⁶¹² RNA Meares Interview, p. 69.

Spelthorne Conservatives sent out 40 ‘eNewsletters’ between 3 November 2008 and 5 May 2010.⁶¹³ My analysis of the contents of these emails suggests that their intended purpose was to inform the party supporters in the association’s email database of news, information and events that pertained to the elections and organisation of Spelthorne Conservatives. The emails were sent also to some non paid-up members. I know this because I continued to receive these emails long after my membership with the Spelthorne association lapsed. In the run-up to 2010, I regularly received eNewsletter-style emails sporadically from Kingston & Surbiton Conservatives; regularly from PPC Shaun Bailey and Hammersmith Conservatives; regularly from Cities of London & Westminster Conservatives; and a prolific range of emails from PPC Zac Goldsmith and Richmond Park Conservatives.⁶¹⁴ Goldsmith’s campaign was the local Conservative target seat that was assigned to the RWCA in a relationship which the party calls ‘mutual aid’.

Another association of which I had been a member was Cities of London & Westminster. I had joined as a CF member, paying £10, at a CF event in London. Subsequently, I began receiving email communications from the association about Conservative social events. I continued to receive communications of this nature long after my membership lapsed. However, in November 2010, all email communications from the association ceased. Richmond Park collected my email address on a number of occasions, including at their social events and on the days that I campaigned for their candidate. Subsequently, I received duplicate emails from them, which as a recipient became an irritant. The other associations mentioned above added my email address to their email list after I emailed them to offer my time to their campaigning activities. All these associations, except Spelthorne and Richmond Park, ceased all communications with me soon after the 2010 General Election.

These cases collectively demonstrate significant heterogeneity and autonomy in the manner in which the observed Conservative associations collected email addresses and disseminated internal-news via email. This would suggest that Cameron’s Conservatives in the associations were free, to some extent, to decide upon their own style of email strategies and use. Furthermore, individuals in leading positions within the association played a key role in how email was used and disseminated. Based on these observed cases, the frequency of emails sent would appear to have had some

⁶¹³ RNA Spelthorne Conservative Association an email file in ant@politician.com.

⁶¹⁴ RNA Richmond Park Conservatives; Kingston Conservatives; Hammersmith Conservatives; and Cities of London & Westminster Conservatives email files in ant@politician.com.

correlation with the desires of the candidate, the association, and the wider-party for that particular seat, to win at the general election. Richmond Park, as a key target seat for the Conservatives, was more aggressive in its approach to email distribution than the nearby safe seats of Runnymede & Weybridge, and Spelthorne. Richmond Park Conservatives rallied extensively its supporters through the use of email and Facebook. Interestingly, when compared with Kingston & Surbiton Conservatives, and Hammersmith Conservatives, whose approach to using email to organise their supporters was milder, Richmond Park had the greatest electoral success in the 2010 election.⁶¹⁵

Where the target seat of Richmond Park used innovative techniques in internet campaigning through active methods for collecting email data, the safe seat of Runnymede & Weybridge campaigned in a traditional way and admitted that it did not make a significant attempt to use email. Therefore, it would appear that at the association level, the likelihood of innovative use of internet applications was dependent on the technological ability and/or inclinations of leading figures within the association, e.g. the candidate or the chairman, and the status of the seat, e.g. whether or not the seat was a Conservative target seat. However, both associations significantly used internet applications to organise their supporters.

Virginia Water By-Election Campaign: 4 June 2009

In the RWCA, campaigning in the run-up to the 2009 European and local elections began in March 2009. In early 2009, I had entered into an informal dialogue with Hugh Meares, RWCA Chairman, and the chairman of the Virginia Water & Thorpe Branch, about the possibility of my standing as a Runnymede Borough Council candidate. There was an opening for a new Conservative candidate in the Virginia Water Ward, because an incumbent councillor in the Ward had intended to resign. The candidate's resignation was managed and timed by the association cadre in order that it triggered a by-election to coincide with the dates of the other local elections scheduled for 4 June 2009. My eligibility and suitability to fill the role was discussed by the more senior cadre of the association.

The process of candidate selection began with a letter of notification for a face-to-face interview, which was sent in the post. The interview panel was comprised of

⁶¹⁵ Zac Goldsmith won Richmond Park for the Conservatives from the Liberal Democrats in 2010. Conservative candidates Helen Whately for Kingston & Surbiton and Shaun Bailey for Hammersmith were target seats that were lost with disappointing results for the Conservative Party. See, Dods Guide to the General Election 2010, p. 179, 271, 615.

senior association officers and representatives who were assembled by the association chairman. Before I could be fully approved by the Conservative association, I was instructed by an email from the association chairman, sent 7 March 2009, to arrange a meeting with the Conservative leader of Runnymede Borough Council, John Furey. Through this process, I became aware that there were two separate but equally important hierarchical structures at work in Runnymede in terms of party organisation. I noted above the significance and influence that leadership figures can have at the local level. In Runnymede, there were noticeable factions of Conservative participants who had subtle inclinations to side either with the association chairman or the leader of Runnymede Council. According to Stuart Ball, ‘there was always the danger of cliques and factions forming, leading to intrigue and even internal warfare.’⁶¹⁶ This phenomenon was accentuated in Runnymede because of the large number of Conservative members on the Borough Council being Conservatives,⁶¹⁷ thus giving greater weight to the political arm of the local party.

Once approved by the Conservative leader of the council, the branch members of the safe seat of the Virginia Water Ward agreed to my candidature in consultation with the branch chairman. In the process of becoming a local candidate in Runnymede, the internet, in the form of occasional email exchanges between the candidate and local Conservative leaders, played only a minor role. Email was used as a tool for communication, which, in turn, facilitated minor organisational aspects of the process, like introductions, meetings and interviews. However, this was no revolution for the Conservative participants involved in the process. Email attributed no more to the process than what could have been achieved by a telephone call or text message. Therefore, the selection of a local candidate remained relatively traditional in its approach. The selection was a stepwise process with checks and balances in place that distributed the power for the adoption of the candidate between a number of key Conservative leaders and the collective approval of their respective cadres. These cadres together collectively formed a wider local-cadre with factions forming around the key leaders in the local organisation. Email as an additional tool for communication oiled the processes of interaction between these individuals and groups in the process of candidate selection in that it assisted the flow of the internal procedural mechanisms. However, where local candidate selection remains within the hierarchical control of the

⁶¹⁶ Ball ‘Evolution’, p. 273.

⁶¹⁷ On 4 June 2009, Runnymede Borough Council consisted of 42 council seats, 36 of which were Conservative and six ‘Independent’. Therefore, the council leader was a powerful role in local Conservative organisation. See the political make-up of the chamber, online: www.runnymede.gov.uk.

local political and organisational-elites, the scope for the use of internet technologies in that process is likely to continue to be limited.

Being a prospective local candidate, I became elevated in the hierarchical ranks of the local Conservative Party and, subsequently, found that the active members of the local party conveyed a greater sense of trust towards me. As research by Dirks and Ferrin suggests, 'trust' plays a significant and beneficial role in organisations.⁶¹⁸ However, in the Conservative Party case, this is balanced by its hierarchical tendencies in which one's behaviour is tempered by a sense of watching-eyes in the higher ranks of the party. A latent culture of deference to those in higher authority is a traditional characteristic of the party.⁶¹⁹ This phenomenon is inherently cultural to the Conservative Party and one I observed throughout the ethnographic experience at the local, devolved and national levels. It is a principle which is passed-on to newly initiated members. Often these members are eager to please the party collective and, therefore, subsequently fall-in-line. There is an unspoken but tangible understanding among party office-holders of order and compliance which emanates through the day-to-day actions and interactions observed within the party collective. These phenomena had repercussions in both the on- and off- line world.

At the association level, I observed and experienced a significant distrust for the use of email to engage with unknown entities/individuals on matters that were potentially sensitive in nature. However, as my time within the party accumulated, I journeyed closer towards becoming a figure within the association cadre who was accepted as someone to be 'copied-in' on certain emails in relation to the organisation of the party and its campaign strategies. It was an unspoken and informal process which evolved over time. It appeared to be led by the local leaders like the association chairman and the leader of the council. When a local party leader signalled in an email to a staff member, officer, councillor or activist, through the action of copying me into the email, or introducing me via email, I found that my email interaction with party participants was exchanged more freely and less guarded in its content.

The prominence of a traditional cadre within RWCA means that new individuals have to learn the cultural ways of the association; and invest time and other resources in order to, firstly, become initiated and, secondly, develop trust relationships. It is the

⁶¹⁸ Kurt Dirks and Donald Ferrin, 'The role of trust in organizational settings', *Organization Science*, Vol.12, No. 4 (2001), pp. 450-467.

⁶¹⁹ Stuart Ball, 'The National and Regional Party Structure', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *The Conservative Century: The Conservative Party Since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p. 219-220.

leadership of specific individuals within the cadre who can use the simple gesture of openly including a new Conservative participant on the email distribution list of an internal email. Once that action is commenced by the individual in the leadership role, others in the cadre receive this as an affirming signal to follow suit by cautiously accepting email interaction with the new individual. However, that point is not likely to be reached unless the new participant has regularly interacted with key individuals within the association or political cadres at local Conservative Party social and political events. Therefore, an introductory email, or the appearance of a newly trusted name on a distribution list, acts as an electronic symbol of acceptance and trust, which is likely to have been earned first in the offline world. Whitty and Joinson state that the internet is often perceived as an ‘untrustworthy space’.⁶²⁰ As Tanis and Postmes suggest, this results in face-to-face interaction being ‘superior’ in comparison to less personalised mediation on the internet.⁶²¹ Based on my observations, these factors were integral to the customary behaviours, of the older cohorts in RWCA, which were behind the processes of initiation through which newer members learnt the ways of the association.

I found that ‘trust’, to some degree, was extended to my campaign team – as though they were an extension of me. As I had contributed significantly to the founding of RSCF, I had a number of young Conservatives from the branch who formed my Virginia Water campaign team. Therefore, because these party-workers were an extension of my contribution to the party, they became relatively trusted and embraced by the chairman of RWCA. The trust and rapport I had worked to develop was inherited by my team members on an individual basis. For example, on 13 March 2009, my campaign manager, an 18 year old Conservative, found himself being copied-in on emails from the association chairman on matters of telephone canvassing at Cherry Orchard. The chairman of the association entrusted the younger member with the responsibility of managing the telephone canvass and recruiting other local CFers for the activity over the medium of Facebook. In this case, the internet was used in a liberal manner by the chairman because a relationship of trust, albeit secondary, had been established already between him and the candidate. Therefore, the candidate’s selection acted as a validation of the candidate’s judgement in others. Those individuals that the candidate brought into the Conservative-fold, as campaign team members, were

⁶²⁰ Monica Whitty and Adam Joinson, *Truth, lies and trust on the Internet* (Routledge, New York, 2009).

⁶²¹ Martin Tanis and Tom Postmes, ‘Two faces of anonymity: Paradoxical effects of cues to identity in CMC, *Computers in Human Behavior* Vol. 23, No. 2 (2007), pp. 955-970.

automatically given a degree of trust to manage campaign matters using internet technologies by the virtue of the candidate's discernment.

While Facebook was used regularly by the younger members of my campaign team to organise individuals and groups of CFers for activism in campaign events, like door-to-door and telephone canvasses, the older members of the Virginia Water campaign team used email. As a relatively new member of the RWCA, I was meeting members and councillors on a continual basis. Some of these introductions were made in person and others using email. On 1 April 2009, a fellow candidate introduced himself to me via email. My email address had been provided to him by a senior official in the local party. This was a relatively common practice among the established and trusted local-elites in the association. Therefore, in this manner, email was acting as a medium that facilitated more fluid network-interactions between local-elites, as they rose to positions of relative seniority within the association. Moreover, this is further evidence for the digital segregation or 'divide' between the younger and older Conservative participants, to which Meares has testified.

Trends in the choices and uses of internet technologies in the RWCA appear to have been dependent on the two distinct age groups in the association. In terms of activism, there was a small but keen group of younger Conservatives who leant towards the use of Facebook to organise their involvement within the local party. However, they also used regularly email and mobile telephones. Often, their mobile phones were used as devices with which internet connections were made in order to access email and Facebook. Some young Conservatives used their phones to update their Twitter status with short microblogs, within 140 characters, detailing their activities on the campaign and other political messages. The CFers created a Facebook group for paid-up members of RSCF, which was also extended to unofficial supporters from outside the local area who could request to join the 'Closed Group'.⁶²² The Facebook group was typical of those administered by other CF branches, which utilised Facebook groups in order to grow a network of supportive and active Conservative participants; share organisational, campaign and other political information on the group's 'Facebook Wall'. Often, this would encourage debate through online activity involving group members interacting with one another and the medium by posting comments in public conversational

⁶²² Facebook offered the administrators of Facebook groups three accessibility settings: 'Open Group' allowed anyone on Facebook to view information and join; 'Closed Group' was visible on Facebook, but with limited information for non-group members (administrators of closed groups had a degree of responsibility, authority and power over the group); and 'Secret Group' hid all information from non-group members until a Facebook user was digitally invited by an administrator to join.

threads. Facebook was used to organise also campaign events, social events and other organisational and political activities. A study by Rachel Gibson suggests that this type of online activity, using social media in political parties, emerged across the political spectrum in the 2010 General Election.⁶²³ She argues that this presents a new model of grassroots campaigning that has led to the devolution of power from the professional centres of party organisation, because of the low financial cost of engagement in social media.

The freedom from financial burden in using Facebook as a marketing-tool certainly enhanced the Virginia Water campaign. The administrators of the Facebook group were able to send 'Facebook Messages' to the entire group, which acted as an instantaneous and targeted promotion device during the campaign period. The chairman of RSCF regularly sent messages to the members of the Facebook group in order to encourage them to attend specific campaign days. Individuals were invited to attend political, social or campaign events through the creation of Facebook event pages. The event page would give information about the time, date and location of the event in addition to further information and a list of those who intended to attend the event. The members of the RSCF Facebook group were subsequently digitally-invited to the campaign event using simple Facebook functions. Members of the group were encouraged to 'RSVP', thus showing whether they were attending/not attending/maybe attending. On 9 May 2009, 12 members of CF, including local members and members from outside the local area, came to a Virginia Water 'action day'. Most of these individuals had interacted with the group and the event information on Facebook.

In addition to the CFers, there were other, more senior, activists who attended the action day in Virginia Water, however they were fewer in number and their participation in the campaign day was organised via other media, namely email and telephone. None of the senior activists were members of the Facebook group. Therefore, they did not receive notification of the campaign day via any Facebook interaction. It is not possible to know who, and to what extent, the senior members had interacted already with Facebook in their personal lives, but as an administrator and observer of the Facebook group, I was aware of who the group members were. Both chairmen of the RWSCG joined the RSCF Facebook Group in the run-up to 2010, and sometime after the Virginia Water campaign.

⁶²³ Rachel Gibson, 'Party Change, Social Media and the Rise of "Citizen-initiated" Campaigning', *Party Politics* [online:] DOI: 10.1177/1354068812472575 (2013), pp. 1-15.

During the Virginia Water Action Day, Meares and other senior local Conservatives expressed how impressed they were with the turnout of younger people and acknowledged the role that Facebook had played in the successful organisation of the event. However, one senior local Conservative, who assisted in the organisation of the canvassing part of the action day, made disparaging remarks about the young people who ‘turned-out’ to help in his ‘patch’. His concerns were centred on the lack of control he had over the organisation of the campaign day, which was a new and uncomfortable change to the manner in which the branch had executed its campaigns in the past. In a campaign day debrief on 11 May 2009, the same Conservative, who at that time was a septuagenarian, said that the best way to contact him was by telephone and that he was not of the generation who felt the need to communicate regularly by email. This account suggests that the digital divide in the culture of the RWCA could cause, at times, a clash between the generations. Perhaps the digital divide in RWCA might have been narrowed if there had been a wider-understanding of the benefits of internet-use in political organisation at that time.

The political networking capabilities of Facebook were demonstrated when Therese Coffey⁶²⁴ searched for my name on Facebook, found my personal profile, and sent me a Facebook message offering to help me canvass the Virginia Water Ward. At that time, I had not had any previous contact with Coffey whatsoever. Therefore, through having a presence on Facebook, as a local election candidate, I made myself and my campaign accessible for assistance from Conservative participants outside of my local area. Furthermore, through having a basic but informative campaign website which included my email address, I received an email from an assistant to Nirj Deva⁶²⁵ who offered me access to his campaign team. Subsequently, Deva and his large team of young supporters arrived in Virginia Water to assist with door-to-door canvassing on what they called Nirj Deva’s ‘Battlebus’. These examples demonstrate how in 2009 a relatively unknown council candidate’s online presence was converted into tangible offline interaction through the power of the internet. In this case, the internet acted to significantly enhance Conservative campaign activity in Virginia Water while investing only minimal financial resources in the technology.⁶²⁶

⁶²⁴ Coffey was a Conservative Party candidate for the South East Region in the 2009 European Elections.

⁶²⁵ Deva has been a South East Region Member of the European Parliament since 1999.

⁶²⁶ Gibson, ‘Citizen’.

Ynys Môn Parliamentary Election Campaign: 6 May 2010

In summer 2009, I applied to the Conservative Party to become a member of the approved list of parliamentary candidates. I was invited to attend a Parliamentary Assessment Board ('the PAB') and, in the August, I was told that I had been approved to become a member of 'the Candidates List'. I applied to a number of Conservative associations with a vacancy for a PPC in their constituency. In early January 2010, I received an email from Ynys Môn | Anglesey Conservative Association inviting me to a selection meeting on 9 January 2010. At the meeting, I was elected by the association's 'paid-up' party members as their candidate to represent the Conservative Party in the impending General Election, 6 May 2010. The following month, I moved to the constituency fulltime and resided in Trearddur Bay, near Holyhead. There, I coordinated my parliamentary campaign and ethnographic field work in a simultaneous and complementary capacity.

Culturally, Anglesey was different to the life I had experienced in Surrey. Anglesey being an island meant that it had a distinct identity, culture and community of its own. I had to adapt considerably my approach to people and politics in order to be accepted within, what was to me, a new culture. I spent some time as both a politician and ethnographer observing and learning the culture, customs and everyday lifestyle of the islanders and the association. I began learning the local language of Welsh and adopting the ways of the 'Anglesonian'. During that process, I developed a stronger sense of what it meant to be a Conservative PPC. It was clear to all concerned that I was not a 'true local'. However, I found that, in general, the local people of Anglesey accepted my candidature in a welcoming and hospitable manner. Many members of the Anglesey association gave me a very warm welcome. After my selection, I was immediately invited by some of the association members to a country cottage for 'bacon butties'. My first impressions of Anglesey life was its remoteness and its areas of relative poverty in comparison with Surrey. Some islanders prided themselves on Anglesey being undeveloped, while others blamed local and national politicians for a lack of opportunity on the island. Anglesey's simplistic infrastructure led many locals to claim that the island was an aesthetic and cultural remnant of 1950s Britain.

In 2010, one cultural symbol of contemporary life which had been noticeably slow to evolve on Anglesey was high speed internet, with the island's high number of

‘not-spots’ and ‘slow-spots’.⁶²⁷ As the Conservative candidate, I received a number of complaints from constituents and local entrepreneurs who perceived Anglesey to be a place that had been neglected in terms of the development of the island’s internet infrastructure. The poor access to broadband was considered to be hindering the development of businesses on the island.⁶²⁸ Rather than using email, the relatively aging population of the island, including the local Conservative association which had no more than five members under the age of 40, preferred to communicate by telephone, and occasionally by letter. Therefore, in terms of my parliamentary campaign, the use of internet technologies to reach the Anglesey electorate was, relatively, a low priority. According to research by Southern and Ward, this is in keeping with general trends observed across the UK in the 2010 General Election.⁶²⁹ Furthermore, Andy Williamson found that there was no significant correlation between candidates’ use of e-campaigning and electoral success in 2010.⁶³⁰

I focused much of my attention on devising and delivering traditional door-to-door leaflets; writing letters to the local newspapers; and achieving media and press attention like my appearance on the BBC Politics Show and interview with BBC Radio Wales. This approach to campaigning is similar to Alexander Smith’s account of the Scottish Conservatives’ campaign in 2003.⁶³¹ I spent the largest portion of my time canvassing door-to-door with members of my small, but dedicated, campaign team with the strategic aim of meeting as many people face-to-face as possible. This aim grew-out of what was considered to be, by Anglesey Conservatives, an historical Conservative tradition on the island, which had been passed down in Conservative folklore since the time of the Conservative MP Keith Best.⁶³² Keith Best was the most electorally

⁶²⁷ See the Isle of Anglesey County Council Report to the Meeting of the Board of Commissioners on the subject of ICT Services, 13 February 2012, p. 3., Section 2., ‘ICT on the Island’, online: http://www.anglesey.gov.uk/x_links/14925 [accessed, 23 July 2012].

⁶²⁸ See, for example, Martin Williams, ‘Anglesey businesses urged to get connected’, *The Daily Post*, 15 December 2010, online: <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/business-news/business-news/2010/12/15/anglesey-businesses-urged-to-get-connected-55578-27827401/> [accessed, 4 April 2012].

⁶²⁹ Rosalynd Southern and Stephen Ward, ‘Below the Radar? Online Campaigning at the Local Level in the 2010 Election’, in Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimer and Simon Atkinson (ed.), *Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and the Media in the 2010 General Election* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 218-237.

⁶³⁰ Andy Williamson, ‘Inside the Digital Campaign’, in Rachel Gibson, Stephen Ward and Andy Williamson, (eds.) *The Internet and the Election 2010: putting the small p back into politics* (Hansard Society, London, 2010), pp. 17-26.

⁶³¹ Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*.

⁶³² Keith Best, originally from Sussex, was somewhat of a legendary character on the island. People across the island made reference to his charismatic campaigning style. His high visibility led to many

successful Conservative candidate on Anglesey. Therefore, I made the strategic choice to emulate his mythological campaigning-style.

I advertised a weekly surgery held at the association office in Llangefni, the island's county town, and made attempts to attract attention using local newspapers. I submitted press releases on stories about campaigns that I had organised in the various towns around the island, which included Amlwch, Beaumaris, Benllech, Holyhead, Llanfairpwllgwyngyll, Llangefni, Menai Bridge, Newborough, Rhosneigr and Valley. We placed half-page adverts in the local newspaper. The adverts invited constituents to attend public meetings that were held in eight of the island's main towns. According to Jon Lawrence, attendance at election meetings has been in decline since the mid-1950s.⁶³³ Anglesey Conservatives were aware of this trend and it came as no surprise that the numbers at each meeting were between 5-28 individuals. Interestingly, however, informants in the Anglesey association reported that attendance in 2010 was higher than the previous two general elections.

In the three weeks prior to polling day, I attended a number of official hustings, most of which drew audiences in excess of 100 people. These included Mencap Cymru; the Federation of Small Business; the Farmers Union of Wales and the Nation Farmers Union; and Churches Together. I organised a campaign weekend with 20 participants who travelled from across the UK to join an 'Around Island Rally'. We spent four days touring the island using a 'loudhailer' to expound the Conservative-message that it was 'Time for Change on Ynys Môn'. The loudhailer was especially useful in the small villages that we had not been able to canvass. The teams of supporters arrived in each village and posted through the door of each home a letter from the Conservative candidate and a short leaflet that detailed both local and national issues. As soon as the Labour Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, called the election, on 6 April 2010, a team of party-workers spent a week erecting Conservative 'Ridge-Newman' posters/boards on private property across Anglesey.

Although the majority of my time was given to traditional campaigning, a significant amount of my day as a fulltime candidate was spent using computers and the internet from either my home or the association office. In the early days, soon after my selection as a candidate, I spent between 10 and 18 hours per day in front of a computer planning, organising, managing, communicating, writing and designing aspects of my

Angleseonians believing that, during the General Election 1979, 'he shook hands with everyone on the island'. He was subsequently elected as the island's first and only Conservative MP.

⁶³³ Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

work as a candidate. Each candidate can have a unique experience, because of the dynamic variables which influence each parliamentary campaign. These include: the candidate's style, skills, leadership abilities, experience, autonomy and creativity; access to political staff, funds and campaign support; and private and personal influences (like family support, external stressors, accommodation concerns and personal wealth). Others variables include: geographical factors; travel concerns; temporal factors; local cultures; interpersonal dynamics between local activists, association officers, Conservative Party professionals and the media; and the mood of the electorate. These variables were observed in the field 2008-2010 and correlate with the archival evidence for the 1951-1964 period. It is interesting that, although the technologies used in the political environment have changed significantly over time, the general variables influencing a Conservative candidate's campaign were remarkably similar in 2010 and the 1950s. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the role of newer-technologies in the campaigning-life of the Conservative PPC for Ynys Môn.

PPC for Ynys Môn and Internet Technologies

On becoming a Conservative PPC, I received a comprehensive 'Campaign Pack'⁶³⁴ in the form of a large A4 ring binder with accompanying digital files stored on a CD-ROM. The pack was compiled and issued by CCHQ Wales and supplied to all candidates and agents in the region. A similar pack was distributed to candidates and agents in the other regions. The Welsh Conservative campaign pack differed to the English pack because some candidates in Wales chose to incorporate Welsh Language considerations in their campaign. For example, I stipulated that all literature in the Anglesey campaign would be bi-lingual. The packs predominantly gave advice and guidance to constituency campaign teams on traditional methods of campaigning, with the majority of the pack being focused on canvassing and traditional political literature. The pack did offer some advice on 'E-campaigning', which included an outline of the role of an e-campaign director within a campaign team; how to campaign online; and how to get-out the vote using email. Supplementary information on 'E-campaigning in an election'⁶³⁵ was later provided by CCHQ London in the form of an election memorandum. The information was contained in a PDF attachment to an email. However, in contrast with the information in the campaign pack, the memorandum

⁶³⁴ RNA CCHQ Wales, 'Welsh General Election 2010 Campaign Pack', 10 December 2009. This was commonly referred to as 'the literature pack'.

⁶³⁵ RNA CCHQ London, 'E-campaigning in an election', a two page General Election Memorandum 2010.

focused on the rules and legalities of e-campaigning rather than how to use e-campaigning techniques to win votes.

The Welsh Conservatives campaign pack stated that: ‘Online campaigning is the use of text messaging, emails, websites and social networking sites to communicate our message.’⁶³⁶ The party’s rationale for using online techniques stated that ‘Modern communication channels are important tools which, when used alongside traditional campaigning methods, will help you to get your message across to a wider audience.’⁶³⁷ The guidance outlines also the benefits of using the internet. It stated that the benefit of email is its speed for disseminating information and its low cost for use. The pack encourages campaign teams to write emails with bold attention grabbing subjects and in a manner that expounds the central messages of the campaign. Websites are described as being ‘essential elements of a modern campaign, enabling residents to find out more about’⁶³⁸ the candidate and wider campaign activities.

In terms of social media, the pack encourages the use of social networks like Facebook and Twitter, stating that they ‘are a great way to keep people who might not read ‘InTouch’ leaflets informed about your campaign and identify the people willing to help.’ The online section of the pack ended with a warning about the use of the internet and the pitfalls of publishing text online at speed and that without the traditional process of ‘sign-off’ being in place. Checks and balances online had to be made by the individual through self-regulation and self-censorship. This demonstrates that by late 2009 the central-party was aware of both the pros and cons of online campaigning. However, the party took a relatively passive approach to managing the electronic-output of campaign teams in comparison to the more structured and rigid approach of the sign-off process for traditional campaign literature. As Fisher et al. write, the central-party was particularly sensitive to erroneous ‘spending commitments’, and, although there was no sign-off process for web-based publication, the central-party did monitor grassroots social media activity.⁶³⁹

When selected as the Conservative PPC for Ynys Môn, I resided over 280 miles away in Surrey for one month before relocating to the island. I travelled twice to Anglesey on constituency business during my first month of being the PPC. Although

⁶³⁶ Welsh General Election 2010 Campaign Pack, chapter 8, section 19.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁹ Justin Fisher, David Cutts and Edward Fieldhouse, ‘Constituency Campaigning in 2010’, in Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimer and Simon Atkinson (ed.), *Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and the Media in the 2010 General Election* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 198-217.

these geographic limitations prevented me from having a daily presence in the constituency, in the early stage, the internet facilitated my role as a long distance candidate. During the first weeks as PPC, I worked up to 18 hours per day using internet technologies and applications via a laptop computer. I had 117 days between my selection and the election day, which was a greatly shorter period than many candidates. I was provided far fewer resources than target seat candidates in terms of funds, manpower and general support from CCHQ. Therefore, I invested heavily my own time, resources and skills to make-up the shortfall. Initially, I focused on bringing-together my political supporters to form a remote-campaign team⁶⁴⁰ from all corners of the UK, many of whom were young Conservatives who had been displaced out of London and the South East because of either work or university commitments. Their geographic distances away from the island meant that they would not be able to travel to Anglesey regularly, but many agreed to take-on campaign team duties from afar. I communicated with these individuals through Facebook and email, but also using SMS or ‘text messages’ on my mobile phone. I held two face-to-face meetings at the Carlton Club with a political communications expert. These meetings were organised using Facebook and SMS.

Using internet-based discussions with members of my remote-campaign team, I was provided with technical and creative advice on aspects relating to social media and website design, in addition to other offline aspects of the campaign, like strategy and fundraising. Each member of the team was assigned tasks using textual instructions either via email or Facebook messaging. Web-posters for my personal campaign website were developed with discursive exchanges over email in order to discuss amendments to the design. I personally designed and built a basic website, using a free website building application at Webs.com. Members of the remote-campaign team contributed to the website in designing and submitting to me, via email, photographic-based posters, banners and logos. These were designed using Adobe software and sent to me in image or PDF format, which I uploaded to the website.

The internet facilitated a virtual campaign-office in which I was able to conduct campaign team meetings, relatively in real-time, across geographical distances. Despite living a significant distance away from the constituency, the internet facilitated my role

⁶⁴⁰ Here I use the term ‘remote-campaign team’ to describe a team of Conservative supporters from various geographical locations across Britain and in order to distinguish it from the traditional type of campaign team, which is usually a collective of Conservative supporters who live in a geographical location within reasonable commuting distance to the constituency in which their candidate is running for election.

as a candidate, allowing me to comprehensively plan and organise my campaign strategy in advance of my move to the constituency. To some extent, my early role could be described as a virtual-candidate insofar that I conducted my first month as the candidate remotely from Surrey. I used internet technologies to help me campaign, communicate and organise as if I were already resident in Anglesey. Facebook and email acted as both private and open meetings in which I could invite one individual or a number of individuals to engage in discourse in relation to specific campaign ideas and practical tasks. The internet-based processes were not substitutes entirely for face-to-face interaction, through which, as a candidate, I could have more effectively expressed emotions using expressions, gestures and social cues in relation to tasks, e.g. conveying a degree of enthusiasm and passion for the campaign.⁶⁴¹

Such interpersonal interaction would have had the potential to stimulate camaraderie between campaign team members, which was an ingredient to a successful campaign that lacked in the remote campaign team. Instead, members of the team worked in isolation, which, rather than building stronger interpersonal relationships between the involved individuals, led to a focus solely on a task-completion-mentality, which, although efficient, was not conducive to the sustainability of the remote campaign team. Therefore, in the run-up to my relocation to Anglesey, one-by-one the once committed members of the campaign team began to drift out of regular contact. This body of virtual campaign-assistants was gradually replaced by a denser concentration of face-to-face interactions with a constituency-centric campaign team constituted by members of the local Conservative association and supporters whom I drew-in through my interactions within the constituency.

The nature of the daily role of the Conservative PPC in 2010, which involved a heavy reliance on bureaucratic-exchange and communication via internet technologies, namely email, meant that the isolation described above was exacerbated by the volume of internet-based candidate responsibilities. A Conservative candidate in 2010 who did not possess at least basic email skills would have been limited in their ability to fulfil the expectations that the central-party at CCHQ London had placed on its candidates. Over my 117 days as PPC, the frequency of emails received in my campaign inbox, via my ant@politician.com, Mail.com, email address, increased significantly as time progressed. Between 6 March 2008 and 28 May 2010, I received in total 4425 emails in relation to my various roles within Cameron's Conservatives. The average frequency of

⁶⁴¹ Diana Mok, Barry Wellman and Juan Carrasco, 'Does distance matter in the age of the Internet?', *Urban Studies*, Vol. 47, No.13 (2010), pp. 2747-2783.

emails received per day (inclusive of weekends) during that period was 5.44. In comparison, the emails received in direct relation to my parliamentary campaign in Anglesey, between 9 January 2010 and 25 May 2010, averaged a frequency of 20.81 per day.⁶⁴² On busy days, my inbox received up to 90 emails within a 16 hour period. Many additional emails could be archived immediately. However, an average of 21 emails per day needed time and specific attention. Emails from the CRD, the Welsh Conservative Press Office and the regional and national campaign headquarters often required intensive reading of attached PDFs. Robin Walker testifies that as a PPC he did not have the time to read daily all of the emails sent by CCHQ.⁶⁴³

As the Anglesey PPC, approximately 36 paper-based letters were received from constituents compared to a significantly greater 186 emails. This was perhaps because of the relative speed and ease in sending an email when compared to traditional mail. However, one notable challenge for any candidate or MP is identifying the authenticity of the sender's of email. In 2010, unlike traditional letters, it was not customary to include a verifiable handwritten signature or physical address in emails. Therefore, identifying whether the sender of an email is a legitimate resident of a politician's constituency was challenging. Some candidates and MPs chose to reply with instructions on automatic emails in the attempt to ensure an address was given. For example, the parliamentary email account of, Conservative, Douglas Carswell MP sent automated receipts stating: 'Please make sure your full postal address was included in your original email. If not, please resend your message with your postal address.'⁶⁴⁴ This demonstrates how some Conservative participants have engaged in a process of rethinking their approach to correspondence with constituents, since the advent of the use of internet communications in politics.

Second to emails, leaflet production was the most time-insensitive bureaucratic activity of the campaign. By 2010, it relied almost exclusively on communication exchange via email. As a candidate without a professional agent, I was reliant on one part-time administrator in the association office, a team of 16 part-time volunteers, and occasional digital assistance from my remote-campaign team. Therefore, in relation to my printed communications, I took much of the responsibility for photographs, text, organisation, communication, liaison and printing. My leaflets consisted of an

⁶⁴² In order to analyse these figures, I catalogued and categorised the 4425 received emails. The 20.81 per day figure is drawn from the sum of emails in the RNA which had a direct connection to the role of being the PPC for Ynys Môn.

⁶⁴³ RNA Robin Walker Interview, 28 March 2011, Appendix 8, pp. 151-164.

⁶⁴⁴ RNA 'Email receipt from Douglas Carswell', to ant@politician.com, 12 May 2009.

‘Introductory Leaflet’; ‘Election Address’; generic ‘Dear Elector’ letter; and small glossy leaflet. I also advertised public meetings using a home-printed leaflet and adverts in local newspapers.⁶⁴⁵ The process of leaflet production included: writing the text; having it translated into the Welsh language using a professional translation company; sending the English and translated text to the printers by email in Microsoft Word in order for them to insert it into a generic template provided by the Conservatives’ literature pack; receiving the returned design proof from the printers; relaying back and forth between the printers in order to amend errors; emailing the final proof to a chain of Conservative-officials including the CCHQ directors in both Wales and London, and Cheryl Gillan MP for final sign-off; having the literature printed; having the prints delivered to the association office; driving by car the 40,000 printed leaflets to a Royal Mail Depot; and, finally, having the leaflets delivered by Royal Mail to almost every domestic dwelling in the constituency. Therefore, leaflet delivery and production when multiplied by 650 Conservative candidates was a very time intensive process for each candidate, campaign team, CCHQ office and Conservative-official involved.

In the Anglesey case, the efficiency of the process was significantly impeded by CCHQ email accounts having inadequate data storage capacities to cope with the sign-off traffic and file transfer, especially at the times when large numbers of candidates sent digital proofs simultaneously. In Anglesey, the process described above was delayed by, at least, one week because emails containing digital leaflet-proofs for sign-off were not being received by the intended recipients in the sign-off hierarchy. Alexander Smith describes the bureaucratic culture of the Scottish Conservatives as ‘banal activism’ in which ‘discursive artefacts’ like leaflets and press releases provided a distraction for activists from the reality of the electoral ‘crisis’ of the Conservative Party in Scotland.⁶⁴⁶ Similarly, the checks-and-balances in place to monitor traditional campaign literature, and the bombardment of digital internal-communications in the party in 2010, were so cumbersome a process that candidates without significant administrative support could become buried-beneath processes and bureaucratic distractions. Ultimately, these distractions significantly limited temporal resources and detracted from the face-to-face campaign out-and-about in the constituency.

Even though, at times, the limitations of CCHQ’s email systems led the process to collapse, in 2010, without the use of email whatsoever the bureaucratic intensity of

⁶⁴⁵ Example hardcopies of the Anglesey Conservatives’ 2010 campaign ephemera are held in the RNA.

⁶⁴⁶ Smith, *Scottish Conservatives*, pp. 7-9.

the sign-off process would have been impractical and relatively unworkable. Email as a medium had been embraced by Cameron's Conservatives in a manner in which, like TV in Macmillan's Conservatives, the medium was assimilated into the party's hierarchal structure. Therefore, as an organisational tool, email facilitated the party's hierarchical tendencies in the offline world without the need for face-to-face interaction or oral communication among the individuals in the chain of command. The intensively cautious approach taken towards the release of paper-based printed media into the public domain was not applied with the same scrutiny to candidates' online publications like blogs and social media.⁶⁴⁷ Therefore, this would suggest that Cameron's Conservatives considered traditional media to be of greater importance to their overall election objectives than new media, but that some internet technologies like email had become essential organisational-tools in order for the party to effectively facilitate the scrutiny of its printed media in a hierarchical fashion.

PPC for Ynys Môn and Social Media

In my experience, candidates had relative freedom and autonomy in terms of their campaign's internet presence in the respect that, other than the brief guidance in the campaign pack, there were no formal written rules or procedures distributed by the central-party to Conservative candidates. This is supported further by responses given by Iain Dale.⁶⁴⁸ He claims that he 'offered to write a candidates guide on the best practices for the use of blogs and Twitter. The party initially thought it was a good idea, but nothing happened.'⁶⁴⁹ Dale believed that 'candidates seemed too afraid to actively use blogs and Twitter. They were often worried they would say something wrong and there would be consequences if they deviated from the party-line.'⁶⁵⁰ Dale testifies that he did not witness any attempts to manage the Conservative-blogsphere by CCHQ London, or communications professionals like Andy Coulson. 'Conversely, Labour did try to manage their blogging community. But, as you would expect, they did it with the typical top-down approach.'⁶⁵¹ This typifies a Conservative-belief that the Tories took a

⁶⁴⁷ Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse, '2010'.

⁶⁴⁸ Iain Dale established his blog (Iain Dale's Diary: <http://iaindale.blogspot.co.uk> (now a communal blog, Dale & Co: <http://www.iaindale.com>)) while in his role as the Conservative Candidate for North Norfolk in the 2005 General Election. He worked also on David Davis's leadership campaign, and when instead David Cameron won, Dale used blogging to expound his personal views to the 'world'. Dale since became a broadcaster for LBC 97.3 and believes his blog led to his radio programme.

⁶⁴⁹ RNA Iain Dale Interview, 3 May 2011, Appendix 4, p. 85.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

different approach to the management of new media in the 2010 General Election when compared to Labour.

I invested little time in blogs and social media during the Anglesey campaign when compared to other campaign methods. Nevertheless, as a relatively young candidate, I felt it important to invest at least a minimal amount of time in social media in order to make potential political contact with, what I assumed would be, younger voters. I carefully controlled my Facebook profile privacy settings and consciously sanitised my online postings. For security reasons, I chose to limit what could be viewed and interacted with on my Facebook profile, and developed a more publically viewable and interactive 'Facebook Page'. Therefore, I existed on Facebook as one individual with two linked, but ultimately separate, digital personas – the personal and the political. The second page was listed as a politician page on Facebook, which gave Facebook users the option to search my name and follow my campaign in their News Feeds by clicking 'Like' on my page. Subsequently, the user became linked in interactive terms to my page. The number of users that 'liked' the page accumulated over time. I observed a number of other candidates using the page function in Facebook during their campaigns and expand on this in greater detail in Chapter Six.

In terms of the Anglesey campaign, I used a simple blog application on my personal website in conjunction with Facebook and Twitter (@RidgeNewman) pages in an integrated manner. Using an online application, I linked my political Facebook page to my Twitter page in order to duplicate my Facebook postings automatically onto my Twitter feed. I had taken the time to compare both my Facebook fans and my 'Followers' on Twitter. I noted that the audiences of each comprised of significantly different individuals. Therefore, the duplication of my Facebook postings on Twitter expanded my audience by almost double. This enabled me to save the amount of time I spent using internet applications in order to focus my time on the offline campaign. Facebook, and subsequently Twitter, acted like a notice board for the advertisement of my blog posts. Most blog posts were created in order to communicate the work I was doing in the constituency and to publish my views on carefully selected local and national issues. I held the distinct belief that these posting would not lead to significantly greater numbers of votes, but rather to motivate my supporters and campaign team. Therefore, the use of social media in the Anglesey campaign was primarily a tool for activist-mobilisation.⁶⁵²

⁶⁵² Gibson, 'Citizen'.

PPC for Ynys Môn and Email

Email was used regularly within the campaign team itself in order to organise canvass teams and locations. My campaign coordinator and agent shared a Gmail email-account with me (anthonyforynysmon@gmail.com) in order to organise the internal and external campaign team contacts more effectively than the functions provided by my public email on Mail.com (ant@politician.com). The Gmail account had a calendar function which was used by the campaign coordinator to input my daily appointments and weekly campaign/canvassing schedule. Email in the Anglesey Conservatives' campaign was used primarily as an internal communication-tool rather than a marketing device. Information that included instructions for campaign days was regularly emailed to the appropriate supporters and members of the campaign team. This process worked effectively and had greater impact than social media. The campaign team's ages ranged between 20 and 70, with the majority being c. 60. Therefore, email had become an established and effective medium for communication in the older cohorts of Anglesey Conservatives.

I made requests to the same individuals to collect constituents' email addresses while canvassing. However, the Anglesey-based campaign team generally neglected to ask electors for their email addresses. The common response to my request from members of the campaign team was that they did not understand why the collection of email addresses was necessary. After repeated explanations of why I believed it to be important to collect as many voters' emails addresses as possible during the campaign – for direct-marketing and campaigning purposes – the activists continued to neglect asking for email addresses on the doorstep. Instead, they held a distinct preference for canvassing in line with their experience in previous campaigns. For the Anglesey Conservatives, this meant not collecting traditional canvass data, but instead distributing leaflets and getting the candidate to 'shake-hands with as many voters as possible' before election day. This shows how changing campaigning activities within the party at the constituency level can exhibit a form of inertia and resistance to change if the experienced individuals of the campaign team believe the changes to be unnecessary.

PPC for Ynys Môn and Campaign Websites

I managed a very primitive form of a candidate's blog while campaigning for the general election. I wrote a number of letters to the Holyhead & Anglesey Mail, and posted the text of any letters written into a webpage on my personal campaign website. I posted, usually after the event, notifications of where I had been on the island and

details of my campaigning activity with the aim of informing constituents of my activities. My personal campaign website averaged 62.5 hits per day during my 117 days on the campaign as candidate, with an approximate range of variation between 32-94 hits per day. The peaks and troughs of website hits appeared to have some correlation with campaign events, like major deliveries of literature and my appearances on radio or television; and periods when my profile as a candidate was less publically visible. Using an online-tracking facility, I was able to identify the general geographical locations from which my website was being accessed. Less than 10% of the hits were from the North Wales region. The majority were from within the UK, but there were a significant number of hits from worldwide locations.

On one occasion, during the final week of the campaign, I spoke to a constituent on his doorstep. He had received my election literature through the Royal Mail postal service, but complained that there was not enough personal information about me on my election leaflets. I explained that the address for my campaign website was printed on the leaflet and that there was more information about me on the website. However, he replied saying that he should not have to go to a website and that he should have received the information about me in leaflet form. Although this was an isolated case, it is typical of the kind of disregard for internet technology, especially in terms of political campaigning, that I found on Anglesey in 2010. Therefore, I would suggest that my website had minimal impact on the Anglesey electorate in campaigning terms. The 11.5% increase in vote share which the Conservatives achieved on Anglesey⁶⁵³ was most likely due to the traditional campaigning techniques used like door-to-door canvassing and printed literature, and a highly visible and energetic campaign presence across the constituency.

Albert Owen, the incumbent Labour MP, did not have a live website until the final weeks of the campaign. His website was basic in terms of its content, features and aesthetic. Ynys Môn was also the seat of Ieuan Wyn Jones AM, the then incumbent leader of Plaid Cymru at the Welsh Assembly. Therefore, like Labour, Plaid Cymru had a buoyant and established support base and activist presence across the island. Dylan Rees, the Plaid Cymru PPC in 2010, required an extra 1243 votes in order to win the seat from Labour's Owen. Therefore, Anglesey was the number three target seat for Plaid Cymru in Wales. Plaid Cymru invested visibly significant resources into their campaign. Rees had the most sophisticated website of all the main party candidates on

⁶⁵³ Dods Guide to the General Election 2010, p. 534.

Anglesey. However, on election day, the Plaid Cymru vote share decreased by 4.9%, and although the Labour candidate was returned as the island's MP his vote share decreased also by 1.2%.⁶⁵⁴ Therefore, there was no observable correlation between electoral success and investment in campaign websites on Anglesey in 2010.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., p534.

⁶⁵⁵ Williamson, 'Inside'.

SIX
Cameron's Conservatives and Cyber Toryism
2005-2012

Since the 1960s, the gradual decline of the mass-based party in Britain has meant a decline in activity at the grassroots.⁶⁵⁶ However, by 2005, the power of the internet was beginning to be harnessed in political activism and meant that there was a developing realisation about the potential for activist empowerment.⁶⁵⁷ New innovations in the use of internet technologies led to the opinions of a new type of Conservative grassroots being catapulted firmly into the gaze of the central-party and its party-elites. As Tim Bale has identified, 'the website ConservativeHome provided an institutionalised forum for complaints – and one that could be easily accessed by the media'.⁶⁵⁸ This acted to peel-back the curtains of the Conservative Party and provide a transparent window through which the public could gaze on the party's views and mechanisms, like never before.

A number of snapshots of the grassroots-culture 2008-2010 were presented in Chapter Five. These case studies, at the local association level of the Conservatives, were focused on narratives developed from candidate and association-executive perspectives. Therefore, in order to place these very specific observational accounts within a more panoramic view of Cameron's Conservatives, this chapter presents a wider-range of testimonies from across the national party. It addresses how the advent of specific internet applications has impacted to change the party's culture and organisation. The respondents include activists, bloggers, candidates/MPs and a CCHQ employee. Additional quotes are included from speakers who debated publically the role of social media in Conservative Party change at the party's 2012 conference in Birmingham. These provide a greater degree of multivocality and thus provide diverse Conservative Party insider perspectives. Subsequently, the cases that were presented in Chapter Five can be understood more deeply in relation to the wider context.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁶ Paul Whiteley and Patrick Seyd, 'The dynamics of party activism in Britain: A spiral of demobilization?,' *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 28, No. 01 (1998), pp. 113-137.

⁶⁵⁷ Wainer Lusoli and Stephen Ward, 'Digital Rank-and-file: Party Activists', Perceptions and Use of the Internet, *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (2004), pp. 453-470.

⁶⁵⁸ Tim Bale, *The Conservative Party from Thatcher to Cameron*, (Polity, Cambridge, 2011), p. 291.

⁶⁵⁹ For a study on 'the making of context' in ethnographies that study internet-based activity in organisations, see, Vanessa Dirksen, Ard Huizing and Bas Smit, "'Piling on layers of understanding": the

However, rather than presenting the narratives in a campaign-specific context, as was the case in last chapter, the following sections are focused on the technologies themselves as case studies for comparison.

The first section of this chapter identifies the role of WebCameron in the daily life of the party leader and CCHQ staff, some of whom were actively involved in an ideas culture that led to the development of the online application. The second section is an in depth analysis of the role of Facebook in Conservative Party organisation and includes also some quantitative data that were sampled while I was in the field in the run-up to 2010. The section introduces the argument that a new type of Conservative organisational culture, which I call ‘Cyber Toryism’, emerged and evolved from the party’s young-participants engaged in grassroots-activism leading-up to 2010. The third section examines the role of ConservativeHome and other blogs in Cyber Toryism, and suggests that the Conservative-blogsphere has impacted in both positive and negative ways in Conservative Party organisation. The fourth section is an analysis of two centrally-controlled Conservative technologies, MyConservatives and Merlin. The section discusses how in comparison with the non-centrally controlled media, like Facebook and the ConservativeHome blog, the CCHQ projects did not impact significantly on the organisational culture of the party’s 2010 campaign. The final section is used to draw together my conclusions for the chapters in Part III. It argues that the advent of the internet has led to a degree of decentralisation of CCHQ control at the top of the party with a loosening of power that has shifted to, and is shared collectively by, individuals closer to the grassroots of the party’s hierarchy.

WebCameron: Watching the Leader

David Cameron, as the new leader of the Conservative Party, launched his online campaign in the form of WebCameron at www.webcameron.org.uk on 30 September 2006.⁶⁶⁰ The event marked the beginning of a new type of campaigning activity for the leadership of the Conservative Party. Moreover, it was the first use of a video blog by a

use of connective ethnography for the study of (online) work practices.’ *New Media & Society*, Vol. 12, No. 7 (2010), pp. 1045-1063.

⁶⁶⁰ Will Woodward, ‘Tories Unveil Their Secret Weapon: WebCameron’, *The Guardian* (30 September 2006), online: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2006/sep/30/uk.media> [accessed: 23 July 2012].

prominent political leader.⁶⁶¹ Tim Bale suggests that Cameron's first WebCameron video, which showed the Conservative leader washing-up dishes, and being a dad at home with the kids, was symbolic in that it encapsulated 'the new man' ideal of the time.⁶⁶² I would suggest that the strategic use of WebCameron conveyed a number of additional messages to the electorate. It portrayed the Tory leader, who was best known for his privileged Etonian-background,⁶⁶³ as a man in-touch with the busy work-life balance of contemporary Britain. It suggests that Cameron, as a son of the British elite, realised the importance of conveying an image of normalcy in a time when television viewing was dominated by a viewer demand for 'reality'.

British television and other media in the 2000s had become dominated by a public fascination for observing the mundane nature of everyday lives.⁶⁶⁴ WebCameron, was the Conservative Party's attempt at a web-based Do-It-Yourself Tory 'Big Brother'.⁶⁶⁵ The advent of new internet video technologies, and the growth in new media uses, had enabled the party-elite to effectively broadcast their leader via his own personal online-channel, for the first time. The use of this new medium gave Cameron and his team complete editorial control over output. It placed the control of this type of media back in the hands of the Conservative Party, the likes of which had not been seen since the early days of political television in the 1950s. Furthermore, WebCameron was symbolic also in party leadership terms, because, like those prominent new media-using Conservative leaders before him, e.g. Stanley Baldwin and Harold Macmillan, Cameron was attempting to master the new medium of this age.

According to Craig Elder's firsthand testimony, Cameron and his close Tory allies played a significant role in the party's use of new media, like WebCameron. Elder describes how Francis Maude, as party chairman, enthusiastically oversaw the party's developments in the use of internet technologies for campaigns, and that George Osborne had the best understanding of, and talent for, the technological uses of internet applications in Conservative politics. According to Elder, Osborne 'was obsessed with

⁶⁶¹ J. Downey and S. Davidson, 'The Internet and the UK General Election', in D. Wring, J. Green, R. Mortimer and S. Atkinson (eds.), *Political Communications: The Election Campaign of 2005* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005), p. 95.

⁶⁶² Bale, *Cameron*, p. 314.

⁶⁶³ Michael Hill, 'Arrogant Posh Boys? The Social Composition of the Parliamentary Conservative Party and the Effect of Cameron's "A" List', *The Political Quarterly* [online:] DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-923X.2013.02430.x (2013).

⁶⁶⁴ See, for example, Annette Hill, Lennart Weibull and Åsa Nilsson, 'Public and Popular: British and Swedish Audience Trends in Factual and Reality Television', *Cultural Trends*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2007), pp. 17-41.

⁶⁶⁵ Big Brother is a worldwide reality television show produced by Endemol, online: <http://www.endemol.com/programme/big-brother>.

getting the iPad, which at that point had not been released in the UK.’⁶⁶⁶ Elder claims that Osborne took a hands-on approach to driving forward the central-party’s use of the internet. Therefore, both Osborne and Maude worked closely with Cameron in order to provide the support at the top of the party hierarchy that was needed to secure successful investment in the use of digital media for applications like WebCameron.

David Cameron and particularly George Osborne were instrumental in empowering our team and giving us the backing that we needed at the top level. Another key person to mention in the 2006 period was Francis Maude. He was absolutely instrumental as party chairman. So, in terms of organisational structure, Francis was absolutely key particularly with the launch of WebCameron, which in 2006 was the first of its kind – as a political party leader’s video blog. It did a very good job in terms of humanising David, because David was obviously a massive, massive asset. He was certainly unlike what had come before him in that he was able to connect with the British people in a way that a Conservative leader had not since the early days of Major. So, for us, we needed to be able to use that asset, and David was very keen, and in particular Steve Hilton, who was Cameron’s Director of Strategy, was very keen that we used the internet as much as possible. Firstly, because the internet is quite useful in a branding sense – we needed to be portrayed to be a younger fresher party that was more in touch with the kind of needs and values in modern Britain. Heavy use of new technology was seen as a way to do that. But more importantly it was seen that we could reach a key demographic, a younger demographic – an internet demographic if you like. There was also a real focus on the idea that the mainstream media was forcing us always to unhelpfully aim for that five second clip on the Six O’clock News. New Media allowed us to make our statement, not at length, because apparently nobody wants to listen to a politician talk at length, but it would allow us to have our say on our terms.⁶⁶⁷

This perspective from inside the central-party and the team behind the branding of Cameron’s Conservatives shows that the use of the internet for the party in 2006 was a strategic choice at the very top-level, with the explicit intention to reach-out to a younger generation of Conservative voters and supporters. Furthermore, Elder’s perspective of WebCameron being a tool for communicating the Cameron-brand on their own ‘terms’ was a view also held by a grassroots-party activist in 2010, who suggested that ‘WebCameron was obviously a way for David Cameron to choose the moments that he wanted to share with the rest of the world.’⁶⁶⁸ Therefore, Cameron’s

⁶⁶⁶ RNA Craig Elder Interview, 7 June 2011, Appendix 2, p. 36.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 35-36.

⁶⁶⁸ RNA Oliver Cooper Interview, 31 March 2011, Appendix 6, p. 119.

team made an early attempt to control the national party brand through the use of the internet, the process of which impacted on the manner in which the Conservative-elite around Cameron organised their weekly duties.

You could not have WebCameron without Cameron. He was always really, really committed to it. The early days were interesting because it was a very amateur production, but that actually gave it a lot of its charm. Four years on, after we made many strides forward in terms of video production quality, we hired a professional camerawoman to come in and work very closely with David – with him, in many cases, for a lot of the time during the day - and people still remember the video that was shot on the tiny handycam, dimly lit in his kitchen. David was always very accessible. He was always very interested in it. He was always challenging us to make it better and make it more interesting. I had many jobs when I first arrived at the party, so David did not always appreciate quite how busy I was, along with the rest of the team. But quite often I would be in the back of the car with David going to various places and just chatting away with him and he would ask why I could not be with him all the time.⁶⁶⁹

The advent of the internet was changing significantly the traditional roles of some CCHQ workers. The incorporation of new media in the roles of communications staff was impacting in a way that it demanded more versatility and on-the-road duties than the traditional communications staff. Elder's role as a CCHQ worker now included being a pseudo-journalist and cameraman. Essentially, as campaign and new media trends developed over time, Elder's role evolved simultaneously and led him to become Cameron's personal in-house broadcast journalist. According to a study by Rachel Gibson, by 2010, this type of internet-based democratic activity, which she refers to as 'citizen-initiated campaigning', had further developed into an emerging trend in British politics.⁶⁷⁰ The advent of the use of new media in this way interrupted Elder's bureaucratic duties and placed him into a position in which he acted as a media professional. This is reminiscent of the way CCO staff in the late 1950s adapted their roles to incorporate the use of new broadcast technologies in their new TV studio.⁶⁷¹ Therefore, it is evident that, like television in the 1950s, internet new media in the run-up to the 2010 General Election began blurring some of the roles, activities and

⁶⁶⁹ RNA Elder Interview, p. 42-43.

⁶⁷⁰ Rachel Gibson, 'Party Change, Social Media and the Rise of "Citizen-initiated" Campaigning', *Party Politics* [online:] DOI: 10.1177/1354068812472575 (2013), pp. 1-15.

⁶⁷¹ See, Richard Cockett, 'The Party, Publicity, and the Media', in Anthony Seldon and Stuart Ball (eds.), *Conservative Century: The Conservative Party since 1900* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1994), p. 566; and, Tim Bale, *The Conservatives since 1945: The Drivers of Party Change* (Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 66.

responsibilities of individuals within the Conservative Party's CCHQ organisation. Conservatives at CCHQ were restructured to incorporate a growing digital media team, which in addition to Elder included the likes of Rishi Saha, CCHQ head of new media, Rohan Silva, communications special adviser, and Samuel Coates, who had previously worked for the ConservativeHome blog. These were in addition to the senior communications strategists like Steve Hilton, the creator of WebCameron, and Andy Coulson, former editor of the News of the World, both of whom had significant influence over the Conservative Party message.⁶⁷²

Elder's testimony suggests that without the enthusiasm of the key political leaders at the top of the party, the organisation of the party towards new media would have been slower to develop.

Cameron took a really keen interest in WebCameron which enabled us to do a lot of things. David gave us two things. He looked at the videos and said, "Well why would anybody want to watch this?" He gave us an unprecedented level of access and trust and he also gave us the backing we needed essentially to go off and get CCHQ budget to hire someone with a broadcast background to follow him with a professional quality camera and produce a broadcast quality film – which took WebCameron up to the next level. The reason why that was incredibly important for us was that come the election, and really in the year leading up to the election, Sky and the BBC would call us and say "We have just seen the WebCameron video; can we have the tape of that, we want to play that out on TV." I do not need to tell you the quality of having footage controlled by us, put together by us and broadcast by us on the Six O'clock News. That was pretty incredible for us.⁶⁷³

Cameron's approach to the inner workings of the use of new media in his campaign would suggest that when the party leadership takes ownership of a new medium, the medium has a significant chance of gaining some prominence amid competing traditional media platforms, which, again, is reminiscent of the late 1950s and the party's approach to television under Macmillan.⁶⁷⁴ In the case of WebCameron, it would seem that Cameron himself understood the public mood of the time: that the people wanted access to the real politician, rather than the gloss and 'spin' that had become characteristic of the New Labour years.⁶⁷⁵ Therefore, the advent of these new

⁶⁷² See, Bale, *Cameron*, pp.350-351.

⁶⁷³ RNA Elder Interview, p. 20-21.

⁶⁷⁴ Cockett, 'Publicity', p. 565.

⁶⁷⁵ See, for example, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinmann, David Fan, 'Spin Doctoring in British and German Election Campaigns: How the Press is Being Confronted with a New Quality of Political PR', *European*

media trends allowed Cameron the opportunity to portray himself as a grounded politician in-touch with the real lives of real people through reality footage. This demonstrates that Cameron held some personal confidence in the medium; and had a relaxed attitude towards the recording and broadcasting of the more mundane aspects of his life as a political leader. Essentially, this confidence came from the control that the Conservatives held over the production of the footage and the manner in which it was broadcast via the internet.

However, although the controlled nature of WebCameron was seen as a positive victory for the Conservative political and organisational elites in the political media battle of the 2010 campaign period, it was not long before the Cameron machine had to adapt again its ideas of how to use effectively the internet as a tool for campaigning. As Therese Coffey testifies, the approach to brand-Cameron loosened overtime as the party began experimenting with the inclusion of more interactive-forms of new media, like live interactive-chats on Mumsnet, a medium over which Cameron had no control.⁶⁷⁶ This suggests that Cameron's Conservatives were observing changing trends in new media uses and incorporated some plasticity into their digital strategies in order for the plans to adapt and change over short time scales in line with the rapid development of new internet applications. Tim Bale suggests that Cameron's Mumsnet webchat was one of a string of publicity stunts which the party stage-managed in order to present a cuddlier-Conservative-face to the public.⁶⁷⁷

Prior to 2006, the use of the internet in Britain had been largely limited to personal and private use. However, the party leader's act of using WebCameron, signalled to the wider Conservative Party that it was 'okay' to integrate the use of new internet applications in communicating the Conservative message. Elder believes that WebCameron was the beginning of a change in political use of internet technologies in Britain and that it 'kick started more innovative use of web-technology'.⁶⁷⁸ This suggests that the use of WebCameron by the party leader acted as a catalyst for further participation in e-political communication and organisation within the party. Elder suggests that WebCameron was the finest hour of the Conservative new media

Journal of Communication, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2000), pp. 209-239; and Raymond Kuhn, 'Media management', in Anthony Seldon (eds.), *Blair's Britain 1997-2007* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 123-142.

⁶⁷⁶ RNA Therese Coffey, 1 April 2011, Appendix 9, p. 178.

⁶⁷⁷ Bale, *Cameron*, pp. 291-292.

⁶⁷⁸ RNA Elder Interview, p. 41.

campaign, because it made a positive story on the front page of the Guardian during the Conservative Party Conference 2006.

...this new era of engagement where politicians were appearing at the hand of a tiny handycam on tiny little YouTube videos. I think that WebCameron probably did play its role in changing the way politics is done online. I would not be so grandiose to suggest that it played as much of a role as anything that happened in the Obama campaign, but I would probably say that it was not far off it.⁶⁷⁹

Elder criticises the WebCameron project for being more costly to the party than necessary, believing that the same result for the project could have been achieved ‘using a free blog platform on a YouTube channel’⁶⁸⁰ and questions why the party did not simply broadcast Cameron from YouTube. However, Elder suggests that WebCameron as a platform allowed the party to do more than what YouTube could offer in that the party was able to encourage interaction through the ‘Ask David’ application. The public could vote for questions which were proposed to Cameron for his response, and thus this placed some control of the agenda in the hands of the voter. Elder claims that the hits WebCameron received in the initial launch period averaged approximately 150,000 per day. However, these numbers eventually settled to between 5000 and 6000 hits per day,⁶⁸¹ which, according to Elder, was greatly fewer than the hits for the party’s central website Conservatives.com. Eventually, in the run-up to the 2010, WebCameron was migrated to the Conservatives.com website where it became integrated with the party’s corporate web-presence. This helped drive web-traffic to both platforms through search-engine optimisation techniques; and build a diversified audience for the Cameron-Conservative brand.⁶⁸² Cooper claims that a number of Conservative Party campaign videos ‘went viral’, and that WebCameron was ‘an invaluable resource to show people what David Cameron thought’.⁶⁸³

The WebCameron narrative tells us something about the relationships between the Cameron’s Conservatives leadership team and the CCHQ digital team at that time. It demonstrates the elite ideas-culture at the top of the party hierarchy from which the trajectory for the use of new technologies in Tory politics has stemmed. WebCameron

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁸³ RNA Cooper Interview, p. 119.

had its genesis in the mind of a party adviser Steve Hilton.⁶⁸⁴ The idea was fertilised by the enthusiasm of the party's most influential leaders for embracing new technologies. The WebCameron project evolved over time and the work of CCHQ staff like that of Craig Elder began to adapt and change in order to accommodate the demands for the party's use of this new technological application. Ultimately, the WebCameron project facilitated a direct channel for David Cameron as leader of the opposition to not simply connect, but, also, interact with the electorate in a manner that had not been seen before. Most significantly for the Conservative Party, WebCameron acted as both a symbol and a visual signal, validating the use of the internet in Tory politics for the wider-party collective. Subsequently, in the years which followed, the wider-party's use of internet technologies increased significantly.

Facebook: The New Face of Conservative Party Organisation

While the advancements in Tory web-applications and technologies like WebCameron had their developmental stages rooted in a CCHQ ideas-culture in the central-elite; and once the publically visible symbols of WebCameron and Ask David signalled to the wider-party that the use of internet technologies in the Conservative Party was acceptable, the party's social media culture began to evolve organically at the party's grassroots. Rachel Gibson argues 'that digital media are introducing a new grassroots-based mode of "citizen-initiated campaigning" that challenges the dominant professionalised-model of campaign management by devolving power over core tasks to the grassroots.'⁶⁸⁵ Although Cameron's Conservative-elite first led the way with WebCameron, the remainder of this chapter will present data that suggests that Gibson's new type of digital campaigning was exhibited at the Conservative-grassroots in the run-up to 2010. However, I argue that, in the case of the Conservative Party, these uses of new media were most affective in party and campaign organisation, rather than for connecting and communicating with the electorate. There is little evidence in the documentary, ethnographic or interview data of this research to suggest that CCHQ actively encouraged and/or discouraged activists, candidates and/or associations to use email or social media in their local campaigns or party organisation. In fact, the evidence presented in Chapter Five and in the remainder of this chapter suggests that the central-party gave relative freedom to its participants in terms of their use of internet-

⁶⁸⁴ RNA Elder Interview, p. 43.

⁶⁸⁵ Gibson, 'Party Change', p. 1.

based political applications in the run-up to 2010. This is supported also by Fisher et al.'s study of campaign activity in the general election.⁶⁸⁶

This suggests that the historic Conservative Party tradition of autonomy for each Conservative association allowed each group of local Conservatives to take decisively their own approach towards the use of email, social media and websites for political communication. It suggest also that prior to 2010, the assimilation of new media into Conservative Party culture had not yet been fully realised and/or understood by the central-party's operations. Evidence collected at the Conservative Party Conference in October 2012 would suggest that the party's understanding of the role of new media in its political aspirations and party organisation has matured since 2010; and that CCHQ is now beginning to actively engage in the dissemination of educational information on social media and online campaigning in order to school Conservative participants in 'best practice' for the use of new media in political campaigns and organisation.⁶⁸⁷ This is similar to the party's approach to TV education in the 1950s.

By 2008, in the run-up to the London Mayoral Election campaign, Facebook had begun being used as an organisational tool for political mobilisation in the Conservatives' 'Back Boris'⁶⁸⁸ campaign.⁶⁸⁹ The wider trends in the use of Facebook,⁶⁹⁰ in which individuals and collectives were employing its social networking capabilities for personal communication and socialisation, had begun being embraced within the organisational culture of Conservative Party campaigns. According to Ben Howlett, the turning point for the assimilation of Facebook within the party was when

⁶⁸⁶ Justin Fisher, David Cutts and Edward Fieldhouse, 'Constituency Campaigning in 2010', in Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimore, and Simon Atkinson (eds.), *Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and Media in the 2010 General Election* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011) pp. 198-217, especially p. 203.

⁶⁸⁷ As outlined in Chapter Five, campaign advisory literature in 2010 avoided detailing significantly best practice for new media and e-campaigning. However, at Conservative Party Conference 2012 the party released two documents which indicate a change in approach. The parent publication RNA 'Campaign 2013 Toolkit' presents a range of considerations for party activism. The publication makes e-campaigning a special case. The internet is described as 'a powerful and cost-effective campaigning tool' (p. 71) and refers the reader to a separate publication devoted solely to e-campaigning. The RNA 'Online Campaign Guide 2013' is a detailed Conservative publication which includes information on using websites, emails and social media as political communication tools and explains jargon and legalities. This signals an advance in the central-party's attitude towards new media.

⁶⁸⁸ The 'Back Boris' campaign was the campaign slogan for Conservative Party campaign to elect Boris Johnson to the position of London Mayor on the Greater London Assembly, in 2008.

⁶⁸⁹ RNA Ben Howlett Interview, 28 March 2011, Appendix 1, p. 8.

⁶⁹⁰ The United Kingdom was considered to be one of the fastest growing countries in terms of growth in Facebook membership in 2008. See, Justin Smith 'Tracking Facebook's 2008 International Growth By Country', Inside Facebook, 29 July 2008, online: <http://www.insidefacebook.com/2008/07/29/tracking-facebooks-2008-international-growth-by-country/> [accessed, 23 July 2012].

Boris Johnson released a Facebook ‘App’ for the campaign.⁶⁹¹ Oliver Cooper explained how Facebook was used to organise teams of young Conservative activists to mobilise the Conservative vote in the 2008, 2009 and 2010 elections.

In terms of Conservative Future (CF), the first thing you do is start on Facebook. You would say, “I want to have a campaign day”, because my agent in this constituency, or my chairman, or my candidate has said, “I want to have this many activists out.” You would talk to them and either get money for refreshments or a lunch or so on. We could then pledge that to our activists and put that on Facebook and you get more people turning up. If you have done your job in getting money from the association for refreshments or lunch, then it is a much easier sell. I organised council by-election campaigns in the local area, in Hampstead and Kilburn, leading up to 2008 and 2009, and we managed to get a lot of local campaigners from UCL [University College London], King’s College London [KCL], LSE [London School of Economics] and so on. We did, explicitly, go out saying that we need to get young people involved, because, frankly, the old people are going to campaign in their backyard. The young people are the added bonus that are going to push you across the finishing line. So, we did use Facebook very heavily. I think I set up probably 10 campaign day events for every by-election going, and it is tried and tested - and it seemed to work.⁶⁹²

This testimony offers a perspective of a young Conservative activist at the sharp end of Conservative Party campaigns in London in the run-up to 2010. It suggests that younger Conservative activists are more likely than older activists to use Facebook and travel outside their local geographical and political boundaries in order to assist campaigns advertised on the social networking site. It reveals that Facebook was used at the local level as an in-house marketing-tool in order for key Conservative participants, who were in activist mobilisation roles, to sell campaign activities to younger members of the party through an interactive digital medium of their generation. The selling mechanisms used were made more effective when Facebook’s direct targeting was combined with the traditional incentives of complimentary refreshment, thus resulting in a quid pro quo campaigning culture at the heart of the Facebook-facilitated activism. Nils Gustafsson conducted a study in Sweden which used interviews of focus groups to assess the role of social networks in political participation. The findings correlate with this thesis, in that already politically active individuals were more likely to be proponents of the use of social networks for political mobilisation.

⁶⁹¹ RNA Howlett Interview, p. 8.

⁶⁹² RNA Cooper Interview, p. 106.

However, those who were politically inactive were unlikely to be spurred into political activity through social media alone.⁶⁹³

In the Conservative Party case, Facebook was used as a tool to persuade and mobilise Conservatives to participate in campaigns to which they would not have contributed traditionally due to geographical barriers. Campaign organisation was taken to the hub of communication that was being used already on a daily basis for general socialisation by the younger generation.

People log onto their Facebook every single day and, if you do pester them, then, in effect, they will cave in, which is why, if you do organise 10 campaign day events and only 10 of your activists in your group of 300 friends on Facebook turn-up, that is still 10 activists more than you would have otherwise – and 10 times your 10 campaign days is probably more activists than you will be able to put on the street than the association will itself.⁶⁹⁴

The use of Facebook in this way helped to make participation in Conservative activism a more fluid and decentralised process.⁶⁹⁵ At a fringe event during Conservative Party Conference 2012, one activist commented that they believed that social media had brought the party closer together, suggesting that ‘from a party organisation and campaign point of view’ it encourages activists to give mutual-aid in other geographical locations.⁶⁹⁶ Therefore, this would suggest that there is now at the grassroots some realisation of how internet technologies have impacted on the party’s organisational culture and understanding of its benefits in aspects of political campaigning. Furthermore, since 2010, the application of social media in campaigns is being discussed and debated with interest from both inside and outside the party. Therefore, social media has become assimilated into the party’s inter- and intra- cultural discursive behaviour.

By 2008, the Conservative Party had begun using online venues as a place to meet the next generation of British Conservatism. Once connected through Facebook, from the comfort of a personal laptop or desktop computer, prominent individuals with

⁶⁹³ Nils Gustafsson, ‘The subtle nature of Facebook politics: Swedish social network site users and political participation’, *New Media & Society*, Vol. 14, No. 7 (2012), pp. 1111-1127.

⁶⁹⁴ RNA Cooper Interview, p. 107.

⁶⁹⁵ Gibson, ‘Party Change’.

⁶⁹⁶ Audience participation during a panel debate with Tim Montgomerie (ConservativeHome Founder), Matthew Hancock MP (Conservative Party), Iain Anderson (Cicero Founder and debate chairman), Peter Osborne (Telegraph Columnist) and Tim Hames (BVCA), ‘Has social media changed the Conservative Party?’, *Cicero Consulting*, Fringe Event, Conservative Party Conference 2012, Executive Room 7, ICC, Birmingham, 8 October 2012, 12:30 pm.

skill in using online social networking tools were able to effectively impact on the numbers of activists attending campaign days in the offline world. Cooper's personal narrative gives some cultural insight into the discovery and development of Facebook within young Conservative circles around that time.

I joined Facebook in 2006, when I first went to university. I had never heard of it before the day I signed up for it and there were very few people at university that were on it at that time. One person that used it very effectively was the president of my conservative society at UCL - Richard Jackson. He was very effective, and still is very effective in organising events and organising complete campaigns for CF and for otherwise on Facebook. He did not teach me - he did not sit me down and lecture me on exactly how to do it, but it is good best practice to copy, and it is pretty simple best practice to copy.⁶⁹⁷

This evidence supports one of the central arguments on which this thesis is based: that Facebook, as an organisational tool for the Conservative Party, developed organically at the grassroots of the party. The use of the social network to mobilise support for Conservative events and campaigns grew-out of the leadership of individual innovation. In this specific case, it was the leadership of a university Conservative society president, which was then observed and copied by other Conservative participants in other parts of the party organisation. Therefore, as this learning and copying culture was passed-on from one group or individual to the next, both the on- and off- line activist behaviour and activity proliferated to provide significant impact for the party's grassroots operations. The use of digital technologies by Cameron and Johnson, the face of the Conservative-elite, had signalled to the party's grassroots that innovative use of new media for the party's gain was an appropriate activity in which to engage. Young activists at the Conservative grassroots then responded accordingly within on- and off-line environments, which provided relative freedom for a culture of digital experimentation and innovation that was tempered only by the party's traditional organisational cultures.

Like many social phenomena which evolve rather than become founded in some act or constitution it is challenging, if not impossible, to outline with any certainty the moment of genesis when Facebook became a significant part of Conservative Party organisational culture. However, Cooper's personal observations offer his perspective on how it may have come about:

⁶⁹⁷ RNA Cooper Interview, p. 107.

Within Facebook we have had groups and pages and then new groups have come along, and these different architectures are used by different people. I guess there is a bit of an evolutionary aspect to it, in that the people that cannot use Facebook particularly well are kind of nudged aside by other people in the organisation in Conservative Future and told to follow the UCL Conservative Society group's structure. They get 400 people a year going to their event, so they obviously know what they're doing. And, I guess, best practice spreads that way. Because there's certainly no training days or courses that I've been to on how to use Facebook to get people to campaign.⁶⁹⁸

The 2006-2007 UCL Conservative Society president, Richard Jackson,⁶⁹⁹ was a close personal friend of, and worked closely with, the 2008-2010 CF national chairman, Michael Rock. During that period, the role of the UCL Conservative Society was one of national prominence in the CF movement. UCL Conservatives' close proximity to CCHQ London; the London Mayoral Campaign 2008; and their influential position and relationship with other prominent University of London colleges which had CF societies, meant that the society wielded a significant influence on the manner in which CF and its use of internet technologies developed in the run-up to 2010. Furthermore, the observations and interviews which inform this research show that, prior to 2010, Facebook was largely used by the younger demographic of the Conservative Party. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that the evolution of widespread use of Facebook within the Conservative Party had its roots in the CF movement, and, perhaps, more specifically in UCL Conservatives.

Richard Jackson's role as a leading figure in the use of Facebook and his position of leadership and interconnectedness between influential networks at CCHQ, the Carlton Club, the Back Boris campaign, the University of London colleges, Cities of London and Westminster Conservative Association and the CF movement meant that he was a key figure on Facebook who utilised his connections to a significant quantity of quality Conservative 'Facebook Friends' interested in activism. Therefore, Jackson's early role in the passive dissemination of the use of Facebook in CF, and subsequently the wider-Conservative Party, may have been an additional significant factor in the development of Facebook being used as a tool for Conservative organisation in

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶⁹⁹ Richard Jackson is now a CCHQ London press officer and was contacted informally to verify some of the facts detailed in this section.

campaigns in London and, later, nationally. Jackson played a mediatory-leadership role in Tory new media culture in the 2000s, similar to that of Edward Heath c. 1960.

By the 2010 General Election, the use of Facebook as a political organisation tool had become an accepted application for use by many Conservative parliamentary candidates. René Kinzett offers his perspective on the political communication process that a candidate was likely to take when selected for a parliamentary seat.

One of the first things they did almost straight after they put out the press release or even before they put out the press release was that they set up a Facebook group. You wanted to make sure that you had enough people to join it straight away. You monitored what other political parties were doing in your area on Facebook and you used it as a way of not just signing up existing members. The age profile of constituency association members/officers means that perhaps they were not the most switched on in terms of e-access, and certainly the use of social media. It was a good way of reaching out...⁷⁰⁰

Kinzett is claiming that, in some cases, a Facebook presence for a newly selected candidate took priority over the traditional press release. If so, this would indicate that there has been a significant change in the political communication culture of Conservative candidates since the advent of social media.

Through social media, candidates were beginning to be able to take charge to some extent of the dissemination of their own communications through their own channels on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and/or in using a blog. WebCameron had claimed-back from the broadcasters some control and power over output for the central-party. Similarly, Facebook shifted some of the power from CCHQ to the local candidate at the party-grassroots.⁷⁰¹ As Kinzett suggests, a further benefit of Facebook was that it allowed Conservatives to group together individuals, who were supporters of that specific candidate's campaign, in digital venues within the social network. These venues were called Facebook 'groups' and/or 'pages'. Facebook, therefore, provided some power to the candidate as an organisational tool for political mobilisation of non-geographically bound supporters, which in turn enhanced the candidate's experiences in a local campaign context.

Kinzett identifies the importance of having a number of Facebook users showing their support on a candidate's group and/or page, and Howlett goes further in explaining his view:

⁷⁰⁰ RNA René Kinzett Interview, 12 March 2011, Appendix 7, p. 125.

⁷⁰¹ Gibson, 'Party Change'.

Facebook is very good from the PR [public relations] perspective: “Great I am more popular than you are.” Facebook is literally a popularity contest. The more people that “Like” your page, the more popular you are - as a rule of thumb. In terms of being able to transfer those into votes, I would be very interested to see what the hit rate would be - I don’t think it is going to be huge, but it helps.⁷⁰²

Howlett believes that, for some politicians, Facebook was a competitive tool used to demonstrate political popularity. However, he recognises that if there were a link between Facebook popularity and gaining votes, in 2010, it was tenuous. What is clearer is that some Conservative politicians and their teams believed it to be politically and organisationally advantageous for them to develop a presence and audience on Facebook in the run-up to 2010 – even though there was little explicit direction from the central-party on the matter. The extent to which Facebook was used by politicians and political groups, and its efficacy for building an audience and/or campaign support, varied significantly.

Facebook: The Political Shopping Mall?

It is important to appreciate the dynamic nature of social media, but especially in the case of Facebook. Facebook’s coding architects make regular changes to its functions and how the site operates.⁷⁰³ This means that retrospective historical research that uses Facebook activity to assess Facebook-culture is virtually impossible unless the Facebook data has been permanently recorded in some way at the specific moment of interest. The quality and validity of Facebook data as a record for historical inquiry degrades progressively the further away from the period of interest one begins sampling. This research attempted to restrict such limitations to a minimum in using the relative immediacy of the ethnographic approach.

As presented in Tables 1 and 2 below, between 1 December 2009 and 31 May 2010, I sampled, using online chain-referral, collected and recorded Facebook data from a number of political Facebook (1) groups and (2) pages. I followed them over the 26 week period, which covered the run-up to the 2010 General Election and beyond for an additional 25 days. Some data, including Facebook Wall and Facebook email messaging activity, was collected and counted cumulatively over the 26 week period.

⁷⁰² RNA, Howlett Interview, p. 10.

⁷⁰³ See, Jose van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2013), p 33.

Other data, including textual information; the quantities of group ‘Members’ or page ‘Fans’/‘Likes’; and privacy settings, were recorded once, 7 May 2010. It is important to note that the data recorded on 7 May were only true at the point they were recorded and may have changed or been changed at any point during the 26 week observation period. The dynamic real-time nature of Facebook means that information and values presented in its groups and on its pages could have changed from moment to moment. Therefore, whereas the cumulative data provides a relatively true reflection of the activity over the 26 weeks in the run-up to the election, the static data give only an indication.

I counted and recorded the data in a spreadsheet in order to compare a number of basic activity indicators for Facebook pages and Facebook groups. The indicators observed during the 26 week period for the Conservative Facebook groups include the number of: group members; Facebook emails sent by the group’s administrators to group members; textual posts on the group’s Facebook Wall; textual comments added to Wall posts by group members; group social events posted by the group; political campaign events posted by the group; photos posted by the group on its Facebook Wall; videos posted by the group on its Wall; ‘Likes’ added by group participants to its Wall posts; hyperlinks added by group participants to the group’s Facebook Wall; and the privacy setting - whether the group was open, closed or secret. Throughout my experience within the Conservative Party as both a political activist and as an ethnographer, a number of Conservative Party-affiliated Facebook groups were brought to my attention through the networking nature of the Facebook application. Subsequently, I joined and monitored the groups I deemed most pertinent to this research. I personally selected a sample of 14 in order to present a cross-section of types of Conservative Party-affiliated Facebook groups. These are outlined in the ‘Archives and Sources’ section in the Introduction of this thesis and presented below in Table 1.

Facebook Group	Facebook Privacy Setting	Members	Emails Sent	Messages per Week	Messages per Month	Wall Posts	Comments Posted	Events Posted	Campaign Events	Photos Posted	Videos Posted	Likes Posted	Links to Other Sites Posted
UCL CF	Open	250	18	0.69	3.00	25	2	18	5	0	0	1	7
KCL CF	Open	154	5	0.19	0.83	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Aberystwyth CF	Open	74	1	0.04	0.17	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Aberconwy CF	Open	47	3	0.12	0.50	14	4	3	0	1	0	1	2
Runnymede & Weybridge CF	Open	60	7	0.27	1.17	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	1
Richmond Park CF	Open	173	5	0.19	0.83	10	0	7	6	0	0	2	1
Cities of London & Westminster CF	Open	384	16	0.62	2.67	18	0	15	14	2	0	2	0
Ridge-Newman for Ynys Mon	Open	169	8	0.31	1.33	20	9	1	0	0	1	12	9
Nigel Huddleson for Luton South	Open	261	4	0.15	0.67	46	15	18	13	15	3	5	6
Michelle Tempest for West Durham	Open	161	2	0.08	0.33	8	0	1	1	1	0	2	1
Tory Reform Group	Open	394	2	0.08	0.33	12	0	8	3	2	0	0	0
Bow Group	Open	609	6	0.23	1.00	13	1	6	0	2	0	0	3
Conservative Way Forward	Open	641	0	0.00	0.00	11	1	0	0	0	0	0	6
Progressive Conservatives	Open	423	4	0.15	0.67	17	0	1	0	0	0	3	10

Table 1. Conservative Party-affiliated Facebook groups activity indicators 01/12/2009 - 31/05/2010

I intended to monitor also 14 political Facebook pages. However, the sample was reduced to 13 pages for observation due to Gordon Brown, Leader of the Labour Party 2007-2010, not having an official political Facebook page. Brown was the only leader of the three main British political parties to not have an official public and political presence on Facebook. On searching the name ‘Gordon Brown’, a number of pages and groups relating to Brown appeared in the Facebook search results. The themes of these groups were significantly weighted toward calls for him to resign as Prime Minister. As potential substitutes, I searched for two alternative leading Labour Party figures, Harriet Harman and David Milliband. Like Brown, they did not have any official public or political presence on Facebook, other than the official Labour Party page which represented the general central-party collective. This would suggest that in 2010 the Labour Party’s central operations took a different approach to the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, whose leadership teams were well represented by official political pages on Facebook. These findings reflect those of Fisher et al., who found that ‘Labour’s level of e-campaigning was lower than that of both the

Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, suggesting that the latter did indeed make particular efforts in this area.⁷⁰⁴

Page	Page Description	Fans	Wall Posts (FA)	Events Posted (FA)	Campaign Events Posted (FA)	Photos Posted (FA)	Videos Posted (FA)	Links to Other Sites Posted (FA)	Likes Posted (PI)	Average Likes per FA's Wall Post	Comments Posted (PI)	Average comments per FA's Wall Post	Wall Posts (PI)
Anthony Ridge-Newman	Tory Candidate for Ynys Mon	131	70	1	0	0	1	32	66	0.94	12	0.17	6
Boris Johnson	Conservative Mayor of London	49733	116	0	0	38	6	48	11351	97.85	5847	50.41	1189
David Cameron	Tory Leader	66463	310	0	0	58	34	126	27776	89.60	14340	46.26	1000s with peak on 11/12 May - both positive and negative (negative mostly offensive)
David Jones	Tory MP for Clwyd West	346	140	0	0	0	0	41	52	0.37	181	1.29	14
Kwarsi Kwarteng	Tory MP for Spelthorne	157	30	1	1	7	0	9	9	0.30	19	0.63	
Robin Walker	Tory MP for Worcester	125	53	0	0	0	0	53	18	0.34	3	0.06	
Conservatives		111540	451	0	0	78	71	261	66775	148.06	25713	57.01	
Conservative Future		3416	149	15	6	2	13	113	428	2.87	112	0.75	0
Scottish Conservatives		612	45	1	1	3	6	31	201	4.47	65	1.44	3
Welsh Conservatives		393	66	1	0	22	0	40	263	3.98	96	1.45	21
Lib Dems		91878	519	15	15	15	53	355	40643	78.31	15246	29.38	
Labour Party		61485	283	2	2	0	21	137	24267	85.75	17591	62.16	
Nick Clegg	Liberal Democrat Leader	73084	248	12	12	14	32	147	22946	92.52	10209	41.17	

Table 2. Political party-affiliated Facebook page activity indicators 01/12/2009 - 31/05/2010

Diverse political pages for both individuals and collectives were selected in order to represent a range of types of political interaction on Facebook. Again, the sampled pages are outlined in the 'Archives and Sources' section in the Introduction and presented here in Table 2. The activity indicators used to represent the digital social-interaction on any given Facebook page refer to actions that were performed by either the page 'Facebook Administrator(s)' (FA) or public interaction(s) (PI).⁷⁰⁵ These are presented for comparison as numerical data and are intended to show the frequencies of activity types and interactions of a range of political individuals and groups that had a Facebook presence 2009-2010.

⁷⁰⁴ Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse, '2010', p. 211.

⁷⁰⁵ In other words, PIs are digital-social interactions on the page that were performed by individuals who were not FAs.

Table 1 shows that the 14 Conservative Party-affiliated Facebook groups' membership figures ranged from 47 for Aberconwy CF to 641 for Conservative Way Forward. All of the groups had the status of their privacy settings operating as 'Open', which suggest that the information viewable on the groups' pages were deemed by the group's administrators to be non-sensitive. The university groups demonstrate some correlation in the number of members and the frequency at which the group sent Facebook email messages to the group. UCL CF with its 250 members sent an average of three emails per month. This is compared with KCL CF's 154 members to 0.83 emails per month, and Aberystwyth CF's 74 members to 0.17 emails per month. It would appear that the greater the membership of a group, the more frequently Facebook messages were sent to the group members by the group's administrators. A similar trend is observable when comparing the association-based CF groups. Cities of London & Westminster CF had the largest membership of any of the CF groups and sent an average of 2.67 Facebook email messages per month. Richmond Park CF with its 173 members sent 0.83 emails per month, and Aberconwy CF with its 47 members sent 0.50 per month. The trend continues further when comparing the candidate groups. Nigel Huddleson had the largest number of members at 261 and sent 0.67 emails per month. Michelle Tempest with 161 members sent 0.33 emails per month. A similar trend is shown in the Tory-affiliate groups. The Bow Group with 609 members sent on average 1 email per month. Progressive Conservatives had 423 members and sent 0.67 emails. The Tory Reform Group had 394 and sent 0.33 emails per month.

The three outliers, Runnymede & Weybridge CF, Anthony Ridge-Newman, and Conservative Way Forward, did not follow the trends within their categories and were subsequently not used in the comparison. This suggests that, although there appears to be a trend in the relationship between the number of members of a Conservative Facebook group and the number of email messages they sent per month in the run-up to 2010, there were those groups that were more active and others that were less active than similar types of groups in their categories. For example, unlike the other Tory-affiliate groups, Conservative Way Forward sent no Facebook emails to its members in the 26 week period. However, during the same period, Conservative Way Forward used traditional-email eight times to communicate with their members, which they addressed as 'Colleagues'.⁷⁰⁶ This compares to no emails being received from The Bow Group,⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰⁶ RNA Conservative Way Forward emails sent to ant@politician.com, between 1 December 2009 and 31 May 2010.

⁷⁰⁷ RNA Bow Group emails sent to ant@politician.com, between 1 December 2009 and 31 May 2010.

of which I was an active member. Therefore, some Tory-affiliate groups used Facebook-email to substitute communicating with their members by traditional email; and others, like CWF, used exclusively traditional email while maintaining also a Facebook presence.

Furthermore, Conservative Way Forward had a lower Wall posting activity than the other Tory-affiliate groups, whereas the Progressive Conservatives were significantly more active in the number of items posted to their Wall. Therefore, a diverse range of activity was observed between the groups. However, there were some observable trends in terms of Wall activity. The Facebook groups with the largest memberships in the university CFs (UCL CF), association-based CFs (Cities of London & Westminster CF) and candidate group (Nigel Huddleson) categories show the highest activity in terms of administrator Wall posts. These same groups show significantly higher event posting activity. Therefore, this would suggest that the most popular Conservative Facebook groups were those which were more social and more active both on and off Facebook. Moreover, it would suggest that there was a direct and mutually dependent relationship between on- and off- line political activity; and that, in 2010, having a strong presence in both the on- and off- line domains assisted the growth of Conservative support both on and off Facebook.

Table 1 shows data specific to Facebook groups. The functionality of Facebook groups in 2010 leant towards use for organisational aspects in Conservative culture. Facebook group function enabled administrators to organise, promote and communicate easily for both social and campaign event purposes. The captured audience within a Facebook group received information from automated event notifications and Facebook email messages when group administrators published event information. This meant that event organisation was targeted, simpler and faster. Its application on Facebook was also more dynamic than other electronic alternatives like email technologies. The administrator could monitor guest/RSVP lists in real time as members actively responded with the click of a Facebook button to invitations via their Facebook profile. Therefore, Facebook groups played a significant role in changing and enhancing the organisational culture of those groups within the Conservative Party which actively used Facebook groups to develop their offline socialisation and campaign operations.

Table 2 shows similar data for Facebook pages. However, it is important to note that Facebook pages in 2010 functioned in a different way to Facebook groups. One significant difference is that, unlike group members, there was no way of emailing Facebook page 'Fans' collectively. Pages were public, and communication activity was

centred primarily on the page's Facebook Wall. Individuals with a Facebook profile could be invited to, or chose independently to, 'Like' a page and therefore become a fan of that page. Pages were used to promote both individuals, e.g. David Cameron as a politician, as well as collectives, e.g. the Conservative Party as a political movement.

Facebook pages acted like shop windows for both individuals and collectives within the Conservative Party.⁷⁰⁸ Websites also act like shop fronts, except they are accessed by a loosely organised global audience. Facebook is populated by a body of individuals who make a choice to develop a personal presence within its password-protected, and, therefore, more tightly organised, semi-closed, online community. Through their interests, Facebook users make additional choices to congregate online as members of Facebook groups or as supporters of a cause, an individual and/or a collective through expressing an electronic thumbs-up. Therefore, in the case of politics, Facebook pages act like shop fronts situated in a distinct online community – rather like an online political-mall in which the political-consumer, first, makes the decision to go shop at the mall; and, second, tour and browse some political-shop fronts before publically buying into political-brands by becoming a 'Facebook Fan'. It is like carrying a branded-carrier bag and displaying to all at the mall that you have bought-in to a particular political product. In the political popularity contest that is facilitated by Facebook pages, the idea is to encourage as many users to carry your political-carrier bag as possible. According to research by Southern and Ward, the Conservatives, Labour and the Liberal Democrats had fairly equal levels of Facebook use in the 2010 General Election.⁷⁰⁹ Therefore, Facebook in 2010 was a particularly useful tool across the political spectrum for those politicians who used it effectively.

A simple comparison of the 'Likes' columns shown in Tables 1 and 2 show how the scale of interactive activity differed significantly from Facebook groups to Facebook pages. The Facebook pages yielded a significantly greater level of interaction by non-administrators than Facebook groups. Therefore, where Facebook groups encouraged a shift in Conservative organisational culture both on- and off- line, it would appear that Facebook pages attracted significantly greater online activity in terms of the volume and frequency of interactions. The number of 'Likes' or 'Fans' a political Facebook page had in 2010 could differ considerably. The fan results in Table 2 can be split into two

⁷⁰⁸ RNA Kinzett Interview, p. 123, 143, 144, 148; and Coffey Interview, pp. 176-177.

⁷⁰⁹ Rosalynd Southern and Stephen Ward, 'Below the Radar? Online Campaigning at the Local Level in the 2010 Election,' in Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimer and Simon Atkinson (ed.), *Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and the Media in the 2010 General Election* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 218-237.

distinctive groups. Firstly, the lower profile politicians including Anthony Ridge-Newman, David Jones, Kwasi Kwarteng and Robin Walker had quantities of page likes ranging from Walker's 125 fans to Jones's 346 fans. Secondly, the higher profile politicians including Boris Johnson, David Cameron and Nick Clegg each had tens of thousands of fans, from Johnson's 49,733 to Clegg's 73,084. In contrast to Southern and Ward's generalised study, the specific Facebook cases here indicate some differences between the ways in which participants interacted with individual political party Facebook pages. Comparing the Clegg and Liberal Democrat pages with the Labour and Conservative pages shows that the campaign events activity postings was low for Labour and the Conservatives, but higher for the Liberal Democrats. Therefore, the Liberal Democrats were more inclined to advertise their campaign pursuits on their main Facebook page than the two other main parties. This suggests that Labour and the Conservatives considered that their campaigns had strategically more to lose in doing so than the Liberal Democrats.

However, there was greater posting activity by the Conservative leadership than the Liberal Democrat leadership in terms of photographs and videos. There were 56 photos and 34 videos posted by page administrators to Cameron's page compared to 14 photos and 32 videos posted by page administrators to Clegg's page. The Conservatives page, which had the most number of fans at 111,540, had also the greatest activity in posting 78 photos and 71 videos. The Labour page, which had the lowest number of fans of the three main parties at 61,485, posted 0 photos and 21 videos. The Liberal Democrats, with 91,878 fans, posted 15 videos and 53 photos. These figures demonstrate how in the run-up to the 2010 election, the Conservative Party was the most popular party on Facebook, even though Clegg was the most popular political leader of the three main British parties. The Labour Party was the least popular party and it had significantly lower activity in terms of integrating its publicity and media with its Facebook pages.

The Conservative Party was the leader in terms of updating its centralised Facebook pages and integrating them with visual media. There was also greater activity by both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats in terms of posting links to external sites. Therefore, the two parties used Facebook to actively promote their other online interests like blog postings and links to central-party website pages with greater intensity than Labour. The average likes per Wall post is a good indicator of public interaction by non-administrators. Table 2 shows that the higher profile politicians' and the main political parties' pages range from 78.31 average likes per administrator

posting for the Liberal Democrat page to 148.06 average likes per Conservative page administrator posting. Overall, the Conservatives were consistently the party with the greater administrator and non-administrator public interactions on their Facebook pages. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that the Conservative Party had the greatest intensity of activity on Facebook in 2010. The Liberal Democrats were not far behind the Conservatives in the levels of interaction with the new medium. However, Labour were distinctly less engaged with the use of Facebook's public pages.

One notable difference between the Conservative Party pages in the sample and those of Labour and the Liberal Democrats is that most of the Conservatives allowed non-administrators to post on the Wall. When I sampled the Labour and Liberal Democrat pages, any non-administrator posts were hidden. Johnson's page Wall had 1189 postings by non-administrators and Cameron had many thousands, which I deemed too many for an ethnographer to count effectively and efficiently on Facebook. However, I did note that there was a considerable peak in the number of postings on Cameron's page between 11-12 May 2010, during which time it was officially announced in the wider-media that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats had reached a coalition agreement and that Cameron would be the next prime minister. The non-administrator postings on Cameron's Facebook page Wall were both positive and negative in their content and tone. I noted that the majority of negative postings and comments could be deemed to be of an offensive nature, because of the expletives and profanities used in them. These results would suggest that the Conservative Party in 2010 took a more laissez-faire approach to the sanitisation of its public interactions on its politician's pages than Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Facebook: Dissolving Barriers

Facebook was used effectively by the Conservatives to encourage participation within the party organisation by new and more established party supporters. Facebook groups were used as a tool to organise events and campaigns. Facebook pages became for some candidates a political shop front from which the administrator could furnish the page Wall, like a window display, with visual multimedia including text, photographs, videos and hyperlinks to market and sell the candidate and collective Conservative Party cause to captured and public audiences. In using Facebook, candidates and activists at all levels of the Conservative Party had access to, for the first time, a medium which held the potential for relatively unknown politicians to develop an audience and demonstrate their popularity in a publically viewable manner. Ordinary

candidates and activists had the potential to challenge the traditional party hierarchy in having the opportunity to engage with a medium in which both the grassroots participant and party leader had access to the same platform. Therefore, Facebook's role in the Conservative Party contributed to a cultural change in the daily practice and use of political technologies in an array of areas in the party's organisation and for a significant number of individuals.

By 2010, Facebook was acting as a venue that brought together like-minded individuals in locales within cyberspace which did not discriminate in terms of spatial limitations and geographical boundaries. Facebook brought candidates and potential activists from across the country closer together than ever before insofar that, with the immediacy and localisation of Facebook through the internet, geographical boundaries were seen as much less limiting. In doing so, it removed the reliance of candidates and activists on the traditional party structure which had been long dominated by CCHQ and the national party organisation.⁷¹⁰ It would seem that this use of Facebook had begun to dissolve the traditional and historic barriers and boundaries for candidates and activists at the grassroots in terms of political communication, which, since the 1950s, had been largely dominated by television and the gradual centralisation of political profile and output. Therefore, Facebook further empowered for the Conservatives a dynamic grassroots communication culture, which is in line with the theories about technological impacts on internal democracy that Gibson and Ward evaluate effectively.⁷¹¹ As the oral testimonies indicate, Facebook appears to have allowed and facilitated: easier organisation of offline socialisation; otherwise unknown participants to develop a profile, and a platform from which their voice was more readily heard; and the opportunity to promote messages outside of those dominated by the traditional centralised control.

Most significantly, Facebook, as an internet application, facilitated a technology-centred innovation culture at the grassroots, which evolved and spread through a learning, adapting and copying behaviour by Conservatives who used the medium early on in the 2005-2010 election cycle. However, it is important to be cautious about generalising about Facebook behaviour in this context, because of the demographic and leadership trends which played significant roles in the history of Facebook's evolution as a political-organisation communication tool for the

⁷¹⁰ Gibson, 'Party Change'.

⁷¹¹ See, Rachel Gibson and Stephen Ward, 'Political Organisations and Campaigning Online', in Holli Semetko and Margaret Scammell (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Political Communication* (Sage, London, 2012), p. 68.

Conservative Party. A range of respondents have supported one of the key observations of this research that, in the run-up to 2010, the majority of Conservative-minded individuals interacting with politician pages on Facebook were representative of the younger-wing of the party.⁷¹² The testimonies above have provided narratives which are useful in understanding how unwitting leadership within prominent CF groups led to the passing down of Facebook best practice in an organic manner through observation and learning. It was through this behaviour that a new and distinctive internet-based cyber-culture within CF began to proliferate. I have named this Conservative Party organisational culture ‘Cyber Toryism’, which has much of its development and proliferation rooted in the population and behaviour of the groupings of younger-aged individuals within the party. The culture of Cyber Toryism in turn led to a loosening of the control that the central-party had over party organisation, and its communication and campaign operations.⁷¹³

The Blogosphere: ‘A thorn in the side’ or the ConservativeHome?

Cyber Toryism’s role as a powerful, sometimes subversive,⁷¹⁴ force in the Conservative Party in the run-up to the 2010 General Election, and beyond, was perhaps most encapsulated in the Conservative-blogosphere. In June 2010, there were approximately 417 Conservative-affiliated blogs, compared with 245 Labour-affiliated blogs and 261 Liberal Democrat-affiliated blogs.⁷¹⁵ These figures support my observation that in the run-up to 2010 the Conservative-blogosphere was the most abundant and active in terms of the number of active Conservative-blogs and the frequency at which the bloggers published articles. The results from Southern and Ward’s research support further these findings. Their figures for the 2010 General Election show that 58% of Conservative

⁷¹² RNA Howlett Interview; Hugh Meares Interview, 29 November 2011, Appendix 3, p. 65-66; Cooper Interview; Kinzett Interview; and Coffey Interview.

⁷¹³ Gibson, ‘Party Change’.

⁷¹⁴ For example, Harry Cole’s ‘Tory Bear’ blog, which broke a story involving young Conservatives who had posted on Facebook comments in relation to attending a bad-taste costume party. Cole’s blog post subsequently led to the story being reported on BBC1 Six O’clock News. See, for example, Tory Bear, ‘An apology from Matt Lewis’, *ToryBear.com*, 9 January 2009, online: <http://www.torybear.com/2009/01/apology-from-matt-lewis.html> [accessed, 12 January 2009]; and BBC News, ‘McCanns’ anger at Tory activist’, *BBC News*, 9 January 2009, online: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7820727.stm [accessed, 12 January 2009]. See, also, RNA Howlett Interview, pp. 24-26.

⁷¹⁵ RNA Total Politics, ‘Political Blog Directory’, Web2PDF [captured: 11 June 2010]. The Total Politics Political Blog Directory was a comprehensive public listing of blogs within the political blogosphere, which totalled 2351 blogs on 11 June 2010. The publication automatically linked bloggers to its website and allowed bloggers to self-submit their blog to its listings.

parliamentary candidates used blogs compared to significantly lower figures for Labour at 40.5% and the Liberal Democrats at 32.3%.⁷¹⁶

At a Conservative Party forum event, in early 2010, the Chairman of the Welsh Conservatives introduced Iain Dale as a speaker and suggested that very few active Conservative participants would go to bed at night without having read the 'Iain Dale's Diary' blog. Whether or not that statement was true, it demonstrates the Conservative Party's appreciation for the role of blogging and that there was recognition in senior-ranks that individual Conservative-bloggers could achieve prominence and influence in the daily lives and culture of Conservative participants. Furthermore, it reiterates the significance of the role of leadership in Cyber Toryism. In this case, an individual blogger, who was an actor in a position of leadership, influenced the behavioural patterns of some Conservative participants within the party.

The ConservativeHome blog was another blog of significance that played a role in Cyber Tory leadership in the run-up to 2010. It was, and remains, the most illustrious example of Cyber Toryism in terms its role and impact in the party's day-to-day organisational culture and the blog's influential prominence, which reached the attentions of Conservative participants at virtually all levels of the party's hierarchy.⁷¹⁷ Elder testifies that the CCHQ Press Department dealt with bloggers in the run-up to 2010,⁷¹⁸ but suggests that it is important not to 'confuse blogging with journalism'.⁷¹⁹ He argues that bloggers, especially those involved with ConservativeHome behave rather more like lobbyists and pressure groups, even though they may come from a journalistic background. However, a former employee of ConservativeHome and other respondents to this research would disagree. Jonathan Isaby argued that:

I am a journalist. I worked for the BBC for four years. I worked for the Daily Telegraph for five years. I have worked for ConservativeHome for two and a half years. As far as I am concerned, I am still pursuing a journalistic career by doing ConservativeHome. I suppose a lot of bloggers would regard themselves as kind of individual citizen journalists.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁶ Southern and Ward, 'Radar', p. 228.

⁷¹⁷ RNA Howlett Interview, pp. 29-31; Elder Interview, pp. 51, 59-60; Cooper interview, pp. 117-120; Robin Walker Interview, 28 March 2011, Appendix 8, pp. 158-160, 162; and Coffey Interview, pp. 175-177.

⁷¹⁸ RNA Elder Interview, pp. 60-61.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁷²⁰ RNA Jonathan Isaby Interview, 31 March 2011, Appendix 5, p. 94. Isaby claims he was the first blogger provided with a Lobby Pass for access to the House of Commons.

The newness, and evolution-in-progress,⁷²¹ of the role of blogging as in interdisciplinary phenomenon, in the run-up to the 2010 election, meant that a clear consensus was and remains absent among the Conservative sophisticate on the definitions of what blogging is and what bloggers are, and how the blogosphere fits in the wider picture amid the traditional institutions of state like the press, the public, pressure groups and political parties. Dan Burstein's historical anthropology view of blogging argues that blogging has been in constant evolution because its precursors date-back to cave paintings and more recently the practice of writing a diary. He argues that these are cultural communication artefacts and that 'blog-like phenomena' have been observed repeatedly throughout the 'history of civilisation'.⁷²²

Burstein suggest that 'blogs are particularly interesting because they marry so much personality and attitude with this complex mix of software technologies.'⁷²³ Perhaps the uniqueness of blogging in the Conservative context is that its versatility as an internet platform for use in policy and discourse meant that it was able to be moulded to be what individuals or groups wanted it to be in order to serve their own purpose - thus placing their personal stamp on it - rather than mirroring the identity of the central-party. I would suggest that it was for this reason that blogging meant different things to different actors in the party and the wider-democratic environment. Even with the benefit of hindsight following the 2010 election, a degree of ambiguity in relation to blogging, and microblogging (e.g. Twitter), remained extant in the Conservative-discourse as recently as October 2012.

Peter Osborne, a Daily Telegraph columnist and ConservativeHome critic⁷²⁴ suggested that 'ConHome is a remarkable phenomenon, which has created a new force in politics that is not yet fully understood'.⁷²⁵ Osborne continued in claiming that the blog draws 'sharp-suited' lobbyists, but attracts the interest of only '0.0001 percent of

⁷²¹ Ibid., pg. 98. Isaby suggests that blogging is a fluid phenomenon which is constantly evolving over time.

⁷²² Dan Burstein, 'From Cave Painting to Wonkette: A Short History of Blogging', in David Kline and Dan Burstein, *Blog! How the newest media revolution is changing politics, business and culture* (CDS Books, New York, 2005) pp xi-xxvi.

⁷²³ Ibid, p. xxi.

⁷²⁴ See, for example, Peter Osborne, 'Lord Ashcroft's Tory Right is stopping the Coalition Working', *Daily Telegraph*, 27 June 2012, online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/9359539/Lord-Ashcrofts-Tory-Right-is-stopping-the-Coalition-working.html> [accessed, 23 November 2012]; and, Lord Ashcroft, 'Lord Ashcroft responds to Peter Osborne's article about him and ConservativeHome in this morning's Telegraph', *ConservativeHome*, 28 June 2012, online: <http://conservativehome.blogs.com/platform/2012/06/lord-ashcroft-responds-to-peter-obornes-article-about-him-and-conservativehome-in-this-mornings-tele.html> [accessed, 23 November 2012].

⁷²⁵ Peter Osborne quote, at 'Has social media changed the Conservative Party?', Conservative Party Conference 2012.

the population'. He suggested that the online publication is to 'the Right' of Cameron's Conservatives' political ideology and policy, and likened it to the 1980's 'Leftist' movements within the Labour Party. Osborne argues that the blog is used to propagate the views of Lord Ashcroft and Tim Montgomerie, which 'represents a narrow stroke of the sophisticate'.⁷²⁶ Tim Hames' observational perspective indicated towards a strong belief in the prominence of the ConservativeHome blog in referring to the Conservative Party Conference 2012 as 'The ConservativeHome Political Conference, to which the rest of the Conservative Party has come along'.⁷²⁷ These comments were made in a debating context in order to provoke thought and reaction, and the speakers were focused on identifying whether ConservativeHome is a help or hindrance to Cameron's Conservatives. However, their discourse reveals that those with influence and interest in the Conservative Party believe and perceive ConservativeHome to have made a significant impact on the party's organisational structure, dynamics and process of policy development.

Montgomerie believes that ConservativeHome has been part of, and contributed to, an 'internet revolution', which has led to the 'most radical decentralisation of power in modern times'.⁷²⁸ He likened it to the significance of the Industrial Revolution, from which time the, now, traditional media began assuming control of the public agenda. Montgomerie claims that ConservativeHome cost \$15 per month in set-up cost, which he considered comparably cheap when the launch of a student magazine would cost in excess of £400, and that the blog achieves a daily online readership of 15,000 to 25,000 individuals. He believes that the 'transfer of power is huge',⁷²⁹ because a reader no longer has to wait for The Telegraph to deliver news to them and 'the little guy can stand-up to these big organisations'⁷³⁰ using affordable and accessible internet technologies. Furthermore, Montgomerie predicts that the 'Fordist monopolies' of the big political parties are likely to fall and when that occurs internet-based mechanisms through applications like the ConservativeHome blog will 'fill the void'.⁷³¹ As

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ Tim Hames quote, at 'Has social media changed the Conservative Party?', Conservative Party Conference 2012.

⁷²⁸ Tim Montgomerie quote, at 'Has social media changed the Conservative Party?', Conservative Party Conference 2012.

⁷²⁹ Ibid.

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ Ibid.

discussed in Chapter Two, this prediction is in keeping with Helen Margetts' ideas for the emergence in Britain of 'the Cyber Party'.⁷³²

On initial assessment, Montgomerie's claims might appear grandiose. However, an understanding of ConservativeHome's genesis gives an insight into the mind behind the operation, which began to transition from an idea to a reality in 2005 while Montgomerie worked for The Telegraph newspaper. Cooper explains that:

ConservativeHome was set up explicitly to campaign on the issue of selection, because they were outraged at the fact that the Conservative Party membership did not really have that much of a choice over who the leader of the Conservative Party was and, as a result, they have always had this campaigning streak – in trying to reform the party and keep the party to a form of Conservatism that the editors and, therefore by extension, the readers share.⁷³³

Tim Bale describes this as, 'Montgomerie leading the campaign to maintain the democratic rights of ordinary members' of the party.⁷³⁴ Therefore, Montgomerie's longstanding objective for the blog has been to shift power from the party's centre in order to influence and catalyse reform in the party's organisational processes. To some extent Montgomerie's objectives have been realised already and the ConservativeHome blog is another example of where individual leadership in the use of Conservative-affiliated internet media has encouraged a culture of Cyber Toryism at the grassroots of the party.

Both Howlett and Cooper claim that ConservativeHome has been viewed by CCHQ and the Conservative leadership as a 'thorn in the side' of the Conservative Party.⁷³⁵ Walker believes that in order for ConservativeHome to be credible, unlike the centrally controlled 'Blue Blog',⁷³⁶ it must remain independent of the central-party. He believes also that ConservativeHome has a significant role to play in party policy and organisational discourse at the grassroots of the party – although at times it is a challenge to party unity.⁷³⁷ Coffey suggests that one of the risks for the party is that the lines can become crossed between ConservativeHome commentary and the official

⁷³² Helen Margetts, 'The Cyber Party', in Richard Katz and William Crotty (eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics* (Sage, London, 2006), pp. 528-535.

⁷³³ RNA Cooper Interview, p. 118.

⁷³⁴ Bale, *Cameron*, p. 266.

⁷³⁵ RNA Cooper Interview, p. 118; Howlett Interview, p. 29.

⁷³⁶ See, 'The Blue Blog', online: <http://blog.conservatives.com/>.

⁷³⁷ RNA Walker Interview, pp. 158-160, 162.

Conservative Party standpoint in the public sphere.⁷³⁸ This would suggest that there are concerns within the party about the decentralising impact of ConservativeHome, and other internet applications, on the central-party's level of control of its official communications and key messages. The primary impact of these internet applications used by Cyber Tories at the party grassroots in 2010 is the blurring of the boundaries in the party's organisation. It reveals that the perceived ambiguity in relation to the understanding in the public consciousness of the dividing lines between the official and unofficial spokespersons is considered by some party officials to be a threat to the party's public identity.⁷³⁹

Coffey and Walker provide the 2010 candidate perspective and agree that the role of ConservativeHome at that time was to open greater channels for 'conversation' at the grassroots. They believe it allowed the candidate selection process to be more transparent – rather than a closed affair hidden under the control of CCHQ and Conservative associations.⁷⁴⁰ This candidate perspective demonstrates how to some degree the party was being forced by ConservativeHome to loosen its grip on information and processes at the heart of its organisation and traditional process. Isaby provides a ConservativeHome perspective on this:

Historically, I suppose sometimes the party would officially not want to have internal [candidate] selection information out in the public domain. But I would say that the nature of the information filter is such that it gets to us anyway. So I think the party before the last election became resigned to the idea that, "Oh well, ConservativeHome will find out anyway – so we might as well just release it." I suppose in that sense the medium of the internet has assisted with creating a bit more openness and transparency about how these things are done.⁷⁴¹

Therefore, some in the wider-party consider the internet to have had some impact on the central-party's traditional culture of control and secrecy, believing it to have led to a greater openness, transparency and loosening of centralised processes. Subsequently, ConservativeHome had a good relationship with candidates.⁷⁴² In fact, Coffey suggests that, used as a platform, ConservativeHome is an excellent 'shop

⁷³⁸ RNA Coffey Interview, p. 177.

⁷³⁹ For the impact of British political blogs in party change, generally, see, Rachel Gibson, Kevin Gillan, Fabienne Greffet, Benjamin Lee and Stephen Ward, 'Party organizational change and ICTs: The growth of a virtual grassroots?', *New Media & Society*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2013), pp. 31-51.

⁷⁴⁰ Walker Interview, pp. 158, 159-160; Coffey Interview, pp. 175-176.

⁷⁴¹ RNA Isaby Interview, p. 96.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

window' from which candidates are able to place themselves on display to the wider Conservative Party.⁷⁴³ Furthermore, she claims that ConservativeHome has an unparalleled position to mobilise activists to key by-election campaigns as it did in the Crewe and Nantwich By-Election in 2008.⁷⁴⁴ This evidence suggests that Gibson et al. could be incorrect in their claim that blogs 'are not mobilizing tools' for grassroots activity.⁷⁴⁵ It also demonstrates why academic caution should be taken when applying generalised claims across political parties and phenomena.

The oral testimonies indicate that the proliferation of Cyber Toryism, like ConservativeHome, has led to concerns about the impact of non-centralised internet applications on the party. However, they indicate also that there was an understanding within the party of the benefits that this new-wave of internet-based political innovation was providing for the party organisation and its electoral performance prior to the 2010 election. Isaby suggests that ConservativeHome's success was due to its 'unique' and 'niche' role within the party. He claims that the blog has excellent relationships, not only with candidates and grassroots Conservatives, but, also, with the traditional mainstream media. He disagrees with Walker on the point that the blog is a challenge to party unity and believes that instead it is a democratising force that has become the primary source of information on the Conservative Party for many individuals inside and outside the party. Isaby claims that without ConservativeHome the information would not be available publically on a real time daily basis. He explains that the internet allows for a cross-fertilisation of ideas and media. Through ConservativeHome's integration with social media, like Twitter, it means that the conversation is wide-reaching and open to anyone.⁷⁴⁶ Therefore, ConservativeHome's unique role in both lobby journalism and as an evolving organelle of contemporary Conservative Party organisation, which now functions and impacts in both the on- and off- line worlds, means that the blog is primarily impacting on the evolution of the party's organisational culture from the grassroots up.

⁷⁴³ RNA Coffey Interview, p. 176.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Gibson, Gillan, Greffet, Lee and Ward, 'grassroots', p. 1.

⁷⁴⁶ RNA Isaby Interview, p. 100.

MyConservatives and Merlin: Campaign Magic?

MyConservatives

Where natural evolution and individual leadership fed the growing culture of Cyber Toryism at the Conservative Party's grassroots, Cameron's Conservatives at CCHQ, and the technologies they were developing in the run-up to 2010, had significantly less impact on the party's organisational culture and dynamics. Two of the most significant developments in the central-party's aspiration for the use of new internet-based technologies in the Conservative Party campaign 2010 were the 'MyConservatives' application, Cameron's Conservatives' contribution to Web 2.0, and the Merlin database that was introduced in Chapter Five. The Conservative Party's corporate website best defines MyConservatives, and claims also that the application has evolved now since 2010:

The original version of the site, launched in the build-up to the General Election, saw over 10,000 people working together for change in 390 different campaigns across the country. It helped to support a number of candidates into seats by raising their profiles and communicating the key areas that they stood for. It also gave electors a new way to directly access their representatives and other members of the community with similar outlooks and aspirations - both of these areas generated significant amounts of funding that would not have been achievable via more traditional fundraising activities. We learned a lot about how to campaign online as a result and we have used that knowledge to redevelop the website. We'll be showcasing the new site at Conference and shortly after it will become one of the key permanent features in our online campaigning toolkit.⁷⁴⁷

This application, which was controlled and produced by the Conservative Party, acted as an online venue in which Conservative officials and participants could meet and engage with other people interested in assisting Conservative campaigns from both inside and outside the traditional party. To some extent, the application reformed the manner in which the party assimilated campaign support at the local level and, like Facebook, at the same time removed the geographical barriers which had traditionally hindered long-distance support of a particular candidate or campaign. Many candidates had used already Facebook applications for that very purpose. However, although

⁷⁴⁷ The Conservative Party Website, MyConservatives.com, paragraph 2, online: http://www.conservatives.com/Get_involved/MyConservativesHolding.aspx [accessed, 23 September 2012].

Facebook was a useful e-organisation tool, unlike MyConservatives, it did not allow individuals to donate easily to a specific candidate's campaign fund.

The party raised approximately 25% of their online-fundraising via MyConservatives.com.⁷⁴⁸ Craig Elder testifies that the central purpose of MyConservatives was to encourage online-donations from individuals who would be willing to support a specific candidate but not necessarily the Conservative Party directly. However, Elder suggests that the application would have been more successful if it had been launched a year earlier in September 2008.⁷⁴⁹ Iain Dale agrees on this point and argues that the application did not have enough time to mature.⁷⁵⁰ Unlike the more-established social media sites of Facebook and Twitter, MyConservatives did not deeply infiltrate the culture of Cameron's Conservatives. Therese Coffey made some use of MyConservatives.com raising approximately £450 for her campaign in the Suffolk Coastal Constituency. She claims that it was an application that some of her friends used to donate easily online. The amounts of the individual donations ranged generally between £10 and £50, with one person donating £150. However, she criticises the application as frustrating her 'because none of it really worked.'⁷⁵¹ Coffey states that she used extensively Twitter, but that MyConservatives failed to improve the organisation of her campaign.

As a target seat candidate for Worcester in 2010, Robin Walker's use and analysis of MyConservatives was similar to those of Coffey. Walker testifies that he used the application to raise approximately £200 and to organise some elements of campaigning. He argues that MyConservatives was an improvement on what the party had before it, but that it was not as streamlined in its functionality or as 'effective' as some online-charity fundraising applications like 'JustGiving'.⁷⁵² Both Coffey and Walker agree that MyConservatives was a work in progress for the party and that with development the application had the potential to significantly assist campaign fundraising and organisation. Therefore, MyConservatives had only a minor impact in the party's organisational culture in 2010. It contributed to some extent in radiating-out the experimental ideas of the party's technological-elite at CCHQ to the lower levels of the party hierarchy. In that respect the application acted in a similar way to WebCameron. Like WebCameron, MyConservatives mediated direct and controllable

⁷⁴⁸ RNA Elder Interview, p. 52.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁷⁵⁰ RNA Dale Interview, p. 85.

⁷⁵¹ RNA Coffey Interview, p. 166.

⁷⁵² RNA Walker Interview, pp. 157-158.

access for Conservative politicians to their audience. However, when compared to WebCameron, the MyConservatives branding was significantly inferior and launched too late to have an equivalent impact in changing significantly party organisation. The oral testimonies provide a general consensus that MyConservatives, as a new medium, was a viable concept with potential for the future, but that it simply failed to mature in time for it to reach its full potential in the run-up to 2010.

Merlin

The Merlin database was another new Conservative Party-specific technology which was widely perceived within the party organisation to have failed to reach its potential prior to 2010.⁷⁵³ This was a topic of frustration across many types of individuals involved in the Conservative Party in the run-up to the 2010.⁷⁵⁴ Hugh Meares suggests that the central access to the Merlin database hindered the local association's use of email in the election:

Because all of the email addresses that are held on Merlin are available to the party centrally, what we have is the party involved in a communications programme in which the associations are not involved. What I believe they're doing is damaging our ability to use this communication.⁷⁵⁵

Furthermore, according to Elder, it was the inadequacies of Merlin which hindered also the extent to which the potential uses were realised by Conservative participants in the MyConservatives application in the run-up to 2010.

MyConservatives ended up being a standalone platform with data which needed to be manually inputted and extracted. That should never have been the case. In 2010, you should have been able to make any database speak to any database and we should have been able to make that work much more effectively than we were ultimately able to do. Now we certainly lay the blame for that at the feet of the infrastructure problems that Merlin faced. Could it be that it was a project too big? Could it be that we bit off more than we could chew? For somebody else to answer, but it seems that way to me.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵³ RNA Elder Interview, p. 51-52.

⁷⁵⁴ RNA Elder Interview; Meares Interview; and Walker Interview.

⁷⁵⁵ RNA Meares Interview, p. 67.

⁷⁵⁶ RNA Elder Interview, p. 52.

Robin Walker claimed that his campaign team used effectively Merlin as a successor to Blue Blue Chip, but suggested future improvements to Merlin were needed in order to integrate successfully its uses with other new internet technologies used by the party, e.g. a personal digital assistant (PDA).

Merlin is a much friendlier interface, it is much easier to use and it can provide you with much more relevant and targeted information than the Blue Chip system. The Blue Chip system was getting on for twenty years old and it was beginning to show. I think with Merlin it was a step forward, but it is still a pretty clunky piece of software and you could see the real difference between the business world in which you have a huge market, and therefore the software gets developed very quickly, and very effectively, and the political world in which the market is actually a lot smaller. Therefore the software is rather slower, more out of date and clunkier.⁷⁵⁷

In comparison with Blue Chip, Merlin was viewed by these respondents as an advance in technology for the Conservative Party. However, their testimonies suggest that as a technology with internet capabilities, Merlin did not significantly change or revolutionise the culture in which Conservative canvassers participated already in campaigns.

Procedural customs around the uses of Blue Chip had developed already over a 20 year period prior to the advent of Merlin. Therefore, in terms of its role in canvassing, Merlin inherited its user culture from Blue Chip. The internet capabilities of Merlin in 2010 enhanced the central-party's access to database information. However, Merlin's interface with other Conservative internet-based technologies like MyConservatives was limited due to the infancy of both technologies and the lack of time available for them to mature prior to the run-up to 2010. Had there been a speedier development and integration of these technologies then it is likely that their capabilities would have played a significantly greater role in the nature of the party's campaigns and the organisational culture in which party participants used the technologies. Unlike, WebCameron and Facebook, the Merlin network and MyConservatives application had not been advanced to a stage in which they held any real revolutionary capacity to change the manner in which the party organised itself at the grassroots. However, there is evidence to suggest that some database administrators, like association agents and chairmen, underwent a process of bureaucratic adaptation in order to successfully

⁷⁵⁷ RNA Walker Interview, p. 157.

interface with the user complexities and harness Merlin's advanced capabilities in associations and CCHQ offices.

Conclusions

The main themes of Chapter Five, which include a digital and age divide; digital bureaucracy; digital campaign-enhancement; dissolution of geographical boundaries; heterogeneity of Conservative associations; integration of new technologies in traditional hierarchies; and rapport and digital trust signals, at the local level of the Conservative Party, set the context for Chapter Six which has argued the case for an observable technological sub-culture in the party's wider organisational culture. The two main national groups of collective participants in the official Conservative Party organisation – Conservative associations and CF branches – are primarily divided by age. The age divide, in addition to secondary factors like the differences in the ways in which these two main groups are structured and organised, led to different responses to the use of internet technologies in the run-up to General Election 2010. Both groups are social in nature. However, CF participants embraced the uses of online social networking tools with greater enthusiasm and thus used them as devices for socialising without the traditional geographical limitations under which Conservative associations generally operate. The use of the Facebook application by younger members of the party allowed for greater networking activity and socialisation both on- and off- line.

There became two distinct organisational cultures within the party in the run-up to 2010. Amid the general heterogeneity of Conservative associations nationally, there were those collectives of individuals who engaged primarily and sometimes exclusively in the traditional communication and structural processes of Conservative Party organisation; and those who transferred and assimilated much of their activity within the organisation of the Conservative Party to the internet – with the development of a mutually beneficial relationship between on- and off- line Conservative Party operations. As the latter group of individuals grew, there was a proliferation of dynamic interactions between both collectives and individuals within the party that led to a distinctly different organisational behaviour and culture when compared to the more traditional view of Conservative Party interaction and organisation. It would appear that the primary factor influencing these behavioural and cultural differences was the role of internet applications, primarily between 2008 and 2010. Therefore, I have named the development of this distinct cultural phenomenon within the organisational culture of the British Conservative Party, which I apply exclusively to the run-up to the

2010 election period, as Cyber Toryism in order to distinguish it as a subculture from the party's traditional and overarching meta-culture.⁷⁵⁸

It seems plausible to suggest that the visible use of internet technologies and applications by prominent Conservative leaders, like Cameron and Johnson, in a campaign context was a signal to those within the party organisation who were actively engaged in the use of the internet in both personal and political capacities that innovative use of the internet for the gain of Tory Party operations was appropriate.⁷⁵⁹ This latent but symbolic message from the party leadership acted as an unwitting catalyst for subsequent growth in the use, experimentation and innovation of internet applications that assisted in the organisation of intra-party affairs in the run-up to the general election.⁷⁶⁰ Applications like Facebook acted as online venues for party participants to congregate and engage in the organisation of Conservative Party events, discussions, debates and campaigns. This in turn led to well organised and well attended party events and operations in the offline world.

Although the cultural dynamics of Cyber Toryism are likely to have been punctuated due to visible endorsements of the use of internet technologies by influential figures at the top of the party hierarchy, which itself was a result of wider technological evolutions in wider society, it is evident that the evolution of the phenomenon perpetuated firmly from within the ranks of the party's grassroots. Prominent Tory activists, candidates and lobbyists, like Richard Jackson, Iain Dale and Tim Montgomerie, respectively, took innovative steps to embrace the first uses of Facebook and blogs in effective ways, which in turn helped to enthuse a new generation of Conservatives for whom the internet was already part of their daily lives. The proliferation of Cyber Toryism developed with the transfer of the behaviours and practices of the traditional political culture of the younger members of the Conservative Party on to a new mode of internet-based participation within the party. This resulted in a co-existence of both on- and off- line cultural phenomena, which were observable and learnable by other Cyber Tory neophytes. A culture of copying, adapting and enacting the use of new media in Conservative Party organisation and campaigns meant that the phenomenological significance of Cyber Toryism continued its growth and proliferation

⁷⁵⁸ See, Howard's theory (in Chapter Two) that technology has the power to influence changes in political cultures.

⁷⁵⁹ See, Schein's theory (in Chapter Two) on the role of leaders as entrepreneurs guiding organisational culture change.

⁷⁶⁰ The Cyber Tory response to the use of the internet could be described as a pragmatic collective act, in line with the inherent nature of which Heppell writes, in relation to the party's selection of Cameron as leader (see Chapter Two).

from a London-centric base prior to and during the 2008 elections to wider national reaches in the run-up to 2010.

By 2012, the veil of latency of Cyber Toryism had begun to lift from the party's consciousness. Although the party did not use the tag of 'Cyber Toryism' to describe the observable behavioural changes in its organisation, the identification of a cultural change had begun nevertheless to receive some cognitive analysis by members of the party's sophisticate and grassroots participants. This realisation and enlightenment in the party's consciousness of the role of social media as a powerful force for change within the Conservative Party further impacted in the dialogue, discourses and agenda of party debates, operations and campaign literature. In 2010, there was little centralised best practice or guidance on the use of internet-based media in Conservative campaigns and organisation. Whereas, by 2012, the central-party operations had submitted to the arrival of wide-spread usage of internet applications by individual participants in the party in the form of publishing an extensive guide on e-campaigning that was largely set apart from literature and guidance pertaining to traditional media and campaign techniques. This was a step towards assuming some central control of the relatively uncontrollable nature of social media.

Through the widespread uptake of Cyber Toryism at the grassroots by 2010, the role of social media had impacted on the traditional structure and organisation of the Conservative Party in the form of shifting some of the traditionally centralised and controlled power, over party communications, message and operations, to Conservative participants at the grassroots for whom the traditional structure of centralised control through hierarchy and deference had previously limited their engagement. Therefore, the advent of the internet and internet-based applications, like social media, impacted on the organisation of the Conservative Party in providing a new environment and social tools with which users were able to claim greater control of party functions through innovation and imitation.⁷⁶¹

The lack of top-down control and guidance on matters relating to the internet meant that the traditional autonomy of the association was extant in terms of their approach to the use of new technology and media. Therefore, each local association took an autonomous approach to the internet. Some associations, like Richmond Park, highly embraced technological change and young people in respect to their campaign operations. Through the extensive use of online technologies, like Facebook groups,

⁷⁶¹ See, Howard's theory (in Chapter Two) that, rather than being the cause, social media play a central role in shaping political engagement.

those campaigns which resourced young activists, through social media, demonstrated a significantly greater engagement and participation in specific campaigns than those which took a more traditional approach. In the successful cases, Facebook and email were used actively as tools to sell participation in campaigns. These internet technologies were used to sell incentives to potential activists, like drinks and refreshments, in order to encourage participants to take the step from weak online interactions to full offline active campaign support. Young people campaigned less for party deference and tribal allegiances and more on a quid pro quo basis.

Facebook specifically helped remove the traditional geographical constraints over communication in the way in which traditional associations operated. Therefore, Facebook acted as a virtual association/participant which oiled organisational processes thus making party operations more fluid and bringing closer the national party into more intimate spaces within online venues. Facebook was also, for many associations and political figures, a shop front or window in which they were able to display a national gauge of popularity through the numbers of fans and supporters they had in any given Facebook page. Facebook's prominence is perhaps demonstrated mostly in the perception of one Conservative-insider that, for a newly selected candidate, a presence on Facebook had become a priority in line with the traditional press release as a mode to announce selection. Facebook was also a political leveller in that for the first time the leadership of a party and a candidate were presented on an equal playing field. In turn, Facebook helped facilitate a technology-centred culture at the party's grassroots.

The resultant impact on the party's traditional constitution was that the en masse use of these media at the party's grassroots shifted some of the power previously held by a few individuals in the party's elite-centres of power, like CCHQ and the party leadership, to a wider-collective of Conservative participants at lower levels of the party's traditional hierarchical structure. There were two major manifestations of this in the party's organisation. Firstly, the use of internet applications oiled the party's operational processes meaning that aspects of the party's organisation, like mobilising campaign activism among young people, was more fluid in its execution than it would have been otherwise. Secondly, the observed widespread Cyber Toryism elevated the impact of blogs like ConservativeHome and Iain Dale's Diary thus giving some participants at the party's grassroots a prominence and power they would have not had otherwise, thus loosening the grip that the centralised-elites had over what was viewed in the public sphere as Conservative Party output and organisational aspects which traditionally would have been kept secret in the immediate term. Therefore, it is

plausible to suggest that the advent of the internet and subsequent applications played roles which have resulted in a democratisation of the Conservative Party's organisation; and a loosening of the more CCHQ-centric culture in which the party had traditionally operated since the 1960s.

Those technologies which grew from organic uses at the grassroots upward, like blogs and social media, had a greater impact on the wider-party's organisational culture than those technologies, like MyConservatives and Merlin, which were developed and managed by central-party operations. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that it was the behaviour of younger participants at the party's grassroots, in the run-up to 2010, which made the most significant impact on the party's organisational culture in terms of technological use, behaviour and innovation. As the history of these events unfolded in the dynamic environment of a high profile long-campaign, the central-party was engaged-in observing, understanding and learning these changes, and was thus a step behind those engaged in the real-time use of Cyber Toryism at the grassroots. The central-party was not in a prime position of control over its individual participants and the media in which they were engaged, on a mass scale, for the first time since the mid-1950s. Therefore, how this phenomenon has impacted on the approach of the central-party, for example the extent to which the central-party has understood, embraced and adapted to these changes in its declining mass-party structure, will become more evident if/when work in line with this research is performed in a comparative context in the run-up to General Election 2015 and beyond.

The use of internet technologies impacted on the party's organisational culture significantly less in processes over which the central-party maintained greater traditional control, like e.g. WebCameron. The process of candidate selection is another example of a process in which CCHQ and association cadres maintained their traditional control in terms of the process's execution. However, candidate selection is also an example of how members of the party's affiliated blogging-community broke the party's traditional protocol in releasing otherwise secret internal-affairs into the public domain. This forced the party into a position of revealing more of its inner-workings than it would have traditionally. Therefore, in this case, the advent of the use of specific internet applications led to a greater transparency in central-party operations. Furthermore, the visible and public nature of blogs and social media meant that any acts by party participants could be viewed by individuals and collectives both inside and outside the Conservative Party. This behaviour, which to some could have been believed to be impertinent and defiant, and a demonstration of a rejection of the party's

traditional deferential-behaviour, was viewed by some inside observers as a challenge to Conservative Party unity and the party's official messages.

ConservativeHome's development, as a postmodern techno-cultural symbol and force within the party's organisational culture, was less like the organic evolution of the technological uses observed in other internet applications, like social media and other Conservative blogs. Therefore, it is plausible to suggest that Cyber Toryism was co-evolutionary in its expansion. Montgomerie's early objective was to use the blog to shift power from the central-party to the grassroots. Although some power was distributed to ConservativeHome participants at the grassroots of the Conservative Party, much of the power that was yielded by the blog application was channelled into the hands of Montgomerie himself, thus elevating him to a position of elite-status in the party, and beyond, in his own right. In this case, the power and the impact of the internet is most apparent, where the innovative use of internet applications through the vision of one individual was able to challenge Conservative Party hierarchy through that individual's rise in prominence in the party's unofficial ranks.⁷⁶² The manifestation of the unofficial prominence of specific individuals in the party through the medium of the internet is in itself a new phenomenon to which the Conservative Party is yet to adapt entirely.⁷⁶³ The Montgomerie case is an outlier when his extraordinary achievement is compared with the collective mass of Cyber Toryism elsewhere in the party. However, in view of the evolving, observing, learning, copying and adapting cyber culture at the grassroots, the party could indeed see a number of Montgomerie-types grow-out of the future of Cyber Toryism – unless the party adapts significantly its organisation to regain the tight central-control that began to be eroded by the impact of specific internet technologies in 2010.

⁷⁶² Darren Lilleker and Nigel Jackson, 'Towards a More Participatory Style of Election Campaigning: The Impact of Web 2.0 on the UK 2010 General Election', *Policy and the Internet*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2012), pp. 69-98.

⁷⁶³ Gibson, Gillan, Greffet, Lee and Ward, 'grassroots'.

Part IV
The Comparative History

SEVEN

Tory Television Culture and Cyber Toryism 1951-1964 and 2005-2012

This final part of the thesis is used to compare the two research periods represented in parts II and III. This chapter compares the Conservative parties under the leaderships of the four premiers 1951-1964 and Cameron's Conservatives 2005-2012. It argues that the advent of internet technologies has contributed to the facilitation of a loosening of the grip that the central Conservative Party had held traditionally over the organisation of its communications since the late 1950s; and that between 2005 and 2010 there was some redistribution of power away from central-elites to those Conservative participants at the grassroots who embraced innovative uses of specific internet technologies. A final chapter follows with the concluding thoughts of this thesis in relation to the impact of new media upon the Conservative Party's evolving organisational culture. It concludes that, since the late 1950s, the impacts of the advents of new political mass communication technologies on the Conservative Party's organisational culture have been to further contribute to an evolution away from a mass-party culture to a more technologically-centric culture, in which television 1951-1964 played a role in demanding further professionalisation of central-party culture; and internet technologies 2005-2012 most notably synthesised with the party in subcultures at the grassroots.

Comparing Conservatives: 1951-1955 and 2005-2012

In their respective periods, both Churchill's and Cameron's Conservatives were presented with significant technological advances in new media. Television in the 1950s and the internet in the 2000s were the new mass communication technologies which sociologically redefined their respective periods. The roles of both technologies in the British political environment were evolving at times when both political leaders and their respective Conservative parties were grappling with understanding and assimilating changing technological trends in Britain and, consequently, their parties' operations and organisations. The Conservatives in both periods looked to the United States to understand changes in American political culture in the wake of developments in new media, but forged relatively their own paths in their attitudes towards the use of new media in the British Conservative Party context. This demonstrates how the party in both periods learnt from and observed external change, but chose to adapt in its own way and in its own time.

When attitudes, behaviours and cultures are compared from the early parts of their respective periods to the latter, Churchill's Conservatives, 1951-1955, and Cameron's Conservatives, 2005-2012, both underwent significant changes in their responses to the advent of the political uses of their respective new media. For Churchill's Conservatives, Television transitioned from having relatively no importance or recognition in the party to there being a significant change in 1954, in the run-up to General Election 1955, at which time the party first established a separate Radio and Television Section at CCO.⁷⁶⁴ Prior to Cameron's Conservative leadership election in 2005, the use of the internet in the Conservative Party context was relatively insignificant.⁷⁶⁵ However, in the run-up to 2010, innovation in the use of internet technologies had proliferated at both CCHQ and grassroots levels of party organisation.⁷⁶⁶ This demonstrates how in these cases the party adapted significantly to the new technologies of the times in order to prepare for campaigns in potentially new political communication climates.

After significant undulations in opinion in relation to the role of television in political culture, Churchill's Conservatives came to view television as a tool for supporting the Conservative cause. However, a lack of general technological

⁷⁶⁴ See, Chapter Three.

⁷⁶⁵ See, Downey and Davidson's predictions (in Chapter Two).

⁷⁶⁶ See, Chapters Five and Six.

understanding and appreciation for how television broadcasting was constituted in British legal statutes led to a general suspicion surrounding television at all levels of the party. This was in contrast to the observations of the party in the run-up to the 2010 election. The comparatively unregulated nature of the internet was one which gave to the individual a more personal and interactive user-experience. Television in the 1950s was a distant and unobtainable medium for direct broadcast by the average Conservative participant. In contrast, in the late 2000s, young Conservatives were likely to have had daily interaction with internet technologies, like social media, in their personal lives. Therefore, when compared with older Conservatives, they were less suspicious about transferring their daily technological practices to the context of Conservative activism in the run-up to 2010.

Unlike the more uniform attitude towards television throughout Churchill's Conservatives, Cameron's Conservatives were split by an age divide which largely impacted on attitudes towards the use of internet technologies by older party participants prior to 2010. It would be incorrect therefore to suggest that there was no suspicion in Cameron's Conservatives towards use of the internet in the party's operations. In fact, it was this dichotomy in attitudes and behaviours, between the younger and older demographic in Cameron's Conservatives, which led to the distinct subculture of Cyber Toryism being observable. No such dichotomous phenomenon was evident in Churchill's Conservative organisation in relation to television culture in the early 1950s. This would suggest that Churchill's Conservatives exhibited a deferential culture that was more unified in nature and characteristic of a mass-party, when compared to Cameron's Conservatives. Unlike early 1950s political television, internet applications helped facilitate a greater voice for Conservative participants in the 2000s. Coupled with Cyber Toryism's shift away from the party's traditional structure, internet technologies allowed for greater power to be harnessed by the individual at lower tiers of the hierarchy.⁷⁶⁷ Television in the 1950s, as a comparatively passive medium, did not generally facilitate for the ordinary activist such an empowerment through interaction.

However, television's arrival in early 1950s political culture was in the consciousness of the Tory collective greatly more than the internet in the mid-2000s. In terms of interactivity, influence and political output, broadcasting oneself was primarily a medium available to the party-elite, which meant its development as a political

⁷⁶⁷ See, for example, the Hannan case (in Chapter Two).

medium for the Conservative Party largely centred on CCO operations. When television raised the party's general interest, the grassroots appear to have looked upward to party-elites for guidance. Therefore, Churchill's Conservatives' interaction with political TV at the grassroots was primarily led by the central-party. Conversely, the gradual, stepwise and evolutionary nature of the internet in Cameron's Conservatives meant that, other than the isolated catalysing cases of (1) WebCameron, as a symbolic statement of new Conservatism through Cameron's arrival on the internet in 2006; and (2) Johnson's Mayoral Campaign Facebook App in 2008, the wider developments of internet use within the changing organisational culture at the party's grassroots went relatively unnoticed by the wider-party until after the 2010 election.

In the early 1950s, the advent of television's arrival in British political culture in itself catalysed a significant increase in correspondence at all levels of the party on matters pertaining to propaganda through broadcasting media. CCO became a bureaucratic-hub for intra-party information exchange on those matters.⁷⁶⁸ This behaviour significantly increased as television's prominence in the party grew throughout the 1950s. In the 2000s, blogs and social media replaced the role of CCHQ in this manner, acting as cyber-places for information exchange of intra-party communications. Therefore, CCHQ in the internet age lost some of its control over processing and facilitating communications between the various individuals and collectives within the party hierarchy.⁷⁶⁹ Social media and email exchange in the 2000s began to substitute letter writing, and, therefore, the speed, extensiveness and intensity of information exchange in the Conservative-sphere was unprecedented. Furthermore, the publically accessible media, like blogs, Facebook and Twitter, through which ordinary Conservative participants were able to develop significant intra- and extra-party audiences, acted as platforms for participants to exchange and propagate information and messages, and thus have a greater voice than any ordinary member could have achieved through television in the early 1950s.

⁷⁶⁸ This fits with Thompson's modernist view of information flows between individuals (in Chapter Two).

⁷⁶⁹ See, the section on ConservativeHome (in Chapter Six).

Comparing Conservatives: 1955-1957 and 2005-2012

In 1955, Eden's Conservatives held a greater mandate than Churchill's Conservatives on which to steer the regulation of broadcasting. Therefore, the party's cautious approach dominated the proceedings surrounding television's use as a political medium between 1955 and 1957. Eden and his party-elite understood that television was going to impact significantly on political culture and that it was simply a matter of time. However, the party-elite was in no hurry to speed-up the inevitable and wanted to maintain control of its use in their own way and in their own time. In the 1950s, the nature of television and Conservative Party hierarchy meant that the grassroots' influence on actively changing the role of television in the party was slight. However, the deference given by the wider-party to the party-elite was responded to by Eden's central operations with a mutual respect that manifested itself in a considerable trust-relationship between the top and bottom of the party. This was demonstrated in the party-elite's encouragement for 'anyone' to become involved with aspects of the growth of television culture in the party's organisation. The party-elite began converting some ordinary activists to become members of TV listening panels and encouraged Young Conservatives to undergo broadcasting training. Therefore, unlike the relatively organic growth of political internet use by the grassroots 2008-2010, groups within Eden's grassroots were actively groomed through central-party operations.

The relatively unknown nature of television in mid-1950s culture meant that the central-party considered it of importance to conduct significant public opinion surveys and analytical assessments of the role of television in the party's operations. Therefore, television in Britain involved considerable interactions outside of the party. These involved primarily institutional-elites, inside and outside of intra-party affairs, which included CCO, Downing Street, the BBC, the ITA and Parliament. The process of cognitively assessing TV regulation and the impact of television in wider-society symbolised a cautious, but keen, approach towards greater use of political television. The caution was rooted also in the party's inherent suspicion of change which the party-elite had held towards the use of television in politics since the previous Labour administration relaunched the post-war BBC. Therefore, there remained at the heart of Eden's Conservatives an elite control that was governed by cautious attitudes towards the role of television in political culture.

In contrast, the internet in 2010 was relatively an unknown phenomenon in the political context for Cameron's Conservatives, because its development was greatly

more rapid, dynamic and diverse than anything observed in the development of 1950s television. The internet is a more disparate and fragmented medium, which influences the evolution of latent cultures and, therefore, presents greater challenges for policy makers to control its uses in politics. Rather than CCHQ employing guidance or control tactics, the use of internet applications in Cameron's Conservatives was characterised by a culture of freedom under a process of self-regulation in which the average online Conservative participant was expected to control and oversee their own internet-based output.⁷⁷⁰ This idea falls in line with classical liberal ideology that 'with freedom comes responsibility', and is a perspective espoused by a number of CF activists, including Oliver Cooper, in the late 2000s.⁷⁷¹ This younger demographic of Cameron's Conservatives thus embodied freedom ideals in their uses of social media and held significantly less suspicion towards the uses of new media in the Conservative Party than older participants, whose suspicions were often characteristic of the type of Conservative paternalism evident in Eden's Conservatives' attitude towards political television. Therefore, in their respective periods, both Conservative parties had dominant groups of participants who were inherently suspicious of change in terms of the use of new media. However, the latter 2000s were unique in that they saw also the party's culture diverge in terms of the co-evolution of Cyber Toryism. Subsequently, Tory campaign participation in the 2010 election was characterised by a new-type of Conservative activism that was constituted by a growing collective of free-minded Conservative participants who could be identified by their age-profile and behavioural use of internet technologies.

While the elite-groups of Eden's Conservatives were gearing-up to take greater control over the new medium of their time, Cameron's elites at CCHQ were losing the intensity of their grip over the party's communication culture due to the organic proliferation of Cyber Toryism at the grassroots. Cyber Tory participants appear to have demonstrated significantly greater enthusiasm towards use of new media activity than the grassroots of the early to mid-1950s. Furthermore, unlike the role played by Eden's CCO staff in the 1950s, general Cyber Tory activity was characterised by the general absence of any discernible direct guidance, instruction and/or control from Cameron's central-party. Therefore, as Eden's Conservatives were undergoing the beginnings of a process of top-down adaptation and change in a transition towards a more television-centric organisational approach; Cameron's Conservatives organisation

⁷⁷⁰ See, Chapter Five.

⁷⁷¹ RNA Oliver Cooper Interview, Appendix 6, p. 105.

of communications was being changed most significantly at the grassroots with an internet-fuelled shift in culture.

It would seem that Eden's and Cameron's Conservatives share some common ground in that both television and the internet were more influential in changing the party's organisational culture in 1951-1957 and 2005-2010, respectively, than the two media played in the process of connecting with the electorate in the general elections of 1955 and 2010. Eden's Conservatives made relatively dramatic changes to the structure, organisation and processes in the ways in which it managed the growing developments in television. Between 1955 and 1957, this was beginning to be felt at virtually all levels of the party through training, increased roles in broadcasting for Area Publicity Officers, and the intense intra-party dialogues in relation to television, which manifested themselves as greater interaction and fluidity between participants across the party's hierarchy. CCO was reasonably cognisant in relation to these steady changes, which were also well understood.

For Cameron's Conservatives at CCHQ, the nature of rapid evolutionary change at the party's grassroots, during an intense and fragmented election cycle, meant that many of these phenomenological changes, which were already out of the traditional remit of control for the central-party, were slow to be realised, understood and identified by CCHQ mechanisms, which were more focused on centralised projects like WebCameron. This naivety is reminiscent of the confusion that many Conservative MPs experienced in the mid-1950s over the process of selection of Conservative speakers for television programmes.

Although Eden's elites and central-staff understood the impact of television and the processes in which the party's culture was being influenced and changed, some sub-groups within the party, like MPs, remained relatively naive to the ways of political television culture. Eden's CCO, used the medium of the 'TV & Radio Newsgram' in order to actively disseminate information to its participants, and in doing so educate them in the ways of television culture. The central-party was therefore actively managing, and, thus, controlling the process of transitional change in the party's organisation in anticipation of there being a significant shift in political culture in terms of the impact of television on the party.

Although the use of WebCameron has been considered by scholars as the first significant use of e-campaigning in Britain,⁷⁷² prior to 2010, Cameron's central-elite

⁷⁷² See, Downey and Davidson's assessment of WebCameron (in Chapter Two).

appear to have been in a state of relative naivety to the implications of internet-use on grassroots activity and behaviour. In fairness to Cameron's central-operations, anticipating evolutions in new internet-based media-uses was perhaps implausible in view of the frenetic digital-dynamics characteristic of the late 2000s. This is especially evident when the rate of technological evolution and diversity in internet applications is compared to the relatively sluggish-developments in British television 1936-1989.

In both cases, each new medium had begun the process of synthesis with their respective Conservative parties and in turn influenced evolutions in the parties' organisations. Both parties' deeper involvements and interactions with new media meant that the two-way relationship between the technologies and parties became more fluid for both Eden's and Cameron's Conservatives. This was likely because the attitudes and behaviours of collectives of individual participants within the parties had begun to shift in line with wider socio-technological changes.⁷⁷³ In the Eden case, this appears to have been planned, orchestrated and executed by the central-party; but in Cameron's case, although his use of WebCameron appears to have catalysed the initial use of new media, it seems to have been leadership and innovation at the grassroots, followed by a relatively natural snowball-effect in uptake at the party's grassroots, that impacted on the most significant shift in the party's culture. In both periods, the parties' organisations and cultures were integrating and forming irreversible bonds with the new technologies. The advent of these new media had led to changing dynamics between the centralised party-elites and those operating at other levels of the party hierarchy.

Comparing Conservatives: 1957-1964 and 2005-2012

During Macmillan's early premiership, 1957-1958, the general status quo in Conservative Party organisation appears to have been largely maintained in terms of its attitudes, traditions and approaches. These seem to have manifested themselves in some practical outcomes insofar that early Macmillan's Conservatives at CCO, as under Eden, continued (1) to invest considerable time and resources in researching and understanding the role of the growing television culture in political culture, in order to assess the impending impact on its own culture; (2) a cautious and competitive approach to adaptation, making tentative changes to party operations; and (3) adherence to its

⁷⁷³ See, Howard's theory (in Chapter Two).

mass-party culture in prioritising methods of motivating and mobilising extensive grassroots participation.⁷⁷⁴

From Cameron's election as leader, in 2005, to the launch of WebCameron, in late 2006, CCHQ took a relatively tentative approach to change and engagement with internet-based political communication techniques. Although the party leadership, which included George Osborne and Francis Maude, had begun implementing some organisational and staffing changes at CCHQ, in the process of gearing-up to embrace new media in its operations, this remained relatively hidden from those outside of CCHQ and, therefore, had a relatively minor impact on wider-party organisation. Furthermore, in the run-up to 2010, the party's central communications operations were distracted by another important milestone in political communication history: the advent of the first televised leader debates during a British general election. This historic spotlight on the broadcast of party leaders seemed to act to bury further already latent internet-based activity in Conservative Party culture, meaning that changing cultural phenomena were hidden from general view inside and outside of the party.

By late 2006, the new social media of Facebook and Twitter were on the rise in wider Western culture. These phenomena were emerging in Britain, but appear to have remained on the periphery of the party's organisation until the London Mayoral Election in 2008.⁷⁷⁵ Like Macmillan's Conservatives prior to 1958, Cameron's Conservatives prior to 2006 were under mounting external pressures to adapt to new media. And then, in a punctuated manner, the party in both periods exhibited rapid change.⁷⁷⁶ Firstly, the dynamics between Macmillan's Conservatives and the broadcasters changed significantly in the final run-up to the 1959 General Election. The once significant power held by the main political parties over the broadcasters declined as the omnipotence of television rose in wider British culture. Therefore, Macmillan, Downing Street and CCO realised that they would need to master the medium in order to remain electorally competitive.⁷⁷⁷ The party's focus shifted from relations with its membership to increased interactions with broadcasters. Similarly, the act by Cameron and his team at CCHQ to first use the internet to broadcast the centrally-controlled WebCameron application in 2006 demonstrates a comparable desire within 'Team Cameron' to claim and master the new medium of their time. It would appear that in

⁷⁷⁴ See, Chapter Four.

⁷⁷⁵ See, Chapter Six.

⁷⁷⁶ See, Schein's theory (in Chapter Two) which helps explain the role of leadership in speeding-up change.

⁷⁷⁷ See, Bale, and Cockett, *The Historiography* (in Chapter Two).

developing WebCameron, Cameron's Conservatives, like Macmillan's Conservatives c. 47 years earlier, were reacting to trends in wider media-culture, which in the 2000s was dominated by reality television. However, WebCameron was particularly significant in the party's changing approach, to the new media of the time, because in the development and use of WebCameron it claimed back for CCHQ some power over the control of the party's audio-visual output, which had been lost increasingly to the television broadcasters since Macmillan's premiership. In this single technological innovation, Cameron's communications team symbolically-interrupted what had been a half century trend in political communication.

Macmillan's Conservatives' response to prominent advances in their relationship with the new medium of their time was to preside over a sea-change in the party's approach to the role of television in wider political culture. In turn this impacted somewhat on the manner in which the party organised its operations at CCO and beyond. Change and adaptation were manifested in a significant and timely assimilation of television culture in the party's general organisation. The new advances in political television impacted in the daily lives of individuals in the party leadership, Parliamentary Party, CCO, and local party-professionals. The party learnt from its experiences at the 1959 election and, from the early 1960s, training in television participation accelerated and intensified; and party-professionals were increasingly required to dedicate significantly greater time to broadcasters in election periods. The latter example chimes with Craig Elder's testimony, which details how he was expected to give increasing amounts of his time to the filming of WebCameron video blogs.⁷⁷⁸ However, unlike the wider-party changes in Macmillan's Conservatives, this type of shift in the work-life of the digital team, 2006-2007, was largely contained within CCHQ.

During much of the 1950s the party allowed relatively open-access to its television studio for participants at all levels of the hierarchy. But in the early 1960s, it made a sharp sea-change to a trend of centralised-use of these and other facilities.⁷⁷⁹ This shows how the status quo of the party's structure and hierarchy, in which a mass-party culture played a significant role, was challenged to some extent by the central-party's assimilation of new technology. In the 2000s, the party used the central-party website to generate funds through new national party-membership subscriptions. However, it made less of an attempt to convert these new digital-members into activists

⁷⁷⁸ See, Chapter Six.

⁷⁷⁹ See, Chapter Four.

in the offline world. This would suggest that the party was continuing a greater shift away from the traditional mass-party culture, towards a party culture that was more embracing of technology as a substitute for a supposed decline in door-to-door type activism. It would appear that the role of mobilising grassroots activism was becoming more of a peripheral consideration for the central-party in the 2000s, which had seemingly focused its efforts into reaching the electorate through channelling its messages using all available, traditional and new, technologies, with a special focus on the TV debates and exporting the Cameron-brand.

At the end of the 1950s, Macmillan's party-elites reached some sort of epiphany about the manner in which the party should change in order to embrace the role of television in its organisation. Subsequently, the party implemented observable adaptations which in turn influenced a trend towards the tightening of its control over television and publicity procedures with a greatly more professionalised workforce to manage and influence the party's transition to becoming an increasingly television-based party.⁷⁸⁰ In the late 2000s, within the elite ideas-culture at the top of Cameron's Conservatives, it would appear that, in the journey to WebCameron's inception, Cameron's party-elite had a comparable epiphany, which led to them mirroring a return to the days when the party-professionals first exerted greater influence over the increasing centralisation of its television operations. Except, however, Cameron's Conservatives were dealing with a very different type of new medium. Television in Britain in the early 1960s was limited to just two channels which drew relatively large and captive audiences. In the 2000s, the internet was a much more dynamic, interactive, diverse and adaptable medium with virtually unlimited applications and channels. However, audiences were smaller and fragmented. E-marketing techniques for targeting the electorate were primitive and relatively unsophisticated when compared to those used in more commercial sectors. Therefore, unlike television in the 1960s, the internet had not matured in terms of its use as a political tool for winning significant numbers of votes.⁷⁸¹ However, Conservative Party user-led online interactions had evolved into an observable culture in which the medium naturally facilitated some organisational aspects for use within the party's operations and internal discourse.

⁷⁸⁰ However, as Bale suggests, it would be the period following the party's electoral defeat in 1964 that would be the time for most the significant 're-examination of its policies and its organisation' in over a decade. See, Tim Bale, *The Conservatives since 1945, The Drivers of Party Change*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), p 102.

⁷⁸¹ The Ward et al. quote (in Chapter Two) states that this was the case in 2005. Furthermore, this thesis suggests that it remained the case for the Conservatives until 2010, but began maturing in terms of the party's understanding post-2010 (see, Chapter Six).

In the early 1960s, CCO's development of a more professionalised-culture encouraged the tightening of centralised-operations and controls. The central-party began seeking less the views of the wider-party membership. The party became increasingly controlled by top-elites and, thus, gradually less democratic. The focus at CCO shifted away from a commitment to maintaining a mass-party culture to a publicity and television-centric party, which was a trend that appears to have endured for 45 years. Advancing forward to the 2000s, greater erosion of the already declining mass-party culture was becoming increasingly apparent and interactions between the party-grassroots and the party-elite were diverging further. In 1997, the grassroots saw the party power-balance shift towards the central-party under Hague's 'Fresh Future' reforms.⁷⁸² Subsequently, when developments in the internet in the run-up to 2010 eventually empowered the grassroots, thus providing opportunities for greater democratisation at the grassroots, organic evolutions in the party's internet user-culture developed into activity which contributed to more of an equalisation in the power-balance between the party-elite and their activists. This development of a new subculture in the party was rooted in the collective use of new technologies in Cyber Toryism.⁷⁸³ It was within that cultural backdrop that the internet facilitated the beginnings of another significant moment in the history and evolution of the party's organisational culture.

The first major act of Cyber Toryism grew out of Tim Montgomerie's reaction, to what he believed to be the lack of power at the party grassroots in the election process of the party leader, and resulted in the creation of ConservativeHome. As Cyber Toryism proliferated, in terms of the numbers of individuals engaged in Tory-centric internet-based interaction and operations in the run-up to 2010, the nature of the ConservativeHome blog meant that it also contributed to a return of some of the lost power to the grassroots; and thus helped facilitate the loosening of the grip that the central-party had held traditionally over party communications and operations.

Although a technological divide, like that which formed in Cameron's Conservatives, did not form to such a magnitude in Macmillan's Conservatives, Macmillan's central-elite had in effect actively initiated a divide between themselves and the wider-party. Macmillan's role as the respected and continuing party leader during this process of technological adaptation meant that his traditional relationship

⁷⁸² Bale, *Drivers*, p. 1.

⁷⁸³ See, Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1985), for theory on the role of electronic media in influencing new cultural phenomena.

with the party, as the figurehead, escaped notable challenge from the grassroots. This occurred even though Macmillan's central-party elites had assumed greater powers that in turn shifted power away from the traditional vehicle for reaching the voter - the mass-engagement of activists. This led to a sense of redundancy and disenfranchisement at the ordinary levels of the party. However, it would appear that their traditional deference ensured that there was minimal impact on those who assumed greater control at the centre. This symbolic creation of an organisational dividing line between amateur and professional was therefore a pragmatic act by the party in response to wider social-changes that it had observed and understood in the 1950s.

In the late 2000s, any deference that remained in the party's culture was being challenged by the changes in the party's youth movement at the grassroots. In addition to the act of leadership through Montgomerie's ConservativeHome blog, the party grassroots had begun integrating their use of social media within the social nature of their offline Tory-communities. Like Montgomerie's response to the selection of Cameron as leader in the form of ConservativeHome, the proliferation of the grassroots' use of Facebook was likely in response to symbolic aspects of Cameron's leadership. However, unlike Montgomerie, the collective acts of innovative use of social media at the party grassroots appear to have been initiated out of early admiration and deference for Cameron's and Johnson's first public uses of internet applications. Although ConservativeHome was designed to challenge the status quo, the initial interaction with Facebook by the Cyber Tories was largely used to organise and support the aim of installing Cameron to Downing Street. Therefore, Cyber Toryism had two main strands: (1) Cyber Tory-followers: those who were catalysed into digital-action by the party leadership's use of WebCameron and Facebook; and (2) Cyber Tory-leaders: those, like ConservativeHome and Iain Dale, with their own agendas and/or axes-to-grind, and, therefore, profiles to elevate.⁷⁸⁴ As Cyber Toryism evolved and proliferated, the early deferential respect held by many Cyber Tories was exchanged for a new empowerment and individualised identity, which, to some degree, acted to fragment traditional unity and discipline at the grassroots. Cyber Toryism became a cultural vehicle that drove engagement in social media, sometimes in dichotomous directions, which both supported and challenged the status quo of Cameron's Conservatives.⁷⁸⁵

⁷⁸⁴ See, chapters Five and Six.

⁷⁸⁵ Stephen Ward, Rachel Gibson and Paul Nixon, 'Parties and the Internet: an overview', in Rachel Gibson, Paul Nixon and Stephen Ward (eds.), *Political Parties and the Internet: Net gain?* (Routledge, New York, 2005), p. 29, identified that internet-based media were a risk for dissent in parties; and, Rachel Gibson, Kevin Gillan, Fabienne Greffet, Benjamin Lee and Stephen Ward, 'Party organizational

Unlike Macmillan's grassroots, comparatively, Cameron's grassroots used innovation in new media to equip themselves with tools that gave them a platform from which the ordinary individual could be elevated and have, together, a collective voice with potential power to influence the direction of party message and operations.

Therefore, the internet, for Cameron's Conservatives, had the opposite impact in the party culture when compared to television, for Macmillan's Conservatives. Television was a significant driver of change in the party, which, along with additional drivers, encouraged to some extent the tightening of centralised control from the 1960s onward. However, Cyber Toryism, which was largely facilitated by the internet, acted in a manner that encouraged a loosening of the grip that CCO had begun to assume c. 50 years earlier, thus acting to decentralise organisational aspects of party engagement. These two 'sublimated' civil wars for power within the Tory Party, separated by half a century, are reminiscent of the 'culture wars' which are said to occur when the status quo of a wider-culture is challenged.⁷⁸⁶ Cyber Toryism ultimately challenged the status quo in facilitating a shift of some central-party power to the grassroots. Unlike the party in the 1950s and 1960s, until post-2010, CCHQ appear to have been a step behind in their understanding of how the grassroots was evolving in its uses of new media. By late 2012, like Macmillan's Conservatives at CCO in the 1960s, CCHQ had taken steps to master and assume some control of the use of the relatively uncontrollable media of internet-based applications in the form of publishing and distributing best practice guidance and literature at party conference.

By 1963, after the role of the party leader was somewhat weakened by the notorious events surrounding Macmillan's resignation, television and political culture had reached a new peak in the intensity of their relationship. The role of television in the party's culture had come to dominate significant aspects of its national operations. Therefore, when Douglas-Home became party leader, a degree of the traditional deference for the party leader had become eroded at CCO. The party-professionals held a greater recognition for the importance of using television as the primary tool in the party's national campaign and took a muscular and pragmatic approach to managing the leader – opposed to the leader managing CCO professionals, as was the case before it. The professionals had a greater command of new technologies and thus their confidence increased for managing the media on behalf of the party. In the late 2000s, Cameron's

change and ICTs: The growth of a virtual grassroots?', *New Media & Society*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2013), pp. 31-51, found that blogging can empower party participants through providing 'public voice'.

⁷⁸⁶ See Bourdieu, and Clarke (in Chapter One).

Conservatives were less prepared for the impact that the rapidly changing dynamics of internet technologies would have on the party at the grassroots. Unlike 1951-1964, it appears that the party was observing, learning and understanding the impact at too slow a rate for the party to adapt and change significantly and assume control over grassroots activity. However, this point is based on the assumption that the central-party of the late 2000s would have had (1) the desire to control Cyber Tory culture; and (2) the capability and tools to successfully control and manage the cyber-masses at the grassroots and their abundant output, operations and interactions of internet use.

Therefore, unlike the CCO-professionals of the 1960s, Cameron's CCHQ were less able to react to and control the developments in the use of internet technologies at the grassroots. In terms of the power-balances in the two periods, this means that the party in the 1960s had a strengthened central-party and a weakened-party at the grassroots, to which the advent of political television contributed; and the party in the late 2000s had a weakening central-elite and a strengthening grassroots, to which the internet contributed. Therefore, in terms of intra-party dynamics, the Conservative Party grassroots of the 1960s experienced television as an anti-democratic force in the organisational culture of the party; whereas Cameron's Conservatives' interaction with the internet was largely a democratising experience in that it provided a new, cost-effective and relatively unregulated environment in which Cyber Tory participants could interact, socialise and innovate in order to assist the party's local and national campaigns, with additional opportunities for developing their own voice and profile on internet platforms that placed the ordinary participant on relatively an equal footing with the more established political figures of the time.

EIGHT

Conclusions

Conservative Party and New Media Impact

Impact: Tory Television Culture

The evidence and analysis presented in chapters Three, Four and Seven suggest that the Conservative Party's adaptation to the advent of the new medium of television occurred in two main phases of transition. The first phase was 1951-1959. During this period the party, under the leaderships of Churchill, Eden and the early leadership of Macmillan was characterised in its relationship with the medium of television by a culture of caution, tentative and incremental change, committee meetings, regulation, research, experimentation and a desire to understand the phenomenon. The second phase was 1959-1964 under the leaderships of Macmillan and Douglas-Home. During that period the Conservative Party underwent rapid change in the party's attitude and organisational culture. It focused on becoming masters of television in wider political culture. By 1960, television was recognised largely as the primary new political communication tool in Britain. Training in the use of the medium became ranked in order of party seniority and priority, which was a shift away from the earlier approach of an open-to-all attitude that the central-party exhibited in the first phase.

Therefore, it appears that there was both an incremental and a punctuated tightening in the party's hierarchy, which was driven in part by the significant developments externally in wider political television culture. From 1951-1964, the party transitioned from being a party rooted in a more traditional mass-based culture to one that was less traditional, in that sense, and became progressively television-centric. The intensity of the bureaucratic management of party publicity increased to the point that it began to integrate its television operations with a carefully processed and sanitised output. In terms of impact, the seemingly active and pragmatic management by central-party operations, towards tighter control of party television output, became an identifiable trait that was characteristic of the changes observed in Conservative Party organisational culture during the second phase of the party's development, 1959-1964. When compared to the less centralised period, 1951-1959, from 1960 onwards this trend meant that a significant and orchestrated divide in party-culture is observable

between the professionalised-elites, at the top of the party hierarchy, and the more emasculated participant, at the party grassroots.

Impact: Cyber Toryism

The Conservative Party's apparent adaptation to the advent of new internet-based technologies seems to have been characterised by a digital and age divide; digital bureaucracy; digital campaign-enhancement; dissolution of geographical boundaries; heterogeneity of Conservative associations; integration of new technologies in traditional hierarchies; and rapport and digital trust signals, which was manifested in a dichotomy in the party's organisational culture. The digital divide was largely associated with generational demographics. The older demographic group of the party generally maintained a commitment to traditional organisation and campaign techniques. The younger demographic group of the party, which was largely represented by participants in the networks of CF and the Conservative-blogsphere, engaged in complementary activities and behaviours in both the on- and off- line worlds. These individuals and collectives both supported Conservative Party campaigns and challenged the status quo of the party's organisational culture. Through a process of political socialisation⁷⁸⁷ and incentivised campaign participation, individuals learnt to synthesise their online activities with Conservative activism. Between 2006 and 2010, the party's relationship with the internet was most saliently symbolised in WebCameron, which appears to have acted as a catalyst that in turn contributed to a stimulation of an organic evolution of innovation in social media uses at the party's grassroots, which seemingly proliferated through a culture of learning, copying and adapting to the uses of internet applications. It marked the beginnings of a new subculture in Conservative Party's organisation.

In order to differentiate between the traditional culture and the new media culture of Cameron's Conservatives, both of which have been observed through the ethnographic- and historical- based processes of inquiry in this research, I have attributed the latter group with the tag of 'Cyber Toryism'. The quid pro quo attitude and technologically-elevated status of these younger, more dynamic and less geographically constrained participants meant that they were of value to the party in terms of them being a campaigning resource. However, they took also a less deferential approach to the party hierarchy in maintaining the cultural status quo in their

⁷⁸⁷ See, Kavanagh's theory (in Chapter Two) on political socialisation.

participation when compared to their more traditional counterparts. In the run-up to 2010, internet applications gave the ordinary Conservative participant a greater and more independent voice while simultaneously allowing the individual, and/or collective group the ability to support the party in traditional campaign and organisation roles; and yet in new and innovative ways through the use of alternative internet tools within the alternative environment of cyberspace, which had impact in both the on- and off- line culture of the party.

Although popularity, in terms of ‘Fans’ and/or ‘Followers’, in social networks demonstrated the importance of the likeability of the party leadership, Cyber Toryism, as a culture, was an embodiment of an erosion of traditional party-deference and, thus, a shift away from the historic hierarchical control of the central-party’s operations. It would seem that the party’s active engagement in the internet ultimately impacted on the central-party’s traditional control over these operations and output. Therefore, the central-party’s tight professionalised-grip, which was strengthened in the 1960s in terms of a tightening in party operations and communications, was seemingly involuntarily loosened in the late 2000s through a culture of mass online-engagement at the Conservative Party grassroots – in the form of the organic evolution of Cyber Toryism. Moreover, the advent of Cyber Toryism within the dynamics of the party’s organisation meant that the widespread and pragmatic use of the internet at the party grassroots acted like a lubricant, which oiled party operations and campaigns, and in turn gave a greater fluidity and mobility to individual participants and organisational mechanisms.

Role of New Media in the Conservative Party

This comparative history has provided a perspective that would suggest that the impact of television in the 1960s was to play an opposite role in the Conservative Party when compared to that of the role played by the internet in the late 2000s. Onward from the late 1950s, significant developments and growth in national television culture meant that much of the power over the role of political television in British society, which had been held traditionally by the political parties themselves, was transferred to the broadcasters. Subsequently, central Conservative Party professionals assumed greater control over the party’s management of broadcasting and publicity. It resulted in a drying-up of CCO-initiated opportunities for the ordinary Conservative participant to interact with the medium; and rendered greater numbers of grassroots participants as passive observers of political television. The processes involving television and the Conservative Party became ranked in order of priority and thus the medium was

assimilated into the party's traditional hierarchy. This act was the first major shift away from the mass-based culture for the party, to a culture that was more television-centric.

In the 2000s, although perhaps unintended, the advent of WebCameron was a symbolic demonstration by the central party, which displayed how the internet could provide innovative opportunities for the party to claim back some of the control over audiovisual output that the party had historically lost to the broadcasters in the 1960s. That said, the nature of Cyber Toryism meant that the central-party, at the heart of Cameron's Conservatives, lost some power and control to the party grassroots through the advent of the internet and subsequent evolutions in the party's organisational and technological culture. This event acted to contribute to a reversal of the trend of professionalised-central control in the management of party communications that began in the early 1960s.

In terms of interaction with new media and that interaction's subsequent role in the party, it would appear that to some extent the power balance was tipped in opposite directions from the 1960s to the 2000s. In the 1960s, there was an observable strengthening in the central-party elite, which corresponded with a time of their increasing use of television; and a weakening in the prominence of the party grassroots. In contrast, the late 2000s transpired to reveal that the use of the internet by the party grassroots facilitated an observable strengthening in the prominence of activism at the lower levels of the party organisation, which would suggest a weakening in the control that CCHQ had over its wider operations and communications. Therefore, the advent of television appears to have contributed to the party's organisational culture in the mid twentieth century in an anti-democratic manner; while, conversely, the evolution of the uses of specific new internet technologies in the early twenty-first century appear to have contributed to the party's culture in a democratising manner.

Over the 1950s decade, it would appear that Conservative Party elites actively groomed the wider-party in order to prepare the party's organisation for the impending impact of shifts in political television culture. Therefore, the role of the party's uses of the medium, and its subsequent contribution to change within the Conservative Party, was rooted in active awareness. However, in the late 2000s, the relatively natural evolution of the latent phenomena of Cyber Toryism meant that the central-party was seemingly unaware about the extent to which the organised cyber-culture of the younger demographic of the party was influencing change in its organisation until sometime after the 2010 election. Therefore, the party of 1951-1964 was largely characterised by pragmatic top-down changes in line with the wider social implications of the new

medium of their time. Conversely, changes to the organisational culture of Cameron's Conservatives 2005-2012 have been largely characterised by an evolutionary assimilation of internet technologies from the grassroots-up.

The early impacts of the roles of both television and the internet as new media in the party's organisational culture seem to have first occurred in a London-centric manner and spread nationally over time. 1951-1964 television, as a symbol of modernity and mass-enfranchisement, was suited to a narrowcast and focused approach to political communication with the aim of connecting with the mass-electorate.⁷⁸⁸ Therefore, the party naturally understood the need to reorganise. The party behaved in an appropriate manner, which enabled it to master and control television and reach its electoral aims. 2005-2012's internet evolutions have been suited to freer and more independent thought and engagement for the average participant, while presenting the individual with cost-effective malleable tools with which to innovate and support the party's aims through a more fluid and interconnected network at the grassroots. As Eran Fisher might argue, this evolution is symbolic of an increasingly globalised age in which 'new technology enables a new society.'⁷⁸⁹

In terms of this research, the primary difference between the roles of the two media is that the manifestation of television in the party's culture was largely dependent on the choices of a few party-elites; and in contrast the internet facilitated the coming together of cohorts in the collective masses at the party grassroots, with an impact that contributed to changes in party-culture that were largely rooted in the manifestation of collective choices. Therefore, where television in the 1960s contributed to splitting the party apart, the internet in the 2000s contributed to bringing the party closer together. These Conservative parties in both periods eventually began to adapt in line with wider technological changes and trends that were being observed in their respective societies, at their respective points in history.

Lack of understanding of both new media in their respective periods resulted in pockets of suspicion in relation to the active uses of the two media. The 1950s was a cautious time for the party while it learned the ways of television. This was contrasted by a sharp turn to rapid change, or punctuated evolution, in the 1960s and a significant hierarchical tightening in the party's structure and in the manner in which it controlled

⁷⁸⁸ Mark Jarvis, *Conservative Governments, Morality and Social Change in Affluent Britain, 1957-64* (Manchester University Press, 2005); and Jon Lawrence, 'The Culture of Elections in Modern Britain', *History*, Vol. 96, No. 324 (2011), pp. 459-476.

⁷⁸⁹ Eran Fisher, *Media and New Media Capitalism in the Digital Age: The Spirit of Networks* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010), p. 1.

its publicity output. Unlike television in the 1960s, the nature of the internet meant the party was relatively unable to practically control the wider-party's use of the internet, like it could other media, such as traditional print communications. Therefore, the late 2000s were a dynamic and innovative period for the party's relationship with new media, which gave new freedoms to the ordinary participant and thus loosened the party's organisational culture.

In the 1960s, political television was used primarily to connect with the voter. In the late 2000s, the internet was used primarily as a party organisation tool in order to facilitate cost-effective mobilisation of party supporters and exchange political discourse. The decline of the mass-party culture, which began in the 1960s, was followed by the beginnings of a technology-centric party culture in the lurch toward a television-centric culture in the party's organisation. In the case of the party in the late 2000s, the party's culture had begun evolving further in the sense of a technologically-centric culture in that grassroots participant activity contributed to the natural assimilation of internet technologies in the party's wider organisation, which meant there was an organic adaptation in the party that would suggest that Cameron's Conservatives, in the run-up to 2010, functioned in a manner that would give some credence to Helen Margetts' cyber party idea.⁷⁹⁰ However, rather than describing this as a prescriptive party model, I would suggest that Margetts' ideas would gain greater traction, and indeed represent a subset of the Tories in 2010, if the theory were instead grounded in a cyber-cultural and, therefore, more organic framework.

It is important to note that a fuller historical picture is available in the 1951-1964 case, because the period and the development of television, from a new political medium to a more mature medium, was relatively complete by 1964 - that is when compared to the newer role of the internet in Cameron's Conservatives 2005-2012. Therefore, the internet will continue to be used as a new and evolving medium in the Conservative Party in the run-up to the 2015 General Election. Cameron is likely to continue as party leader, at least, until then and, perhaps, well beyond that time. Therefore, more work needs to be done on the role of the internet in the rapidly changing intra-party dynamics of contemporary Conservative Party organisation and culture, because maturity in the use of the internet seems to be a distant thought in the party and wider society. The user-led innovative nature of the internet means that the Conservative Party in the run-up to the next election will continue to adapt and evolve

⁷⁹⁰ See, Margetts (in Chapter Two).

in line with innovations in the party's uses of new media. How history looks upon its impact on the Conservative Party's future organisational culture is for subsequent research to decide.

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APPENDICES

The Conservative Party and New Media: A Comparative History: 1951-1964 and 2005-2012

By

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

1. Ben Howlett

Role in 2010: Key national Conservative Future activist
Other Roles: National Chairman of Conservative Future 2011-2013

Interview Date: 23 March 2011
Duration: 1:24:28

START AUDIO

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Anthony Ridge-Newman, interviewing Councillor Ben Howlett, National Chairman for Conservative Future. Hello Ben, thank you for agreeing to do this interview. How did you first become involved with the Conservative Party?

Ben Howlett: I got involved in 2006. My local parliamentary candidate, Douglas Carswell, who's now an MP for Harwich, well Clacton actually now because of the boundary changes. He was running a campaign to save a local special needs school, against the local Conservative led educational authority. And I thought, "Okay", I was young, I was what 16? No, I was 17 at the time and thought, "Okay let's get involved in a really local action project". And met up with a lot of the school kids' mums, they really sort of said, "Yes come on board, it's really fun, really exciting" and really kind of got developed into that.

It was during my A levels and from thereon in, I have kind of got more involved.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And what was it specifically that interested you in the Conservative Party over other Parties?

Ben Howlett: It wasn't a particular sort of ideological, you know, I've got this beam of light shining from up above that says, "I need to go and join the Conservative Party". It just kind of happened to fall into place.

I suppose it was the views that I had heard whilst I was studying my A levels, that you know I thought, "Um okay market freedoms" you know, "liberal freedoms" these sort of ideals that the Conservative Party are embedded with were more to do with what I thought of. It wasn't sort of an overnight, "I will change to become a Conservative" and then happened to naturally kind of fall into position.

And I can only say really now I've been involved for, what? Six years I would say, that I have really understood exactly what conservatism means to me. And I think as a Conservative you build on those views pragmatically.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How old were you when you first got involved?

Ben Howlett: I was 17 when I first started out.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So that was during your teens, and is your view now different to the party now you're in your early 20s?

Ben Howlett: Yes because to be honest with you, my first probably political memory was 1997 and I thought "Ooh" – this is when I think back of what on earth was I thinking in those days? "Oh yes, no John Major, yes absolutely he's going to win the next election" and then it was a bit of a shock to me.

And like I can't remember exactly what I was thinking at the time, but it was seeing Ken Clarke coming out of his old house in a van, rather than in his Jaguar. And that's one of the last things I remember, well one of the first things I remember back in those days.

Then 2001, I can remember again I was thinking, "Okay yes, William Hague's going to do really well as party leader" and realised that actually he didn't at all.

And then 2005 was the one I really sort of remember, because it was the first time. And I'll say this to anyone that wants to get involved in politics, it's the first time that I actually saw what politics really meant by standing at the count watching Douglas sort of holding, clenching onto those handrails, looking over the votes that are being counted. He only won by 900 majority and him thinking, "Oh my God, am I going to win this or am I not?" And that is what politics really meant, and that kind of inspired me to go off and become a councillor and get more involved into where I am today.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of the Conservative Party, it would be fair to say that you're a relative young member, could you tell me a little bit more about what it's like to be a young member in the Conservative Party?

Ben Howlett: I think it's probably best to talk about the reputation of the Conservative Party, in that it has always been seen as an older persons' party. And in reality the votes mainly do come from older people. And there was that whole Tory boy image in the 1990's, which I think we've spent a long, long time to dispel the myth. It didn't help that Harry Enfield kind of picked on this sort of clique, but to an extent it was kind of justified by the stuff that was coming out of young conservatism.

So over the last sort of 10 years, there's been a bit of a detoxification of the brand as such, in that now young people are seen as integral and are actually the future of the party.

And over the last six months, I've kind of led on the good work that's happened over the last two years, by the work that Michael Rock was doing as my predecessor, as CF National Chairman, in creating an image of an organisation which is there to represent young people.

Just like Conservatives – sorry, young Conservatives back in the 80’s were seen as representing young people in general back in those days. So it took a while, but now we’re getting there. Sort of the build up of the Conservative Future policy forums and organisations like that, they kind of embed ourselves with what young people really want out of politics.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So in a nutshell, what is Conservative Future also known as CF?

Ben Howlett: In a nutshell, Conservative Future is a membership organisation that represents 23,000 members across the United Kingdom. And it represents them on everything to do with young people’s issues, basically.

It’s a campaigning plus organisation in that it campaigns, it’s there to help win general elections, or elections in general for the Conservative Party. But it does social events, it works on social action projects, it works on fundraising. Everything that the mainstream Conservative Party does, in that we are training people up to become the next future leaders of the party, and replace those people that are getting towards the end of their careers within the party.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: What is CF’s relationship with the mainstream party?

Ben Howlett: It’s got better, to be honest with you. It was an organisation which had a very, very poor reputation before I started out.

There was two options, as I found out, when I started out as Chairman. It was either we put it behind, away in a box and we close it down and we don’t do anything with it, or we could actually create an organisation which is there to represent young people. Become a real, proper, professional campaigning organisation, and that’s where we’re seeing it going today.

And it was sort of a bit of watershed moment last week, not that many people know about it because obviously it’s something that’s internal. But it – saying that if the co-Chairman of the Party is saying, “Oh my God, this organisation’s completely turned around in fortunes, I’m going to get you the Prime Minister to come along to an event for just CF”. This is the first time in CF’s history that the Prime Minister will come along to a CF event, and represent young people’s views.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So in terms of CF’s relationship with the party, what is its raison d’etre its reason for being?

Ben Howlett: Its reason is to, as I said, the mantel of the organisation, the prospect of the relationship, is to be a campaigning plus organisation. So it will go out there and campaign for parliamentary candidates, it will go out there and support local social action projects. And do everything that the mainstream party is doing, but from a young person’s perspective.

Without wanting to generalise, younger people have more energy, more time, more opportunity. Apart from retired people, for example, that have a lot of time on their hands, to go out there and really sort of get out on the streets and spread the word, as such.

And, you know, look at comparable figures, you've got Conservative Future activists that can get 40 activists around for a London wide campaign day, and spend something like 400 man hours in doing that. Whereas say, for example, 40 activists from the rest of the Conservative Party, the older generation, could spend sort of half that time with the same amount of people. So it's really sort of about productive campaigning.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

And you are now an elected Chairman on a national level of CF, what does your role within CF involve, and how do you integrate that role with CCHQ London?

Ben Howlett:

Okay in terms of where I sit, I've got - I'll talk to you about the structure of the organisation first, because that's probably the easiest. This is the first time we've kind of worked in practice on the new reforms that came out a couple of years ago. And that I am the Chairman, I've got an executive of seven people under me, then I've got 11 regional Chairmen.

So what I tend to do is sit more as a chief executive/Chairman of a private company, in that I will ask the executive to do something and then their work kind of filters down to the ground level. So in reality, instead of there being one event, they'll be 11 events across 11 regions. Which is a remarkable change in comparison to what it used to be, in that they'll be just one event and everyone used to come along to it, normally that was in London. Now we've got Yorkshire doing their own thing and Wales doing their own thing and Cardiff – sorry and the south-east doing their own thing as well, great okay.

And what I do is primarily ensure that the campaigning side of things work and that we are actually going out there fighting by-elections, working on campaigns such as “No to AV”. Helping out with the Boris elections, Welsh Assembly elections, Scottish Assembly elections. I don't, I should actually say I don't cover Scotland, that's the only one region I don't do. But Northern Ireland, again we've got Council Assembly. Well we've got council elections coming up there, which we're all fighting.

I run social action projects, so community organisations that are looking to, I don't know, do up their local community centre and refurbish it. We send the activist there and we help out doing that, providing the manpower, I think that's probably the best of way of saying it.

And then also we do the social events, which bring in the money in order to provide funding for training for young activists, and also for campaigning opportunities as well.

In terms of how I sit within the wider CCHQ, well there's two ways I kind of integrate myself into this. One which is the Party Board itself, I sit on the main party Strategy Board which involves myself as head of Conservative Future, Conservative Women's Organisation, social action organisations. And every other regional Chairman of the mainstream Conservative Party, I represent those 23,000 people on that and in party convention as well.

And also then I have two members of staff, three members of staff if you include the press officer that's seconded to us every so often, working for just CF out of Conservative Party Central Office which basically manages our campaign allocation. And we have a budget of around about £40,000 a year to work on that.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And what was your role in the 2010 general election?

Ben Howlett: I wasn't involved in terms of Conservative Future per se, I was working for London Member of European Parliaments, Syed Kamall. And I was helping him with his campaigning activities, supporting 78 constituencies across London and in total we helped campaign in 56 of those constituencies. And we spent the majority of our time working in marginal seats, so that we could help effectively in Tooting, in Westminster North, Richmond, Enfield, wherever. Anywhere else like that really.

And also I was a councillor as well, so I was helping out with my local ward up in Essex.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Why did you get involved in the 2010 general election?

Ben Howlett: One, because it's the combination of five years of hard effort and hard graft, in that we – I'd been out campaigning every weekend, I had friends standing in elections. It was partly because I've always done it, so I wanted to do it.

And this is – it is like when you're going off to a football match, and you're going to watch the finals of your favourite football team that your support. Of course I will go along and help out my favourite team, which is the Conservative Party. I'm going to go out there and make sure as many people know as possible, to make sure that they vote in David Cameron as the next Prime Minister.

And locally, your local MP or parliamentary candidate at that stage, and also of course I worked for Syed Kamall, so it's all about helping campaigning for him. And making sure that his message of helping local communities gets across to those that are actually going to be elected in the next few months, and those members that are supporting him.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Did you receive direct communication from central party during that period?

Ben Howlett: Yes to an extent, London has a regional director out of Central Office and they sent me emails saying where campaigning was going to be achieved.

I wasn't involved in the strategy of that at all, it was just literally, "There's a campaign day going on", which obviously they have thought about and know what the target seats are. I went there and helped out, and made sure my friends knew that that was happening as well.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And how often would you receive emails from the party about campaigning events?

Ben Howlett: Up to the election, probably once a week. In non-election time, it's probably once a month.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of your daily campaigning schedule, I'm sure there's probably not a typical day in terms of campaigning, but on the whole, in general, how often would you actively use the internet?

Ben Howlett: Actively use the internet, in terms of campaigning, every day, absolutely every day. My role, in terms of CF Chairman, is integrally linked to the internet. That's because simply everyone who's a member, every member of Conservative Future is on the net. And is on Facebook in particular, or Twitter, so you have to use those means of technology.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So thinking about the 2010 general election in particular, and the run up to that, seeing the run up being the Parliament, the entire Parliament before. So that three or four years in the run up to the election, did the role of the internet change at all over that period?

Ben Howlett: I would say yes it has, I would think the main turning point actually, from my memory, because I've been so integrally linked in London, because of the work I've done with the London MEP, was the initial Boris election. Boris was the first person that I remember to create an app on Facebook and you could – "I back Boris" App. And it kind of came out with all these updates, loads of information about what Boris does, loads and loads of fans, hundreds and thousands of them.

And at that stage, I was one of the first initial people to sort of join up with Facebook when I was at Durham. You looked at what Boris was doing, and you're like, "Oh my God, this is amazing. You know, he's obviously going to go out there and do really fantastically well, because he's got all these Facebook fans".

The difference between what Boris did, and what David Cameron did, with the his internet campaigns whether that was

WebCameron or whether that was sort of Conservative Party apps or whatever, which costs a lot of money, is that Cameron translated those people that clicked “Like” on Facebook into actual votes. Which is a big, tough issue for me on a very small limited scale in Conservative Future, in that you can create a Facebook event but not necessarily do you have people turn up as a result.

So what we spent a lot of time with doing is yes using it as a tool, but not making that the exclusive tool. Because it’s a great platform, great area where you can go on and see what events are coming up, but unless they’re going out on the streets it’s pointless in sort of having that actually being – you setting up an event on Facebook.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: That’s a very interesting point, and I will come back to that in just a moment. But can you be specific about when it was that you were spending time on ensuring these apps became votes?

Ben Howlett: Let’s think, my personal ability to try and translate that into votes is minimal, because I didn’t really have any sort of influence. I was the man on the ground as such. My personal link to it, I would say would probably be inviting my friends to, like Boris for example.

And, you know, you go along to a training day run by CF, when I wasn’t running it, and they said, “Oh, you know, invite all your friends to it”, which I did. You know, it wasn’t massive but that’s as much influence I really have.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You just said that David Cameron spent a lot of time in converting those “Likes” into votes, when exactly did that begin to happen?

Ben Howlett: You could see that happening as soon as the Cons... - WebCameron was in existence for a little while, and then they had the Conservative Party apps being created on the internet. And you had the Facebook politician pages, which you could link up to.

And you could see there was a sort of massive “Get out the vote” campaign being done, probably about two years before the general election itself. And then you could see it happening, if you were politically astute, but then you could really see it happening as soon as the TV debates came out in that it was literally not just, “Oh David Cameron is doing this”. It was, “David Cameron is doing this to ensure you end up voting for him”. And it was as explicit as that in saying that, “Okay if you like change, great, because we’ve already created that pattern of change, or that image of change, that David Cameron was trying to show. But now is your time to vote for change as well”.

And there was a rebranding policy that was going through the Conservative Party that happened online and offline as well, in that it was time for change, vote for change. And you could

see that just – the big clincher was the November 2009, no October 2009 party conference, because all the banners changed and everything like that. And you could see that quite clear, that that’s the way that they were going for.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And you mentioned David Cameron specifically, when you’re talking about David Cameron and his use of Facebook in converting “Likes” into votes, are you suggesting that David Cameron himself was running the Facebook page? Or his team behind it?

Ben Howlett: Oh it’s always going to be the team behind it, because he simply doesn’t have that time to do that. And part of good leadership is the team behind you, at the end of the day.

If you’re a parliamentary candidate and you’ve got a big team, ultimately if you’re an MP you’ve got a big team as well. But the thing that sticks in the mindset of general public, as if you were doing some sort of brand marketing technique, isn’t the sort of, “Oh great, it might be”. I don’t know, let’s think, “Diageo that is running a drinks campaign”. In fact you’re thinking that it’s Smirnoff, the brand remains in the item itself, not the team around it.

So if you’re creating a campaign, you need to make sure that everyone is David Cameron and that they’re all striving for that same aim. And that’s how he converted it into, converted it into votes by getting those people around him, that he trusted, to ensure that they were going to do exactly that.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In your opinion, those people that would like a politician, like David Cameron, on Facebook, would they be intending to vote Conservative?

Ben Howlett: More than likely, yes, absolutely. Those people that are not – those people that like him are either going to be Conservative Party members, Conservative Party voters. Or they’re going to be people that are kind of swayed by what he’s saying on TV. It’s kind of like that core, core strategy technique as such. I don’t think it’s very reflective, very reflective as sort of the floating voter as such.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How effective do you consider Facebook pages, politician pages, as applications on that kind of national profile like what David Cameron has? How effective do you think they are in getting out the vote?

Ben Howlett: Facebook is very good from the PR perspective: “Great I am more popular than you are.” Facebook is literally a popularity contest. The more people that “Like” your page, the more popular you are - as a rule of thumb. In terms of being able to transfer those into votes, I would be very interested to see what the hit rate would be - I don’t think it is going to be huge, but it helps.

I don't see the internet being the only way you can go out campaigning, it's a tool, it's a means to an end. If there's something – if this a means of communication that you're not utilising, there's a problem there in that you are losing X amount of thousands of votes.

Just like if you forgot to go out and put a leaflet through the door, you've got serious problems. You've got serious problems if you don't use the internet, because it's a whole different channel of communication you're missing out on. The more channelled communication, the better you're going to do.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: From what you perceived in your time campaigning for the Conservative Party in the run up to the 2010 general election, what kind of age category would be hitting like on a Facebook page?

Ben Howlett: Anyone below the age of 25 at that stage. Before sort of early 2010, you know, there wasn't a massive ballooning of people in the sort of beyond the age of 30 category that were on Facebook. And ever since then, in my perception anyway, I've seen a growth in the number of people above that age. Particularly local councillors that are now seeing the benefits, and reaping their rewards of that actually, in linking and communicating with younger communities as well.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: What are the benefits, and rewards, of being on Facebook? Why would a politician have a Facebook page?

Ben Howlett: As I said earlier on, it's another mechanism of communication. When you're looking at your electoral statistics, you're thinking, "Okay I've got X amount of groups, X amount of demographics which I need to communicate effectively with". If you're going to communicate effectively, you've got to find the best model, or the best mode of communicating with them.

You know, if you've got a younger group population, you're going to be thinking, "Okay Facebook's the best way of communicating with those". However, you wouldn't think necessarily if you've got loads of old people's homes in your community, you'd go out and campaign with Facebook to those groups. That's why you've got to use a massive spread.

And the benefit ultimately would be that, and this is something I've been doing a lot of work on, and something that's going to come out in terms of strategy in the next couple of months to a year, is looking at what younger people want from their politicians and what they can deliver. And it's not because there's an assumption about it, it's because they're communicating effectively about that, with them, about that subject.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Going back to something you said earlier, and I said we'd come back to that, you mentioned how politicians use Facebook and build a relationship with the potential supporters that they have

and they use Facebook in order to do that. Would you consider the association between a member on Facebook and a politician as a strong or weak association?

Ben Howlett:

I think the perception would be of strong association. If you weren't involved in politics you would think, "Oh great, I could send a message anytime to my local politician". More so than you could by say sending a letter, I don't think the connection would there as much. Based on the perception of, as a young person myself, and also of what other young people have said to me. The great thing about Facebook is that it's a platform in that you can create a rallying atmosphere.

Obama did it very well in that he would send out a message to the people that like him to go out and take the message away. Brilliant, okay, the question is how do you translate those people into getting them onto the ground, in knocking up the doors of those people that aren't on Facebook? Those older generations, for example, that actually are the core Conservative voters.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

So if a politician has 100 members on a Facebook page, signed up to that page, how many of those individuals, in a crude percentage, would actually actively go out and campaign?

Ben Howlett:

I would say probably less than about 20% of those people. Primarily because if I was to create, I don't know, let's think of a CF group. Newark for example, up in Lincolnshire, has recently created a CF society. I would invite all my friends to that group and ask them to join it and support it. However, they come from across the country, so you've got probably about 50% of that number of coming from around the country that may happen one day to turn up to an event, if there was a national by-election there.

But to be honest with you, they don't really want to do it. They just associate themselves with the Conservative brand, so therefore they need to like as many different Conservative societies as possible.

The core activists won't come from those people that like it, those core activists will come from the message you send out by saying, "Come along to an event afterwards in the pub". You know go to a social event, and then ask them to come campaigning after that, that's the way to get the people to go out on the ground and campaign for you.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

So just to be clear, in a one word answer, the association between the people that are on the Facebook group and the politician, is that a weak or a strong association?

Ben Howlett:

Weak.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

Is the party, or has the party, done anything during the period of the 2010 general election to encourage that weak association

to become a stronger one? And has that changed since the general election?

Ben Howlett:

It's the age old saying of "resistance is futile". The more events you're invited to, the more chances of somebody turning up. The more interesting events you invite them along to, the more chances of them turning up.

The party started to realise that when they were putting out loads and loads of stuff on Facebook, put it out on Twitter etc. Great, okay. Some people would re-tweet it, but there are sort of like the politicians anyway. Fine, let's talk about the mainstream, the party now has realised we need to engage better and in particular in CF terms, because CF just took it as granted. You know they would send out a message saying, "Come along to an event, it's the general election, of course you're going to come out and campaign". You know, "You want to see the general election, you want to see it win, you want to see David Cameron win". Great, lovely, that was the buying power.

Now the buying power has gone in that we're in government, what do we do? So we've worked out the things that we do are creating events, creating social events in particular. Creating campaigning events, and campaigning training, that are of interest to the market you're offering it to.

The things that they are looking for out of Facebook are, I don't know, networking events, social events, listening to big speakers. Young professionals wanting to network, students wanting, I don't know, a better fresher's packs involving beer mats, or whatever. Listen to what your market wants, let's take it to a more kind of commercially driven astute way of organising a campaigning organisation. And you'll see a remarkable turnaround in results, and you've already seen this with massive amounts of new members coming into the Conservative Party at the moment, and particularly CF members as well.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

From your explanation, it sounds to me like the people that are based in a Facebook group are encouraged out via events to campaign, would you agree with that statement?

Ben Howlett:

Yes to go out and campaign. The other side of it, which is a bit of a failure in terms of my explanation, is that a lot of the key messaging is not just about the traditional campaigning knocking on doors. It's actually blogging, it's about making sure the message is kept up, a positive message is kept up on the online communities.

And the problem is with this, and the research states that, is that the people that blog don't necessarily go out and campaign, which is my main thing. You know, we need people out on the streets doing the door knocking, but they don't turn out and vote. That's the problem, they don't want to kind of tear themselves away from the online medium, which becomes

very, very addictive, out onto the sort of polling stations. That's a great difficulty.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So you're talking about here the difference between those that use the internet and those that go out and campaign on the ground. Is the application of Facebook the most effective way of getting young people in your organisation out to help the party? Or does the party do other things?

Ben Howlett: At the moment yes it is, because there is not really another platform which has got as many members, has got as bigger market share as Facebook. Until someone can create something that – I mean Twitter, it's a very similar thing in that Twitter, now a lot of people are on it, not everyone is on it. But I can see in a year's time that thousands of CF activists will be on Twitter, but there's nothing else.

You could email people, which we do email, we use all sorts of communication. We use Twitter, we use Facebook, we use email, we use Instant Messenger, we use text messages. We use all those communications to get people out and campaigning but, you know, there's nothing better than Facebook.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Before we move onto Twitter, which you've just mentioned, could you tell me a little bit more about how someone managing a Facebook page, and creating events, would practically go about that?

Ben Howlett: Right okay, we realise that, let's take a by-election as an example. We realise that recently there was a by-election come up in Lewisham, what we did was that we said to my communications manager in Conservative Central Office, Richard Jackson, "Will you set up a Facebook event? I will invite all my friends to it that I've categorised". I'm pretty sad like this in that I have them all in alphabetical order.

Richard has a massive list of about 5,000 people on Facebook as well that he invites to that. Great, he invites them, as long as you know where they're going, how to get there, and the incentive is, at the end, you go to the pub afterwards. So there always needs to be an incentive in any type of marketing, and in this instance it was, "Let's go the pub afterwards". You know, great, okay, fun. Campaigning plus, campaigning plus also social afterwards.

And then on top of that, then it gets automatically sent out to Twitter, which I know you're going to come onto in a minute. And then it kind of goes viral by text messages afterwards, which most of us have got free text messages now, so we send that out as well. And just make sure their friends are told, "Okay guys, please send it out to your friends, please send it out to their friends" and then we get more people in as a result.

And in Lewisham, of all places, which isn't very Conservative at all, we came second in the by-election as a result of having –

I think it worked out to be roughly 35, 40 CF activists which matched the number of activists from the rest of London that came down and helped out, which is a great help for them.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

One of the central points that you keep coming back to, is how when a group on Facebook is created there is, there seems to be some kind of online community within the younger party where friends are invited, and they invite their friends. Is that a growing culture within Conservative Future?

Ben Howlett:

Yes indeed, word of mouth and well, word of mouth and word of Facebook, I don't know what the word is there, but the word of Facebook speaks bounds. It's all about networking. If an organisation is to grow, it has a good reputation in that say for example you're setting up a new branch. I've been to one recently, which only had four members that turned up. However, the next event they invited their friends along, so that meant that they each brought a friend, that was eight people.

They then, at the next event, brought another, their friends as well so it's 16. It gets bigger and bigger and bigger. If the events are fun, and their friends are going to be there, more people will turn up.

But the issue is when their friends leave, what happens? Does the organisation continue, does it not? We need a continual sort of process of people always being involved in the party, otherwise we end up with pigs and troughs and we're trying to make it more of a stabilised organisation.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

Putting all this in the context of other political parties, is there anything that the Conservative Party is doing that differentiates it from Labour, the Liberal Democrats and other such parties?

Ben Howlett:

I recently had, I was being interviewed by I think it was The Guardian, a couple of weeks ago, and the journalist was actually talking about new media. And he said, "I was looking at your Facebook events, I was looking at your ...", sorry, "I was looking at your Facebook page or I was looking at your website, I was looking at your Twitter accounts. They are active to the extreme, in fact sometimes a little too active, in that there's so much information coming out that people are like, "Wow God, where do I get involved?" But in terms of Labour Party, and this is their own critique, it was, you know, what are they doing? There is no sort of online presence, there is no sort of major Twitter accounts.

Look at the comparison between LabourList and ConHome, the amount of readers – the readership of ConHome outstrips LabourList to the extreme.

Liberal Democrats, even though they're quite a young, hippyish sort of organisation, should be using the internet a lot more, and they're not.

You could see this with an event I'm running tomorrow, in that we've got 40 activists that are coming along to a debate, and we've got 80 people in reserve. Liberal Democrats – and we've got two busloads coming down to London, and this is all via Facebook and via email communication, all via online communications, whereas Liberal Democrats could only get 10 people along, 10 delegates. Which says a lot about the use of our communication techniques in comparison to their use of communication techniques.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So what is it about the culture within the Conservative Party organisation that makes it different?

Ben Howlett: I don't think there's any secret recipe for what we're doing. We're just doing it and we're actually just getting the communications out there, blow the reviews of what happens. You know if there's a continued online presence, if people know what we're doing and people know how to get involved, and we're being active about it and proactive about it, sorry, we're going to do well.

Liberal Democrats and Labour Party don't do that, they don't get their message online well enough. They sort of – ironically a fear of the online community in those two organisations, in comparison to ours. And I've had this conversation with leaders of the Liberal Democrats' youth wing and Labour Party youth wing as well, they just don't do it.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So what is attractive to the general Conservative Party, Conservative Future member about the internet that seems less attractive in other Parties?

Ben Howlett: It is literally the amount of communications we whack out. The more communications we do – if Labour and Liberal Democrats got onto the message, got onto the point and realised, "Okay the more stuff we put out, the more people turn up to our events, the more sort of – the bigger the brand image we create". Great, they're going to get loads of people coming along.

We have completely, utterly, overstretched their abilities, well sorry, we've overstretched our abilities in comparison to them. They have no sort of online backing, really, in comparison to ourselves.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You've talked a lot, and repeatedly mentioned, that you use the internet to organise social events and campaigning events. And that those campaigning events can also be social events, do you think that that is something that is core to the success of the use of Facebook, the kind of social nature of the Conservative Party?

Ben Howlett: Yes, absolutely. I mean if I go along to a CF event, that's organised via the Internet, I don't tend to talk about policy. You know, it's not one of those things you really do, you just talk about things as normal friends would do. You know, "Did

you see what happened on TV last night?” Or, “Did you happen to see what happens in the House of Commons?” Rather than, “Did you see what happened?” in terms of a football match. Those are the sort of things you talk about.

You don’t talk about, I don’t know, you don’t talk about, “Oh did you hear exactly what Gordon Brown ...” oh sorry, “Michael Gove was talking about in terms of education policy the other day, and the changes that are being made?” Well no you don’t, you don’t talk about that sort of thing.

And I don’t know whether I’ve got the - I don’t know whether I’ve got the strategy right. My strategy when I first became elected, was campaigning plus, in that it’s campaigning plus social. It seems to be working, and the proof is in the pudding and that you end up with loads of people that turn up to events. You know, one debate where you have 40 tickets, and you’ve got 120 people turning up.

And normally the biggest draw of things is coming along when there’s a bit of booze involved for CF members. And there’s no booze involved in this one, and yet you’ve still got loads of people turning up. So bingo, it’s the quality of the debate that’s being proposed. And the quality of the people that want to get involved, so great.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Why would a candidate use Twitter?

Ben Howlett: Candidates? If we’re talking about parliamentary candidates here?

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Yes.

Ben Howlett: Parliamentary candidates have got to be very careful about the use of Twitter, and in particular the use of Facebook as well, in photos and different messages that they’re using. Twitter, I have always used as a campaigning method, as a use. And other MPs have realised this as well, in that the message from Central Office is, “You either use Twitter for campaigning, or you don’t use it at all” because you can fall into a massive hole in that you end up putting something stupid on Twitter whilst drunk at some stage. And you end up blowing up your career.

But it opens up a whole new type of communications in that younger people, what do they want to see out of their political message? How many characters on a Twitter message? 140 characters? People don’t want to sort of listen any longer than 140 characters, as a young person. Great, use that as a use of communication.

But as I said earlier on, don’t use it as the only one. Use Facebook, use email, use phone, leaflets, knocking on doors etc. as well as it.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: What is the difference between Twitter and Facebook?

Ben Howlett: Well Twitter ultimately is about the slogan, and if you get the slogan right within 140 characters, and I've experimented a couple of times on this, in that I could put, "Tonight that I'm speaking to you about an academic research paper". Or I could go out there and say, "Good God, Gordon Brown is out there being an idiot again, and David Cameron's marvellous". You'll end up with about 70 people liking it on Facebook, great.

You've got to make sure that what you say on Facebook, however, has some sort of different appeal. Whether that's on multimedia sort of terms or sort of something other than just text, that's the way you get more people interested in Facebook.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So it sounds to me, from what you've said about Facebook and Twitter, that Facebook is used for events and social purposes and Twitter is used for a more of a conversational purpose?

Ben Howlett: Yes, yes if you want to start a debate, you put it on Twitter, because you've got the trending, you've got the slogans, you've got the messages, you've got the quick, easy updates. Which Facebook does have to an extent, but Facebook has that as a part of the whole social networking thing. Twitter isn't about social networking, Twitter is about a message and your political message, if you are using it for political purposes. Or some sort of social purpose, if you're some sort of celebrity or something.

Whereas Facebook, you can use it for absolutely everything. So I twinned my Twitter to my Facebook, so it updates on my message as well as it updates people on events as well. So I can use both platforms at the same time.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You mentioned CCHQ's role in candidates using Twitter, and the advice that they give, does CCHQ monitor the use of Twitter?

Ben Howlett: There's social media managers in Central Office, and yes they do, they look at what goes out on Twitter pages, they follow people. And in a way, it's not sort of – it's not some sort of style in this police method of campaigning, or monitoring as such. But it's there as a check and balance, and I think there always needs to be a check and balance. It's not sort of, "Good God you've just done this wrong, what the heck are you doing?" It's sort of giving advice where advice is needed.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Does the party in some way have concerns about the use of social media?

Ben Howlett: I think the party has concerns over anything that it doesn't necessarily, which it's not able to necessarily, control. I think everyone's like that, if say for example something's said about me by somebody else, and I can't control it and it goes out there virally, then I get very annoyed about that. Just like anybody would in terms of gossip, or whatever. Twitter is a

gossips sphere in that it does need a check and balance from those people that are professionals in that way.

The party, however, recognises that – sorry party sounds like this sort of this style on this machine here, but it's not. The party recognises the use of Twitter as a communications method, as it does with Facebook, as it does with everything else. And in fact whilst the Conservative Party has got this message, this image of being sort of backdated, or sort of slow on the uptake, in fact will be very quick at grasping a new technology. Seizing it, seeing it as a sort of use of great ability and campaigning message and run with that.

Only recently you saw – you've got the things that crop up in the Metro the squares with sort of mosaic pattern in it and that you can put your Smartphone against it and pick up on that. The Conservative Party is the first party to have used the square mosaic, and use that as a campaigning tool out of all the other Parties in the country.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So what is it about the Conservative Party that means that they're first off the mark on new technologies?

Ben Howlett: Because the Conservative Party ultimately is a pragmatic party, it hasn't got this ideology of it being sort of Conservative with a small "c" sort of thing. It will realise that, "Oh great okay, there's a new technology out there to get our message out there. It's a good method, it's tried and tested in the commercial world, let's go out there and use it ourselves".

Anthony Ridge-Newman: What was the role of Twitter in the 2010 general election?

Ben Howlett: I wasn't on Twitter at the time, so I don't really know to be completely honest with you. I can imagine it was growing, Twitter as a platform, that's sort of grown over the last couple months from what I've seen. But I've only really only been involved with it since May 2010.

I funnily enough hated the use of Twitter beforehand. I was very kind of, "Oh do I have to use another form of communications?" I've just used Facebook and I thought Facebook was good enough. And then someone said, "Get involved in Twitter" and now I've got what? 790 odd followers on Twitter since May 2010, so it's a good tool, people like it, people follow you and listen to you.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So there are some downsides to using social media?

Ben Howlett: Yes there are, if it goes wrong, it goes horribly wrong. When you think Charlie Sheen, for example, recently puts on the odd Twitter message and it just kind of blows up out in their faces.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So in what ways could using social media go wrong?

Ben Howlett: You end up going to a – it has gone wrong in terms of Conservative Party over the last few years. I've seen it in that

people go to bad taste parties, dress up as appalling figures, which you shouldn't necessarily be dressed up as. You know, you end up with an odd person that dresses up like Hitler.

Someone only recently had a photo up on Facebook, God knows why, holding up a golliwog. You know, these people are going to be clamped down upon and looked upon very, very seriously. You know it's the exactly the same as you would if you said it, or if you wrote it down. Twitter however, unfortunately, or Facebook has got the opportunity to go across the entirety of the internet, and that goes to millions, if not billions, of users. So not the best way of using campaigning techniques.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And is there something different about the role of the internet in terms of political life in the Conservative Party that is – gives potential for this kind of negative instants to happen?

Ben Howlett: No I think, there is nothing intrinsic within the Conservative Party that makes this happen. No, it's up to the individuals to just ...

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Sorry, just to clarify, I meant, "Is there anything about social media that is different to other technologies?"

Ben Howlett: Right, sorry, I should say – sorry I thought you were talking about the Conservative Party there. Is there anything different about it? Yes because of the fact that click of a button, in comparison to writing out the letter or writing out the foul comment in pros, it goes everywhere. And you've got to be very, very careful because you can't get something back if it's already gone out there viral.

Someone will have a copy of it somewhere, and it doesn't go down very well. Especially in terms of the media because the media now realise that, "Oh great", especially with the tabloid media, there's a way of monitoring social media, in that they'll get a screen grab and they can use that in the papers the next day. Or almost immediately if they put something up on the internet about it.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So are there any security risks in using the internet for political communication?

Ben Howlett: Security? That's something probably more in terms of the Government side of things. If a minister is putting something in terms of Twitter, their Twitter can be hacked into, that's a security risk.

Therese Coffey ended up being hacked into recently as an MP, Twitter is very unsecure. Even if it's on your BlackBerry, and BlackBerry is one of the most secure uses of, most secure iPhone – most secure Smartphone, sorry, in comparison to iPhones or HDC or anything like that.

You could end up being hacked into that way as well, as soon as someone uses a password encryption key on your Twitter, then that's it, Facebook exactly the same.

The good thing is with Facebook in comparison to Twitter, is that the checks and the security on Facebook means that if anybody logs into your Facebook, remotely that looks a bit suspicious, bit like credit card technology, they will automatically freeze your account. And you have to go through the security processes there and it's all in the programming, which is brilliant.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: For a non-high profile candidate, can social media convert in – the use of social media, can that be converted into votes within the constituency for which they are standing?

Ben Howlett: I don't think it really matters if they're a non-high profile or a profile candidate. If you're in a "no hoper seat", no hoper seat in inverted commas, then you know you have to use every single tool possible in order to achieve your goal. In exactly the same way as David Cameron has done that as an absolute potential Prime Minister, now is a Prime Minister, so.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: But earlier you mentioned that a lot of the people that are in the Facebook groups, for instance, or are followers on Twitter, they could be anywhere in the country. So they do not necessarily geographically live in that constituency, so if a candidate is using Facebook, what is the primary objective?

Ben Howlett: The primary objective of Facebook depends what your event is. So for example you've got 3,000 friends on Facebook, you know that they're dotted all around the country, but they're friends with you as a person you can use them as, as I said only 10% of that sort of 300 people may turn up to your event. Those 10% of people are better than no percent of people, based on the fact they may not have even heard about the campaign that's going on because there's no way of communicating with them.

Or alternatively they may live somewhere else in the country, so you go off to them instead geographically. Like what I do with CF, in that I don't just spend all my time in London, I go round the rest of the country. So I realised that, say for example, I'm looking for a fundraising, I'd go into London and invite all my friends from London to fundraise for us and put some money behind the campaign.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So is what you're saying that social media can be used as a tool to gain votes by organising events that facilitates a body of people to go out and campaign and use that for gaining votes?

Ben Howlett: You've got to look at what your market is wanting. If your market is wanting to not go out campaigning, but is willing to put £10 in the pot to come along to a social event, that comes along for fundraising – that goes towards fundraising, brilliant, use it as that. If your market is wanting campaigning, great use

it as that. Look at the most appropriate level of what they're wanting first, and then do something that they actually need.

For example, CF Young Professional is just being launched as a part of the Conservative Future movement. Young professionals want networking, they want drinking organisations, they want to hear high profile speakers. Great, we can use them for gathering money in order for those people that are actually going out there campaigning, mainly students, to go out there and campaign and fundraise and push them to actually go out campaigning.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of campaigns, like the 2010 general election, in a political sense, on a day-to-day basis, what would be the most likely use of the internet for an activist? Would it be social media or email?

Ben Howlett: If you're got a good database, and this is where it all kind of boils down to, is Facebook is a database. And every candidate wants the best database as possible, because it's their best way to know what data, sorry is the best way to know that you've got some sort of communication going out.

I would use both, Facebook has got an opportunity to get a few people out, great, and spread the message virally. Emails has got the more sort of personalised approach. Now it depends how you use email, if you're using email as a mail merge, "Dear Anthony, Dear Ben" whatever, or, "Hi". You know that sort of stuff is personalised, it makes out as if I've actually emailed you directly. If it is a put you on all a BCC, it's not going to work at all. So it's really, it's very difficult to say unless I know exactly what sort of campaigning you're doing or how you're going to use that sort of method.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So are you suggesting that if, from your last comment, you use Bcc on an email and send that out to 300 people, for example, you said it wouldn't work at all. So that would mean that not one of those individuals, of that 300, would come out if you used a Bcc email?

Ben Howlett: You'd end up with probably about one or – probably, I'm generalising there. You'd probably end up with about one or two people that would sort of come along to an event, because they see it. But the reaction you get from an impersonalised spam email, in effect, wouldn't be as strong as you would from a personalised email.

And when I work in – I work in recruitment, so if I send out an email which is, "Hello all" you know you get no responses back. If I put one saying, "Dear Bob, how are you?" Or, "Hi Bob, how are you?" sorry, you end up with Bob automatically replying back saying, "Oh yes I'm brilliant thank you, how are you?" because they think I've emailed them directly.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So did the Conservative Party use personalisation techniques with emails in the run up to the 2010 general election?

Ben Howlett: Yes it did, one in terms of donations and two from personal messages from David Cameron. CameronDirect was you've got the sort of multimedia channels and stuff like that. He also did the emailing out as well, and that came from him personally. It wasn't him personally, but you know it looked as if it was.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You mentioned fundraising, what role did the internet, social media, party websites, email replay in terms of fundraising in the 2010 general election?

Ben Howlett: Multimedia doesn't work in terms of getting the big donations in, so you're not going to get someone, it would be surprising if you did and I would love it if it ever happened, but you're not going to get like £3,000,000 donation from somebody that happens to see a spam email come into their inbox. Let alone would you get that from somebody receiving a leaflet through the door saying, "Will you please donate".

But what you will do, however, is do the other side of fundraising which is instead of going for one big amount, go for 50 small amounts. And the more small amounts you get in, equate to exactly the same as the big donation with probably less effort as well.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: I recall from the general election campaign, Eric Pickles placing a lot of notes on Facebook and Twitter sites. One I recall was that he encouraged, or commended a candidate, for inviting supporters to donate just a £1 to the campaign. In your experience, and opinion, how effective is that type of fundraising in terms of generating subsequent funds for a campaign?

Ben Howlett: Very, if you look at what Oxfam or the other charities do, they say just £3 a month can keep, I don't know, an African village in water for example. Great, okay, brilliant that's the way that they work, so we should be using that sort of technique as well.

But it depends on where you are, or what your demographics are. So for example if you're in Virginia Water, you would be thinking, "Okay well you should be looking at sort of putting about £100 behind that".

If you are in student land in the middle of Sheffield, for example, if you're in Sheffield Hallam or something, then you should be thinking, "Okay, let's get loads of students to put £1, £1 a year, in that pot". And you'd probably end up with what, 100 odd members, so it's about £100 you get back out of that, out of nothing you could get beforehand.

But you shouldn't look at the two separately, you should do – like with a range of communication channels, you should be using a range of fundraising channels as well. In that you should be doing a wide range of £1 donations, but also making

sure you've got someone out there picking off the sort of big donors from local businesses and things like that.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Was blogging used as a campaign tool in the 2010 general election?

Ben Howlett: Yes, I've always been very cynical of blogging, blogging you can't necessarily control the message that's going out. And blogging, to me, is always, not always but in the majority critical of the organisation that's trying to get its message out.

So you could end up putting out a message, for example, tuition fees and saying, "Facts on fees are this, this and this". But you end up with hundreds of people blogging saying, "Oh it's disgusting" etc. And the message being completely watered down or changed or altered, so I've never been that supportive of it.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Why then would an activist become a blogger?

Ben Howlett: Activists become bloggers because they want their message to be heard, but don't really know the way that that message is going to be heard. I'm trying to work out a better way of saying this. An activist doesn't necessarily get listened to, for example, in terms of main party policy, so the people that they think that listen to them are other bloggers.

In fact virtual people that sit behind their computers and don't necessarily go out leafleting, that's why I don't necessarily agree with bloggers as such. The Guido Fawkes of this world, you know, they're there to make a quick buck tabloid story, they're not there to sort of make a particular point.

And it also downgrades politics to an extent that that's the way that, you know, journalism is going and the bloggers are sort of taking over and, you know, what's the point of their story? You know, I don't understand it.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So are you saying that blogging, and the use of the internet, can give relatively unknown, low profile individuals a voice that they wouldn't necessarily have?

Ben Howlett: Yes, but not necessarily for the right reasons, or actually creating a positive dimension as a result. Perhaps when people like Harry Cole started off blogging, and they thought, "Oh great I could blog about how great the Conservative Party is" realise that not very many people listen and sort of turn to the dark side as such. And went off and started being more critical, being more opposition, creating more opposition to the Conservative Party, which ultimately he started out supporting.

And trying to create a story in that they are now becoming more like journalists in that - do young people get their news from TV? They probably don't, they get their news from Twitter, or they get the news from blogging, or they get the news from sort of ConHome as such. And that's probably

more of a story, rather than the strange death of politics, more the strange death of media.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Could you explain more about Harry Cole and his role as a blogger?

Ben Howlett: Harry started off something called, "Tory Bear", probably about three years ago now, and has closed it down over the last six months. Probably about a month after I won the CF Chairman election race.

He started off on stories about Conservative Future, about you know what the Government was doing. He's always come from sort of like the more right wing sort of ideology of the party, which is absolutely fine, I've always worked with sort of right wing MPs in terms of those Tory Party.

And then sort of slowly changed himself to be a lot more critical of the Conservative Party, a lot more sort of journalist in orientation. More sort of egotistical as such in its approach, that's not a criticism, it's just the way that his blog kind of changed.

And we've seen sort of a slight – well he's now working for Guido Fawkes, Paul Staines, in that he's doing the sort of journalist sort of – it's not dirty tactics, but it's the sort of, "Get the interesting story out that kind of embarrasses an MP, or embarrasses a minister".

And you saw that with William Hague in the Chris Myers' story. You know, you're just thinking, "Why? What sort of vindictive purpose is this? If you're a Conservative, you shouldn't be doing that". But he has now obviously changed to become more of a journalist, and you can see that change in ways he was operating over the last sort of six to 12 months really.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How would someone like Harry be viewed by the party?

Ben Howlett: To begin with, I suppose it was literally, "Oh great" because we didn't really know much about – when I say "we" I wasn't really involved at that stage. They didn't really see blogging as a big issue, but ever since Harry's day of sort of getting blogging up to sort of be the big thing.

Iain Dale's Diary, for example, a similar situation, you know more and more was it seen as sort of a bit of a sinister type of party activism. And that it was always seen as, "Let's get people out of their computer screens and out on the knocking on the door" because it causes a lot more problems for us if they're blogging about stuff and creating their own opinions, which weren't necessarily party policy.

Or they were embarrassing the party anyway and undoing all the hard work that the traditional campaigners were doing, so the Cabinet members were doing in trying to get the message

out positively in terms of the press. So the party is not keen on blogging, and I think the reputation of Harry, and others involved, have reduced the – the image that Harry has created, and others have created, have reduced the positive things that blogging can actually do in getting the message out well and virally.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Has the party taken any steps to try and either control that, or have some influence?

Ben Howlett: It can't do either, it really can't do either. It can't really have any influence over what they're going to say, because they're going to say it anyway. If, of course, they're going to put something as a – if you're a party member, then yes they're going to say, "What the heck are you doing here?" you know.

Recently it was "the golliwog-gate", you know, they put up a photo on the campaign for political correctness saying that, you know, "We should have the right to stand here with the golliwog". And you're thinking, "Well actually no, it's racist and it's just terribly unethical and very rude". You know, you just don't do that sort of thing.

But the party can control in a traditional way, it can't control in what people are going to say, because as I said earlier on technology becomes viral and they just send it out and people get hold of it quite quickly.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Who specifically was involved in "the golliwog-gate" incident?

Ben Howlett: I think it was, I think it was Bill and Star Etheridge, if I remember correctly, up in Dudley in West Midlands. Those two in particular, and there was a couple of others involved as well. But they were suspended from the party for a number of weeks, I think it was about six weeks in the end. And they went off on one saying, "Oh God it's disgusting, the party are trying to control our views". Well no, it's just completely offensive to other people.

You know you don't wear a Hitler moustache and do a Nazi salute in the middle of a Jewish community. You don't go out and photograph yourself against a golliwog, it's just not done. You know, you don't go off and start chanting or beating up gay guys in the middle of Soho, you know these things you just don't do.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How effective is this type of discipline from CCHQ in terms of the wider party, and encouraging them to not post things that the party would otherwise dislike?

Ben Howlett: Well we should be quite careful in terms of CCHQ, it has no influence at all, because CCHQ does what the voluntary party tells it to do basically. They are a mechanism to run an effective campaign, they are basically a bunch of agents. They're not, they don't sit on the Candidates Committee, they

don't sit on the Disciplinary Committee, that is all run by volunteers of the Conservative Party.

Yes we get the support from CCHQ, because all the associations are put into the pot for CCHQ, but we need to make that one very, very clear and kind of keep CCHQ out of it.

But it's probably a failure of the Conservative Party in that it doesn't necessarily train people well enough in terms of damage limitation, in terms of its PR image. In terms of getting a proactive, positive story out there, it's a lot of fire brigading, damage limitation exercises which are very, very reactive.

And anyone in PR will say, "No, to get your message out there effectively, you need to do a lot of proactive PR". The party doesn't train its activists in that, because they feel that it's not necessarily an activist's job to get that image out there as well.

There has been a remarkable turnaround in events recently, in that the party is now thinking of doing, or is doing exactly that, in that there are massive amounts of best practice that's going out. Massive amounts of training programmes that are going out, massive amounts of – even with CF training schemes that are coming out as well, that really sort of don't see the activist as just activists. But really enhance and embed them within the campaigning machinery itself.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So there is a new generation of Conservative activists and campaigner that is likely to be involved in the internet, in some capacity. And the party has noted a change in types of campaigning, in terms of social media, email and blogging. And some of those media are considered by the party in a positive way, and some in a negative way. Social media in a more positive way, blogging in a less positive way, would that be correct?

Ben Howlett: Yes, yes absolutely.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You mentioned that the party is now starting to understand and develop ways of encouraging activists to use the internet in a positive way for the party, as opposed to the more negative ways that say blogging could be used - as you've described. Could you just give me a little bit more detail about how that works in practice?

Ben Howlett: In practice, in practice you've seen a large amount of work, and I think the best example of this is "No to AV". "No to AV" is a campaign, isn't being run as a traditional "We will shove as many leaflets through a door, we will knock on as many doors as possible". One, because of the national scale of it, and secondly because there's not enough money in order to do that.

It's not a campaign that sort of attractive, to be honest with you. I'm sure more people get involved if it's an EU

referendum campaign, than on electoral reform, as you can see with the poll saying that turnout's going to be appalling.

The message that's going out is using Facebook, in terms of getting activists out on the ground, it's using a limited amount of resources but producing the maximum amount of gains for activist count. And also for hit rate as well, in that more people will be – more people are engaged – the market is engaged on the electoral reform on the internet, than it is sort of in the mainstream press.

So you need to make sure that message is targeting those people that are most interested. And that is via blogging, is via sort of holding debates, we're making sure those debates are advertised via online portal - via sort of online messages, via blogging in itself.

I wasn't saying earlier on that blogging is an absolute no, no because the party has now realised there is a benefit to blogging, because we need to train people to know how to blog. And know how to blog effectively to promote the Conservative Party. And they are now saying to people actively, in terms of the "No to AV" campaign, because they're realised that there's no money out there to sort of do the traditional leaflets.

Go out there, blog as much possible, get yourself on as an activist on as many different radio stations, TV channels, print press as possible to spread that word. And the way that the word is being spread cheaply, because it costs nothing to send an email, send an email.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

So how exactly is the party doing this encouraging of people to blog in a specific way?

Ben Howlett:

It is literally saying, as black and white, "Go out there, blog, tell all your friends that "No to AV" is the right thing and that we don't want an electoral reform. We will give you as many tools as possible". And this is where the best practice side of things come in, that "We will give you as many tools, or as many messages as possible to put in your blog, as long as you blog for us".

What I'm trying to get at is by what mechanism is the party saying this. Are you saying it via email? Emailing out its members saying, "Go out there". It's saying it by word of mouth, it's saying it via Facebook, to an extent. Not massively Facebook, because we know that the "Yes to AV" monitor the Facebook counts of "No to AV". It's literally saying to as many people as possible, as many contacts as we've got possible.

The Conservative Party has got thousands of email addresses that "No to AV" stuff goes out to. "Go out there and spread the word", that's the way that it's doing it, and it's all online, it's not sort of send a letter in the post.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And going back to blogging, what role do you consider the ConservativeHome blog to have played in party organisation during the election period?

Ben Howlett: ConHome can be seen as a thorn in the side of the Conservative Party, in that the party message at the moment, or the party ideology, is a lot more sort of centre, centre-right. The ConHome readership is very much, as with any sort of newspaper, associated with its own readership. Which in terms of ConHome readership, it's very much further right than centre-right.

So there's always sort of like criticism of the party message on ConHome as a platform. If you put something up there now, you'll realise that actually what the Labour Party have been doing, quite effectively I have to say, is infiltrating that site as commentators. And commenting on blog posts, negatively, to sort of embarrass the Conservative Party really.

I've seen it with my own CF election campaigns, in that there was a heck of a lot of negative comments that were done by my opposition. And that's a very small thing, you know the Conservative Future is not the be all and end all.

Whereas sort of Conservative Party itself has got many more followers, thousands of followers in fact, and that negative sort of persistent campaign to embarrass the party as such. On its own sort of what is perceived as the voice of the Conservative Party for members, for grassroots members, is quite persistent really.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Is there something about ConservativeHome that is in some way like the Government's policy on transparency? Is ConservativeHome the transparency for the organisation of the Conservative Party, that the internet is for the transparency of Government expenditure?

Ben Howlett: No, I don't think it is. I would say probably ConHome is more of an experiment in Conservative Party newspapers, for example. In that, you know, when you're a local councillor you produce your own print press that's sort of quite positive about the local council. But it doesn't want to be seen too positive about the local council, just in case it's sort of seen as being complete propaganda.

ConHome is used by ministers as a voice for its grassroots members, for its grassroots members to find out what the party is doing and to rally support. It's not, I don't agree that it's sort of about sort of producing a sort of inside out view of what the Conservative Party is doing on a day-to-day basis.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And what is the central role of ConHome in terms of its role within the Conservative Party grassroots?

Ben Howlett: Centrally it's a newspaper, so it's there as a journalistic press, it just happens to be about the Conservative Party. Like LabourList is literally just about the Labour Party and producing news about the Labour Party.

Its secondary objective, although they would like to consider it to be the primary objective, is that it represents the views of its grass ... - of the Conservative Party grassroots members. Yes to an extent, but the Conservative Party can do that internally, it doesn't necessarily need to do that externally.

Hence, probably, why they've created something like the Conservative Party policy forums, in order to voice that opinion of grassroots members. But internally and actually giving them an ability to actually change the decision making, and also the way that the manifesto is created in the future.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Well if the role of ConservativeHome is to disseminate information to party members, what is different between ConservativeHome and the party's blog, the Blue Blog?

Ben Howlett: Again, it's about brand appeal. The Blue Blog is seen as literally just a blog that talks just about the Conservative Party and how wonderful the Conservative Party is. And it's not really news at the end of the day, it's just a voice piece for those people that want to blog on it and the readership on is ridiculously low.

I only found out about it about three months ago, I'd never even used it before until someone said, "Oh by the way, have you posted anything on Blue Blog?" "Yes okay, I know what that is" and in fact I had no idea.

In comparison to the brand image of ConHome, ConHome is huge, everyone goes to it. People from every walk of life, journalists, public affairs, managers whatever, they get their news from ConHome about the Conservative Party. And what the Government's doing from a "inside the tent" perspective, and that's why they do very well. They're not annoying the Conservative Party, but they, because they're obviously promoting what the Conservative Party's doing, but they're looking at it at a critical, from a critical angle.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And does the Conservative Party have any kind of relationship, direct relationship, with the people at ConservativeHome?

Ben Howlett: I'm sure they always have meetings and the press office probably get on very, very well with ConHome, they absolutely have to really I think.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: What is different about ConHome to a traditional newspaper?

Ben Howlett: A traditional newspaper with that broadsheet or tabloid, if you're talking about national press, national press they talk about all issues. And the press have a very specific job and

very, very good job in that they hold the Government to account.

The ConHome is there as a newspaper just on a particular issue. I'd probably even call it a trade press, in that its view is just – its focus is just on the Conservative Party. And will look at bashing Labour, or bashing the Liberal Democrats because they know that's where their, one their money comes in from, which is the Conservative Party activists and Conservative Party readership or Conservative related advertisement.

And secondly, also, it's there to really hold the Conservative Party to account, it's not there to hold the Government to account then. That's a different – it just happens to be now that we're in Government.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Let's assume that ConservativeHome is a platform for the grassroots of the party to have a voice, how would that be viewed by the Conservative Party?

Ben Howlett: There is no other way that the party activists can have that voice other than through commenting on pieces. Or on the Blue Blog, which again I've said no one really reads. Or putting comments through to the policy forum, the national policy forum. There's no other way that it can happen, so the party realised that if this can be outsourced to an organisation such as ConHome, then great, let it happen.

But we have to take all the comments as the grassroots making comments on, I don't know, Eric Pickles' localism bill with a pinch of salt. Because it's not Conservative Party members necessarily that are putting those comments down. Yes it might happen to be the majority of people are actually Conservative Party activists, but you know you've got other opposition people on there as well. And people really aren't involved in the Tory Party that comment on pieces.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You were recently elected as the National Chairman of Conservative Future, and you led a high profiled campaign within the Conservative Party in order to achieve that goal. What role did the internet play in your personal campaign?

Ben Howlett: 100% of what I did was via – well 99% of the stuff I did was on the internet, so every single time I went somewhere I publicised it using internet via Facebook, via email address, of the email addresses I'd collected.

Twitter, I hadn't really used per se, I kind of got more active on Twitter as I went along. More so now as Chairman, I'm involved with Twitter than I have been when I was campaigning.

But yes, it was, I couldn't do anything unless it involved Facebook as an event. I did a big sort of tour of the UK and invited loads of people along to events and the way I advertise those events was via Facebook.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And is there something unique about the internet that allowed you to campaign in a different way to your predecessors?

Ben Howlett: Yes, Facebook at this stage had then massively kicked off in that every university member was a member of Facebook. There was ways of creating a database that was efficient use of database space, in that you knew where your activists were. Sorry, you knew where your supporters were, you knew how to categorise those supporters, you knew how to communicate effectively with them, and efficiently in particular. And the most important thing is that Facebook is free.

Obviously you can't go around pissing off Facebook, because they'll end up cutting you off and kicking you off of it and you lose that massive database. But work it efficiently and work it effectively, you'll end up with a very, very good supporter base as a result.

And the big thing, as with any "Get out the vote" campaign, was translating – say for example a parliamentary candidate would translate those people that have said they were going to go and vote for you as pledges into actual votes. I needed to make sure that those people that are following me, are fans of me on Facebook, translated into votes afterwards as well.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: If in your campaign, in the 2010 general election, internet did not exist, how would your role have been different?

Ben Howlett: I would have had to look at totally different means. I would probably had to look at post, which I did send out a letter to all associations across the country, fine. I'd have send out postal addresses to other people and things, which is fine. I don't think there's much of a take up on that to be honest with you, because they received a letter and thought, "Why do I bother?" You know, that gets posted out to all my members, but post costs something.

I'd have to use telephones and calling people and I'd have to get all their telephone numbers, which is ineffective and costs money by telephones etc.

If the internet hadn't have been in place, it would have cost me a lot, lot more money and wouldn't have been as effective, I don't think.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So what was it that was most effective about using the internet?

Ben Howlett: Well cheap and effective, sorry, free actually, campaigning opportunities basically in that I can set up an event, invite loads of people along to it, and people would turn up, so that was quite effective.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: That concludes the interview, and I'd like to finish by saying thank you very much for your participation Ben.

Ben Howlett:

And thank you very much Anthony.

END AUDIO

2. Craig Elder

Role in 2010: Deputy Head of New Media at CCHQ

Interview Date: 23 May 2011

Duration: 1:16:24

START AUDIO

Anthony Newman: Anthony Ridge-Newman interviewing Craig Elder from, previously, the Conservative Party. If you could just start by telling me how you first got involved with the Conservative party.

Craig Elder: Sure, I was I guess something ironically perhaps not given you know your background. I was actually working towards a PhD at the University of Dundee in of all things, Post Modern American Literature. I was supplementing this, supplementing my income in order to pay back extortionate fees by working as web editor for the university as well. Got about maybe say half way through that PhD and I saw there was an opportunity to go and work with the Conservative Party. To be honest not a party I have ever been, previously, associated myself with but took a really, really keen interest in politics. I was taking a very keen interest in the changes that had taken place in the Conservative Party after David had become leader.

So, I applied for the job as a kind of speculative thing and thought well if this comes off then I would quite happily take a break from my research. If it doesn't come off then you know nothing ventured, nothing gained. Went down was interviewed, met with a couple of key people in what was then a very young communications team. I don't mean young in terms of our ages, but just only been set up. Previous to that research and press were the two main functions of the party and the idea that you would have a department which was involved in branding and another kind of marketing-led forms of communication was quite a new concept.

So, within that team there was a digital communications team in to which I was the second hire. So, that was September 2006 when I joined.

Anthony Newman: You mentioned that you got interested in becoming involved in the party after David Cameron became leader and you mention the word "changes".

Craig Elder: Yes.

Anthony Newman: In your opinion what changes were made to the organisational structure of the party and elements of new media when David Cameron came along?

Craig Elder: The Conservative Party has always seen itself certainly as a pioneer when it comes to a use of new media. I mean the first Prime Ministerial webpage was set up under a Conservative government. We have always prided ourselves on that. And indeed the guys who were already there in terms of the IT side of things really took pride in the Conservatives.com element of the kind of new media side of things.

In 2005 it had been certainly as an impartial observer at that point far and away the best digital presence of any of the political parties. So, in terms of getting the Conservative Party online, thankfully that wasn't something we needed to do in 2005/2006 because it had already been done. But making it work from a communications perspective and not just purely an organisational perspective was a real challenge for us. I am sure you have heard this already but one of the main challenges of the Conservatives.com and indeed something which really took us two years to overcome was that as you will know one of the party's greatest strengths is the degree to which it devolves responsibility out to its various member groups.

Everybody had a presence on Conservatives.com which meant that in terms of keeping everybody in the party happy it was good. In terms of actually communicating what the Conservative Party was for, what our policies were and who are people were we had an incredible challenge. Because getting on Conservatives.com is easy, finding what you wanted once you got there was practically impossible. So, the situation we inherited was quite simple. We had one website, it was Conservatives.com. It didn't really do what it was meant to do and one of the main reasons for that was nobody was quite sure what was meant to be done, nobody had really taken ownership of it.

So, at arrival as the digital team within the communications team was to take ownership of the entire digital presence and to make it first decide what the job it should do would be and then make it do that job.

Anthony Newman: And you mentioned David Cameron as being part of this change, did he play a direct role or was it his team around him that played that role?

Craig Elder: I would love to pretend that I along with my colleagues came in and wrestled the control of the Conservative Party's web presence away from you know all of the myriads of different organisations. We were kind of pulling it sometimes in, not unhelpful directions, but just many desperate directions. David Cameron and particularly George Osborne were instrumental in empowering our team and giving us the backing that we needed at the top level.

Another key person to mention in the 2006 period was Francis Maude. He was absolutely instrumental as party chairman. So, in terms of organisational structure, Francis was absolutely key particularly with the launch of WebCameron, which in 2006 was the first of its kind – as a political party leader's video blog. It did a very good job in terms of humanising David, because David was obviously a massive, massive asset. He was certainly unlike what had come before him in that he was able to connect with the British people in a way that a Conservative leader had not since the early days of Major.

So, for us, we needed to be able to use that asset, and David was very keen, and in particular Steve Hilton, who was Cameron's Director of Strategy, was very keen that we used the internet as much as possible. Firstly, because the internet is quite useful in a branding sense – we needed to be portrayed to be a younger fresher party that was more in touch with the kind of needs and values in modern Britain. Heavy use of new technology was seen as a way to do that. But more importantly

it was seen that we could reach a key demographic, a younger demographic – an internet demographic if you like.

There was also a real focus on the idea that the mainstream media was forcing us always to unhelpfully aim for that five second clip on the Six O'clock News. New Media allowed us to make our statement, not at length because apparently nobody wants to listen to a politician talk at length, but it would allow us to have our say on our terms

Anthony Newman: You mentioned that David Cameron, George Osborne and Francis Maude were pretty much the figures that we driving the show. Did you have much one to one contact with those figures?

Craig Elder: Yes, I mean Francis was the Party Chairman when I first joined and his office was as close to, if I was to say how close you are right now I wouldn't be far off it probably. As close as that sofa just over there, that's where he was, he took a real keen interest in it. He was fascinated by the whole thing. I don't know if you remember 18 Doughty Street which was the internet TV station that was set up by Tim Montgomerie, Iain Dale amongst others. Francis took a very keen interest in that right from there. So, he thought it was you know it was incredibly interesting innovation. So, he was very switched on very interested in that side of things and as Party Chairman he had a very hands on role. So, he was very much involved.

David obviously incredibly involved with the WebCameron project. That was his main involvement on our day to day business to start off with but as the election went on and we started to do more innovative things online, things that really started to touch with areas of policy, communication and ultimately manifesto publication, David took a very keen interest. George, the thing about George is he is the most naturally adept at talking the language of technology.

There was a very revealing moment during the election where he wanted an interesting way to present a manifesto to lots of journalists on the battle bus. He was obsessed with getting the iPad, which at that point had not been released in the UK. So, he had trailed off and spoken to friends at Apple and managed to get hold of this iPad and use it to show the manifesto to journalists. One of the things for George was that he is just is naturally very good at this stuff.

You know there was-, during the election and certainly also in the build up to the election George I think was the one who was most challenging to us in terms of our use of new media. The one who is constantly saying, "What can we do here? How could we use this," But also along with thinking about it in a campaigning sense was also thinking a very picture about how this could be used ultimately as part of public policy. So, I mean we now started to see things like open data playing a massive role in terms of our transparency agenda for Whitehall. This had been going back a long way for George Osborne and one of his key advisors, Rohan Silva - he really helped to drive that agenda as well.

Anthony Newman: You use the word innovative in terms of the way you perceived the Conservative Party used digital media, could you unpack that a little bit and tell me what was innovative about that role?

Craig Elder:

I mean I think the if you like the way that we used new media was split into three phases. The first one I would unashamedly call the buzz phase in which was we leaned far more towards the branding benefits that could be found using new media. Whether it was being to use new technology or whether like I say before it was being used to by-pass the mainstream media. It wasn't really until we came into the second phase that things started to get really interesting and a strategic focus started to come into play.

The big challenge came in 2007 once WebCameron was an established brand was to say, "Well we have got this thing Conservatives.com, what's it actually for we want to go back to basics with this thing." We were very, very nearly pushed into that project too early by the election that never was. That forced us to kind of if you like panic, design a replacement general election website.

I think I was standing at the back of a hall where Iain Duncan Smith was giving a fantastic speech on social justice and myself and Rishi Saha, the head of new media, were writing on the back of a bit of paper exactly what on an election website we would have to do. Because we had just been told minutes before that Brown was definitely going to call an election, it was absolutely 100% sure that this was going to happen.

Now once we had dodged that bullet we knew that we had to take the opportunity once the election that never was, never was to go off and really rebuild Conservatives.com and make it do that job. We now knew what it had to do, we knew that when it came to May 2010 or whenever the election ended up being we knew we needed to be able to speak to floating voters in a very broad way about the two things that we knew from our search analytics data that they cared about which was policy and people. We need to tell them who our candidates were and we need to tell them what we stood for, that's all people are broadly speaking interested in. Everything else was nice to have but not a must have.

So, we build the entire website around that. When I speak about innovation there are a lot of things that we did during the election that will go unnoticed. I am not going to cry any tears over that but I guess it is times like this when the opportunities to speak about why things like Conservatives.com were pretty clever. Search engine optimisation is becoming an incredibly, incredibly important thing. 80% of online journeys start with Google, therefore we want to make sure that when 80% of the public are looking for stuff they are able to find our stuff. So, what we did was we rebuilt the entirety of Conservatives.com and every single database item for the purpose of search engine optimisation.

Every single news item, every single video, every single persons biography was all linked back to an item of policy. What that meant was that we basically had policy pages that explained our policies on health, on education, defence, our policies on green issues. Because every page in the website basically linked back to those policy pages it meant that they weighed a tonne and Google knew that they were

important which meant that when people searched for stuff about our policies on issues it would finish right top of the list.

We did a similar job with people which helped us ensure that when people wanted to read about our candidates and our MPs that would finish right top of the list. But I think quite cleverly we were able to not hijack but take our place in the news agenda. We hired a copywriter for our team who was specifically versed in search engine optimisation. Who would write the headlines of stories, the copy of stories to make sure that when people were searching for big political issues of the day, yes of course you would see the Telegraphs take on it, the Guardians take on it, the Daily Mail's take of it but you would also see our take on it.

That for us that innovative use of what was very much accepted in the commercial sector as standard practice to make sure that your research results finished first. For us it was first time it had been done in politics and was very, very effective and what we couldn't earn we bought. So, we have used Google AdWords before any other UK political party. Using it in terms of a long tail strategy to make sure that when people were searching on issues that we could never really optimise for because we didn't have quite enough content on that, that we were able to buy up with a search term.

So, if people were searching on the names of local hospitals and constituencies for example we would be able to drive them to candidate biographies. Be able to drive them to constituency profiles, to be able to drive them to any relevant news stories about our policies on. If it was a hospital, health, if it was school, education so on and so forth. Also using again sticking with Google, AdWords were used in a very, very tactical ways like budget day which we did in 2009 and indeed 2010.

When people were searching for I guess they are quite esoteric words that the Chancellor tends to use when standing at the Dispatch Box whether it is fair fuel stabiliser actually that's a bad example that's one of our policies. Whether they are speaking about car scrappage schemes, boiler scrappage schemes whether they are speaking about all the myriad different names that there are for all the different taxes that are rising and falling. So users would search on those terms and find an advert for our take on the budget as it unfolded.

So, you know Google for us was something we used in a very innovative manner. But really used it around this-, you know this Conservatives.com main presence which was that second period for us. Which was the really establishing a proper corporate web presence and then the third period for us was working I guess in the social space. But when we speak about social media and I guess we will probably speak about this more at length later on so I will keep this brief, it was understanding that social media is not Facebook and Twitter.

That just happens to be two places where people congregate and in huge numbers. It was understanding the opportunity that social afforded us was to go and speak to people in the places they were having conversations. Because users and their relationships with the internet has changed radically particularly over the past three years.

They no longer have 100 favourite websites that they will visit periodically. What they have increasingly got is portals of which Twitter and Facebook are becoming. They have places where they are absorbing all of their information but they have also got favoured websites that are relevant to their day to day interests.

So, if they happen to be mums, they are interested in Mumsnet, if they happen to be in the armed forces, they are interested in Army Rumour Service, if they are businessmen they are probably using LinkedIn and it was about us learning how to use social platforms with our candidates, with our Members of Parliament and take them into spaces where they could have valuable conversations with specific audiences. So, that third phase for us was about clever communications and spaces where people were.

Anthony Newman: In your opinion how does these innovations and uses of the internet compare to those that the other two main parties participated in?

Craig Elder: I mean I have been fortunate to one, maintain very good relations with my counterparts at the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. Secondly, I have been very fortunate enough to share a platform with them on a number of occasions where they have been very open, honest and forthright about what they did. I think you know there is a lot of credit to be given to my counterparts at the other parties because you know our strategy was based around the fact that as you well know as a candidate in the 2010 election we had to win a lot of seats. We had to win a lot of seats. I mean we were looking for our best performance in 70 years, possibly even as much as 100 and we were told it so many times by Eric Pickles I can't quite believe I've forgotten.

But we had a big old challenge on our hands and we needed to have this very broad brush communication with as many people as we possibly could which made targeting very, very difficult. The Labour Party weren't very such of much in the 2010 election, they weren't even sure who they were going to go into it with as leader but if there was one thing they were sure about is they weren't going to win it. They might get a hung parliament but they weren't going to win it. They very quickly turned to targeting individual constituencies that they really wanted to hold onto and if we are totally honest they did not do too badly. You know it is like they held onto some seats that they should never have been able to hold on to.

In fact we did disproportionately well against the Lib Dems but did disproportionately quite badly against Labour in some seats that we really should have picked up. So, for them their strategy was very much about giving supporters in key areas the tools that they needed to get them out on the doorstep, to help support the offline objective. Now, I would argue that the Labour Party you know I am very fulsome in praise in terms of that side of things but I don't think they were particularly innovative, restrained by budget and I think to a certain degree by staffing resource.

I think they quite often it looked like they had quite a dilapidated and tired corporate web presence. It kind of looked like things were being done on a shoestring but it admirable to get things done at all under those sorts of situations but I would never really say that there was

anything that happened during the election when I went, “You know I wished I had done that.”

In fact there was only one moment if you can forgive the elongated answer. There is one moment I remember from very, very clearly during the election and it was a Tuesday or Wednesday morning and CCHQ is set up that you have a communications hub in the middle of it around which Steve Hilton, Andy Coulson, Oliver Dowden so on and so forth, they sat around daily, they were very much the hub of you know the most senior staff in the Conservative Party. Somebody I can't quite remember who it was probably Andy had said, “We have just found out that Brown's going to announce this thing and he is going to announce it exclusively on the web, it is going to be something to do with MPs expenses.”

I felt terrible because I had really, up until that point-, until this point in 2008 we had always been there first. We had been the first to do everything and it really made me sick to think that there was this massive issue where for one of the very rare occasions outside of the general election period everybody in the country was sitting up and taking notice of an issue and we hadn't jumped on it. You know Labour; well Number 10 had got there first.

Now, as I am sure you probably know the punch line to this story is that what they were actually doing was the much derided Gordon Brown gurning video where he had stood in front of the YouTube, the camera for three minutes and did this horrendous video. I can't believe was ever signed off by his staff. That was the only one occasion where I looked at it and said I wish we had thought of that but deep down I know if we had done it we would have done it a hell of a lot better. I am really glad they did do it actually in retrospect because it was an absolute disaster but it was that one occasion where I thought, “You know that's quite innovative, that's quite clever you could have put him on TV but you are going to do this over the web and that is a great way to get people to look at your web stuff.” As it happens they probably didn't actually want people to look at that stuff.

The Lib Dems I mean being totally honest and you know I have got to give a lot of-, a lot of praise to Mark Pack who was the former Head of Innovations at the Liberal Democrats. When I arrived at the party in 2006 the Lib Dems were ahead of the game in no uncertain terms, that was very much led by Mark who has got a real eye for an opportunity and a real knowhow in terms of how to do things. Usually quite data heavy things without spending very much money, he's a really, really clever guy and the party has been very lucky to hold on to him at least in an advisory capacity whilst he has gone off to work on the commercial side of things.

But you know there was a number of things particularly, “Flock Together,” Which they had in 2006 which was that idea of just basically getting Liberal Democrat supporters, who were already quite good on the ground anyway to organise using a Google Maps powered system where you can search for things that are happening in your area. You know we all thought that was great and we all wanted that and we ultimately you know did build our own version of that.

But you know I would certainly be doing Mark a disservice if we didn't give him you know a lot of praise for how innovative he was in that early period where the parties weren't really doing anything in that 2005/2006 period. So, yes there you go that's Labour and the Lib Dems from my point of view.

Anthony Newman: A lot of academics have been interested in the role of the internet in British politics for some time. They have talked about when the internet was going to arrive in British politics and after the Obama campaign people really thought this was the one in 2010. Some academics have said that event happened when David Cameron used WebCameron, and they cite it as a very significant move forward in the use of the internet in political campaigning in Britain. What is your prospective on that?

Craig Elder: Let's be honest about WebCameron's finest hour if you like. WebCameron kick started more innovative use of web technology; I mean I would like to think that was the case. Indeed you know I don't in any way want this to appear to be saying that the Obama campaign wasn't that good, that's absolutely not what I am saying but I think when we look at the Obama campaign, I will come back to the kind of WebCameron thing in a second. It is important for us to remember why the Obama campaign was so fascinating and so interesting and why so many people wanted to take part.

Frankly that reason is because Barack Obama was unlike anything that had come before him. He was a very inspiring figure of change; young people really took Obama to their hearts and really wanted to work for this guy. It is just so happened that Facebook was a platform where people could show their support for concepts or ideas or for people or for brands and therefore people congregated there. So, to suggested that you know a lot of the innovation, a lot of the interesting web things that we apportion to Obama's web team and web strategy are actually more things to do Barack Obama in strength as a brand and how much he inspired people.

But just kind of moving off that for a second and back to WebCameron. WebCameron's finest hour for me was and probably always will remain the fact that we got a positive story about the Conservative Party on the front page of the Guardian on the first day of party conference. Now you will well know how difficult that is to get a positive story about the Conservative Party on the front page of the Guardian. WebCameron was always from the first instance and that for me is evidence of it, something which people went-, looked at and said, "Oh this is really interesting, this is a bit different David Cameron is a little bit different."

Did it change the new media landscape? I think to a certain it did, I mean I don't know if you are familiar with Jeff Jarvis who is an academic and the author of the book, "What Would Google do?" He was fascinated with it, he thought it was fantastic and interesting and you know he actually came across to the UK to speak to us about how we did it and why we were doing and how we thought it was going to work and kind of if you like this new era of engagement where politicians were appearing at the hand of a tiny handycam on tiny little YouTube videos.

I think that WebCameron probably did play its role in changing the way politics is done online. I would not be so grandiose to suggest that it played as much of a role as anything that happened in the Obama campaign, but I would probably say that it was not far off it.

Anthony Newman: In terms of putting something like that WebCameron into action. What's the process and the organisation element?

Craig Elder: WebCameron for me, if being entirely honest, I think we spent more time and more money on it than we should have. It wasn't a huge budget project by any means but the frustrating thing is that certainly I don't think it was as obvious to the team. I mean I arrived in the last month of the WebCameron project whereby agencies had been appointed, you know it had been scoped; it was well on its way to being built when I arrived. We could have achieved WebCameron, whether it would have been as compelling I don't know but we could have achieved WebCameron using a free blog platform on a YouTube channel.

To a certain extent that still remains a frustration for me that we could have just put David on YouTube. That would have been you know buy a camera, buy some cheap video editing software which is exactly what we did. In WebCameron if you like it is kind of you know costs in terms of technology it was a couple of hundred quid and then my time because I used to be the video guy when it first started which was fun. But for me there was a lot of time that went into it. A lot of technical build went into it. That took us to quite interesting places.

It got us to a position where we had a technical platform whereby people could ask questions and then vote on the questions they wanted to go to David in a kind of weekly thing that we called, "Ask David."

The idea of opening up the agenda, not asking the questions that we wanted to ask of David, but asking the questions users wanted to ask. WebCameron couldn't just be David rambling on saying, "I am at some event today, I'm speaking to these people," Because life is leader of the opposition in comparison to his life now is not very sexy, sometimes you are speaking to not by any means less interesting organisations, you know they are still incredibly worthy and interesting organisations but you are just not meeting with rock stars and Presidents and Prime Ministers all the time.

So, for us we were able to do things with that platform that we wouldn't have otherwise been able to do such as you know opening up the agenda, letting people ask the questions that they wanted of David. Allowing them to upload their own videos, but part of me thinks that it cost more money and it took more time than it should have. We could have just used WordPress plus YouTube for channel. But you know it was too late in the day after my arrival to make that case.

Anthony Newman: How much time would David Cameron spend on this?

Craig Elder: You could not have WebCameron without Cameron. He was always really, really committed to it. The early days were interesting because it was a very amateur production, but that actually gave it a lot of its

charm. Four years on, after we made many strides forward in terms of video production quality, we hired a professional camerawoman to come in and work very closely with David – with him, in many cases, for a lot of the time during the day - and people still remember the video that was shot on the tiny handycam, dimly lit in his kitchen. David was always very accessible. He was always very interested in it. He was always challenging us to make it better and make it more interesting.

I had many jobs when I first arrived at the party, so David did not always appreciate quite how busy I was, along with the rest of the team. But quite often I would be in the back of the car with David going to various places and just chatting away with him and he would ask why I could not be with him all the time. “Like well because I have got another job to do, I am not just your camera guy I just happen to be the guy that runs up to parliament to meet you whenever you’re off to do something, films you for a bit and then runs back puts it on the web thing and then goes back to doing my normal job.”

Cameron took a really keen interest in WebCameron which enabled us to do a lot of things. David gave us two things. He looked at the videos and said, “Well why would anybody want to watch this?” He gave us an unprecedented level of access and trust and he also gave us the backing we needed essentially to go off and get CCHQ budget to hire someone with a broadcast background to follow him with a professional quality camera and produce a broadcast quality film – which took WebCameron up to the next level.

The reason why that was incredibly important for us was that come the election, and really in the year leading up to the election, Sky and the BBC would call us and say “We have just seen the WebCameron video; can we have the tape of that, we want to play that out on TV.” I do not need to tell you the quality of having footage controlled by us, put together by us and broadcast by us on the Six O’clock News. That was pretty incredible for us.

So, the web audience was incredibly important but those times when you had it on Sky News, those times when you had it on BBC News 24, those times when you had it on the Six O’clock News, they were the most valuable periods for WebCameron in that latter period. Producing broadcast quality footage that the broadcasters wanted and we would show in place of you know a regular piece. That was really the ultimate value of WebCameron at the tail end of its if you like its campaigning life.

Anthony Newman: Two very quick questions on WebCameron, whose idea was it?

Craig Elder: WebCameron was the idea was of Steve Hilton. So, he was obviously-. You know Steve has always been fascinated with you know the whole web-side of things and indeed his wife is very high up in Google. That’s why Steve went to California for quite some time, she was working over there. He very early on thought this would be a nice idea to do something innovative with David on the web using video.

He used Google’s blogging technology and I think Google video as a prototype WebCameron for David’s visit to India. I think maybe six or

seven months after he became a leader. That was just an experiment, Steve was on that trip with him, he said, "I'm going to buy a camera, I'm going to try this out," and it was successful and it worked really well and then ultimately Steve said, "This is going to become something else, this is going to be another thing, another bigger thing," and that's where WebCameron was born.

Anthony Newman: How many hits daily would WebCameron get?

Craig Elder: This is the thing-, the thing about these videos is, and this is kind of why I make the point, why it is incredibly value for you to be able to reach that second audience through broadcast. Because I think WebCameron viewing figures were really, really high when it first launched. But then I think we were ourselves guilty of you could argue perhaps we didn't have the access to the source material that we needed in those early days, that kind of that six month period where things took a bit of a lull.

But you kick things off with you know kind of 150,000 people coming to visit this website and that's great you know. But then you quickly start to see it tail off to what a political party website can usually expect to receive daily which is usually kind of 5,000, 6,000 visits in a day, which is fine, it's okay. You know there is an argument to be made for, you know the importance of that small-scale interaction and changing people's perceptions. You know if you can change the perceptions of 6,000 people as long as they are the right 6,000 that's valuable. But one of the keys things was to just role it into conservatives.com. Because Conservatives.com had a much, much bigger audience where it was consistently hitting very, very high figures because ultimately if you like MicroSites, websites that are set away from your main presence.

You can never expect to sustain high traffic figures with that so it was important for us to start going-, bringing it back into our corporate presence where we knew people were looking anyway. But, also moving it onto YouTube as well. So, I mean if you look back at you know the videos from you know during the election you are seeing you know a couple hundred thousand views on the videos on YouTube. That was incredibly important for us as well to go where the audience was.

So, yes I mean like I say you know WebCameron was early days, big early viewing figures, starts to tail off but then you adjust your strategy. You start to look how do we find our audience more effectively and it was our own corporate presence that was the future.

Anthony Newman: With that in mind did you use any other internet applications to drive traffic to WebCameron and the website?

Craig Elder: For us in that 2008 period onwards, search engine optimisation and Google AdWords are the two main ways to reach traffic. But then there is the alternative which I think we have touched on briefly earlier on which is that it's about going to where your audience is. It is not just about putting videos on YouTube it is about when you are doing things like we did our policy consultation on the environment back in 2009. It's about going to environmental websites and working with

them and saying you know this is a non-partisan thing we want to work with you, we want to reach out to your community. We want to be able to then have an intelligent conversation with David and put him if you like on the rack.

Because one of David's great strengths is the fact if you ask him a difficult question he shines, that's when he is really great and we work with that a lot. For us getting those viewer numbers was about going and finding the right audience. So, if you had a piece of content about environment you went and worked with environmental blogs and websites, whether it is do the green thing or whether it is tree hugger. If you have got something on defence then you got and work with defence websites so on and so forth. So, for us it was two-fold it was about making sure that when people might be looking for our content, they might not be saying, "I want to find out something from the Conservative Party,"

But they might want to say, "Well I want something about taxation, I want to know something about why it is so bloody difficult for me to set up a business. I want to know why it feels like our armed services are underfunded. I want to know why it feels that the NHS is constantly being reorganised." We would help them to find their content using search, using page search but then also it was about going to communities where people are having these conversations anyway. That really helped us to get the engagement numbers that we were looking for.

Anthony Newman: Did the party have an internal policy that determined the use of social media applications by the membership and the candidates for election campaigns?

Craig Elder: It's a great question I am really glad you ask it. No we didn't. Although, there was a period during the election that suggested that we did and one thing I have found out in politics is the disproving something that is not true, is one of the hardest things to achieve in politics. We were told absolutely point blank, I think it was posted up on mischievous labour blog that we devised a strategy whereby we told local candidates that they couldn't speak about policy issues without calling CCHQ first.

Now, as I am sure you are well aware it is frankly impractical to call CCHQ every time you have got a question. Basically it had been suggested that we wouldn't allow people to Tweet anything or write anything on Facebook unless they checked it with us first. Now we were only an eight strong team and with 650 candidates around the country it just wasn't going to be possible for us to have those conversations. So it was just very much mischief making.

Now, when I say we didn't have a policy, what I mean is we didn't have a list of dos and don'ts. You know we are the Conservative Party, like we believe in the kind of rights and responsibilities and ultimately the fact that people have got you know a head on their shoulders to make a decision for themselves. Indeed we have lost a couple of candidates because they have said stupid things either on social media and otherwise. What we did offer was guidance, if people came to us and said I want to build a website then you know we had a centralised

template where people could set up a website for £150, pretty reasonable. If people wanted help setting up a Facebook page or a Twitter profile we would help them to do that.

If people wanted to work with us on MyConservatives and try and raise money on a local basis we would help them to do that. But what we absolutely were not doing is running around slapping people on the back of their hands. Because one, we didn't want to do that and two, even if we had wanted to do that it would not have been possible.

Anthony Newman: What would constitute as a stupid thing for either a key activist or a candidate to publish on a social media site.

Craig Elder: I think we have got a challenge like any other political party and that we have to maintain a national brand whilst at the same time campaigning locally. The problem is campaigning locally there are some issues which are more important in local areas than they are in others. There are some things that happen in local areas, there-, certain communities feel certain ways or say certain things that are inconsistent with the national brand. Now you know I guess I am a bit of a Cameroon to be honest so quite often I think well you know what I think broadly is speaking the national brand but I can appreciate you know there is this kind of you know this activists and supporters of any party who say things that just don't quite fit.

So, I think the challenge for us is that we are party; the thing with the Conservative Party is you know the Conservative Party has constantly been a party of change. You know we have always been very pragmatic; we govern in the national interests. Sometimes the public don't agree with us that we are in the national interest and that's when we get booted out and then they realise we are and we come back in.

But the challenge for us is that when you are undergoing a period of change, when you are speaking about issues like-, when you are prioritising issues like health. Like the environment and you are if you are if you like suppressing issues that previously the party has been seen with obsessing about. By suppressing I don't mean telling people not to speak about it but we are just not-, we didn't go to the electorate unlike in 2005 with the manifesto that said, "We don't like immigration, we are not mad keen on Europe and by the way we won't put your taxes down." We did that in 2005, we didn't do that in 2010.

We spoke about kind of warmer, friendlier, cuddlier issues if you like and the kind you know the new mean green kind of Cameron machine if you like. For us the problem is that local candidates could occasionally contradict that. You know the fact is that we are broad church in no uncertain terms and some of us are more old Tory than others. Sometimes some of us say things that are inconsistent with the national brand. That can cause a problem but I mean if we are being totally honest you know one of the reasons we lost a candidate during the election was and I can't remember the exact wording of it but he had said something which could I guess be considered to be unhelpful.

I think oh god it is some guy in Scotland, I completely forget his name and I completely forget exactly what he said but I am fairly sure he said something about gay marriage or something similar to that. You are

just kind of like-, I mean frankly he should have known better when he was wading onto you know a difficult area. You know I don't know what he said but if it was deemed to be offensive then I am pretty sure it probably was.

But yes candidates can sometimes say things on areas which they are either ill qualified to speak about or massively out of step with the national party and that can certainly have some bad effects. But you know we weren't the only ones I mean for god sake you know Labour had a candidate who unbelievably escaped censure after publishing the postal votes as she saw them being opened in front of her. That's outrageous and she was the new media spokesman for Labour. I mean you know I met Kerry a little bit she is a nice woman but I wouldn't hold back at all by saying that is a really, really foolish thing to do.

I think it was astonishing that she didn't face heavier censure than she did for that.

Anthony Newman: What was her full name?

Craig Elder: Kerry McCarthy she was the-, was and remains the MP for Bristol East. Like I say a nice woman, very enthusiastic about new media but you know I guess it is a lesson for candidates there that think a little bit before you Tweet and she certainly should have and she certainly should have faced harsher punishment than she did. But you know we all suffered you know I am sure there was Lib Dem candidates had a problem to, we certainly lost one candidate. I am sure other candidates also said quite foolish things but you know we certainly weren't alone in that respect.

Anthony Newman: From the perspective of the central party at CCHQ what approaches did the party take to manage its social media communications?

Craig Elder: Yes, I mean basically the party started to take social media very seriously in 2008. It wasn't like we didn't take it seriously prior to that but we started to see its emerging use as a campaigning and an organising platform. Particularly Facebook -I think an undue amount of attention was given to Twitter during the election. I think a lot of journalists got excited about it thought it was the big thing and it is a great place for discovering news and for me it will always be more of a news platform than it will be a social media platform.

We use Twitter and we used it effectively. Ultimately if we are speaking about effectiveness and effectiveness is mainly measured through numbers, we measure it through who had the biggest presence. Now, we had more than the other two parties combined in terms of our numbers, so that was good. Now for us the party appointed me as if you like our social media spokesman in 2009 which is you know a lot of fun because people were taking a lot of interest in this side of things.

In terms of organising it I mean it happened all quite organically, I remember being told in 2009 we launched a new membership drive which was based around; I don't know if you remember it, six key policy areas. There were like silhouette posters and we bought the Jimmy Cliff song, "You Can Get It If You Really Want," and the

notion was that Britain can be better you just you know join the Conservative Party we can do this thing together.

We had been asked I think one or two nights before what can we do that is innovative with us using the web. We had been given a video by I forget this is really shameful (Matthew Vaughn) but I forget the name of the guy who did it but he was the director of Layer Cake like the Hollywood film Layer Cake. He was directing this film, "Well this is interesting you know you have got a Hollywood director making this film for you, how about we do what we have always said we were going to do, we go and get ourselves a presence on Facebook. We become the first UK political party to do that and we say that you can watch this video but in order to do it you have got to join us on Facebook and we will do that for the first 24 hours and then after that we will send the video out and everyone else can have it."

Now it seemed like quite a nice idea and I remember Steve went for it, he kind of broadly said, "Craig I have got no idea what you are talking about, but it sounds quite nice - we'll give it a go," and we did it and I went to bed and woke up the next day and the Conservative Party had 10,000 fans on Facebook. I didn't expect that, I would expect 100, 200 and you know I work in the commercial sector and I have seen how brands can really struggle. We just offered them an exclusive piece of content that they couldn't have got anywhere else.

So, that really gave us that insight we needed in order to continue to develop that to offer up exclusives to give the people that opportunity to interact with us on Facebook. That is what ended up with us having over 100,000 fans come in the election. You know it worked well for us, it was a good platform. Twitter for us, like I say, I have fulsome praise for how Labour have done things on a local level but nationally they have spent far too much time just messing around on Twitter like it was ever going to win any votes. They spent time speaking to themselves.

I guess you are familiar with TweetMinster. They did it on a measurement piece during the election which showed a huge volume of Labour MPs on Twitter. The number of Tweets and you kind of think to what political end, who are you speaking to that you ordinarily wouldn't have been speaking to anyway.

You know Labour MP turning to Labour voter and saying, "Labour are great" and then Labour voter turning back around and going, "Yes they really are." It is completely unproductive and a waste of everybody's time. We kind of knew that about Twitter that it wasn't really going to do that for us so we used Twitter as a news delivery mechanism to get you know to get news to our supporters as fast as possible.

In fact I think the most innovative way that we used it was back in 2008 when we first started to use it Twitter was still, you could still get it as text messages on our mobile phone for free. I mean I know you can still get that done anyway but is not free anymore. I think a couple of networks offer it but what we did is we said to people local electioneers are also coming in, we get them before they even arrive in the TV studios to sign up to our Twitter account, put in your mobile phone number we will give you the local election results first as they come in.

That worked really, really well for us, it is like 1,000 people went for that overnight.

Now you know we have ended up with I think it is 50,000 Twitter followers but back then it was about that just using Twitter which is a new interesting emerging platform and using it for what it seemed like it was good for which is delivering the news really, really fast. Not having a chat about how good we are.

Anthony Newman: In a structural sense in terms of how CCHQ is organised what was the role of social media, emails and blogs in the departmental sense?

Craig Elder: That's a very good question. I mean social media was you know I am really chuffed with this actually because one of the things for us is that you know became the social media guy in 2008. That was interesting but you get asked a lot of policy questions and things that frankly had nothing to do with me. I would go to the Press Officer and I'd say, "Somebody has asked this question about schools, what I need to say back," and I would go and say it back. But you are kind of like I'm not a policy guy one of these days I'm going to get found out.

We worked with Henry McCrory who's a fantastic character, the Head of Press at CCHQ, you know proper kind of old tabloid guy. He said, "You know I have heard about this Twitter thing, I have seen how you've used it, I'm quite keen on doing it," and he started to use it as you know the Conservatives Party's press spokesman using Twitter. Then all the people who worked for him, you know all of the spokespeople on all the different issues they started to use it to. We started to end up with our guys were putting out our view on various issues you know to a couple of thousand followers usually including huge amount of journalists on a regular basis.

So, social media for us was a way to effect to-, and Henry was great you know because Henry is like a 60 year old guy you know. It is like it -, it doesn't meant that technology is not for him, it just means you know and the great thing about Henry was that he was like, "Hang on a minute so you mean that I can speak to the 20 journalists I need to speak to without having to text them all individually or calling them up. I can just kind of give them a little bit of gossip, like a little snippet." I was like, "Yes." "So where do I sign that sounds brilliant," and that's exactly how it worked for all the other members of the press department as well you know.

So, social media was really, really effective and particularly Twitter was incredibly effective in that sense. But you know like I said it had a couple of thousand followers but it was really a hundred that it really mattered because it was about speaking to journalists. If anybody else wanted to come along for the ride then great but this is about targeted communication, time saving communication. Blogging internally for CCHQ I mean not a massive thing. I mean we use blogging technology for a couple of things like the Conservative Policy Forum. So, we would post up things and people could comment with their views on it and so and so forth. That was quite useful.

Anthony Newman: Was that fed back into party policy?

Craig Elder: Yes it was yes. I mean the CPF I think is-, I think it has undergone a bit of a renaissance recently, certainly since I have left. I mean Adrian probably have given you a better view of this than I could because during my period it was very much the-, it was a kind of dwindling project. One that was taken very seriously but you know the CPF you know when Steven Hilton first started in CCHQ his first job was going through the envelopes coming back from the CPF. You know when Steve was Director of Strategy, CPF had been reduced to this thing that was kind of on a website somewhere and people weren't participating as much at the local level.

Now, as I understand it that has been energised but I am frankly having been away now for a year probably not the best place to speak about that so I won't. In terms of email, I mean email is obviously incredibly useful in terms of your know daily bulletins, in terms of policy, lines to take. Things that you would have seen as a candidate were also whipping their way around CCHQ. Because frankly even though I was you know working within the web team I was still a communications guy and frankly you know like how we first met you know you find yourself on Channel 4 platforms being asked questions. You need to know what the big issues of the day are and you need to know what the Conservative Party position is on them.

So, email still an incredibly effective tool in that respect. In fact email was probably the most effective tool for us full stop in terms of digital communications.

Anthony Newman: Who were the main individuals involved in the internet campaign at CCHQ?

Craig Elder: Good question we started off with a two person team. There was myself and Sam Roake who was hired from Google. I think Sam decided it wasn't really for him and he left in 2007 where Rishi came across and we started to build a much, much bigger team in which I ended up being Deputy Head of.

Anthony Newman: If you could give both their first and last name that would be useful.

Craig Elder: Yes, of course sorry yes. So the way the team ended up was an eight strong team and it had Rishi Saha Head of New Media, myself Deputy Head of New Media, Sam Coates who worked on the campaigning side of things, Adrian Harris who was our Technology Manager and Anthony Griffiths who was our Fundraising Manager. We had an absolutely fantastic intern, a young Texan girl called Brittany Greer she turned out to be such a fantastic intern that we hired her as a campaigns manger; she worked very closely on the MyConservatives side of things.

We had Nicola Woodhouse who was hired from a broadcast background to be full time WebCameron producer, director and we had Tom Edmonds who is brought in from Zopa which is this fantastic social lending company where he had been copywriter and he had been brought in as a copywriter and if you like Content Manager.

Anthony Newman: In terms of internet media did the central party have aspirations for its use in the run up to the 2010 general election that weren't fulfilled?

Craig Elder:

Yes, I think we did and I think this is where we kind of need to speak about the other side of things which is Merlin. For me the potential for parties to organise using the web is both incredibly encouraging and should be for us also incredibly frightening. There is something that I don't know if you have spoken to Tim Montgomerie at ConservativeHome but he has got a really great view on this, which is absolutely spot on. Which is that a lot of the things we use to need political parties for, one of the main things being organisation. The internet can now do that and the reason why the internet is scary for us you know the conservative party doesn't agree with itself quite a lot. There are certainly possibilities for small parties to be able to organise much more effectively using the web to present a bigger challenge to us in the future.

Also opportunities for single issue groups to organise themselves effectively outside of the Conservative Party a lot more. So, I think it presents not just a challenge to the Conservative Party but presents a challenge to if you like the British Political orthodoxy. The three party systems if you like could very quickly become a much, much bigger issue because people are now able to organise outside of the three big parties much more effectively using the web.

But sticking to your specific question what my main frustration is that it should be able to organise more effectively using the internet than we achieved during the 2010 election. I think one of the main frustrations for that was that right throughout the whole period I was told you know Merlin will be the thing, Merlin will one day be the backend of Conservatives.com but will power everything to the extent where you will come in as a voter in Anglesey and you will see information which is specifically relevant to you. We will know thanks to Merlin you live in this street with this many kids, you are more likely to read this newspaper and drive this sort of car. We will give you information based on that so you get and feel like a tailored experience.

That should be possible in the near future but we should have got a couple of steps towards that. You know and this and that if you like I guess is almost the big vision, you know could work incredibly effectively despite how kind of scary it seems on the surface. We couldn't have got there in 2010 but we could have got lot closer to it and I find that quite frustrating. I think sometimes the more high in technology that the Conservative Party let us down a little bit; you know the web-side of things, the .com side of things great. The campaigning side of things I think we are slightly hamstrung by an expensive, unwieldy piece of architecture which I understand is not a great deal better now than it was back then.

Anthony Newman:

The issues of Merlin have been raised quite regularly in these interviews. One of the points that have come out of it are concerns about security and data protection with exchange of data over the internet and remote access to that data and the potential for that data to be accessed by other parties that would then gain an insight into the Conservative campaign. Can you give more of a perspective on that?

Craig Elder:

Merlin was very much an IT owned project. So, when it came to you know kind of boxes and constituencies and modems and kind of secure

access and VPNs all these kinds of things I am probably not the best placed person to speak about that. I mean I think one of the-, for me the issues I saw with Merlin were just purely infrastructure. They were the fact that it didn't do what it was meant to do and you know that was certainly a challenge.

As I understand it on a local level some candidates find it very useful, some candidates you know didn't have access to it or didn't find it useful at all. I mean I can only speak from my own personal perspective which is the frustration I felt in terms of Merlin should surely be able to help us do campaigning things. Things like MyConservatives for example could have been much more effective than they were able to do without Merlin.

MyConservatives ended up being a standalone platform with data which needed to be manually inputted and extracted. That should never have been the case. In 2010, you should have been able to make any database speak to any database and we should have been able to make that work much more effectively than we were ultimately able to do. Now we certainly lay the blame for that at the feet of the infrastructure problems that Merlin faced. Could it be that it was a project too big? Could it be that we bit off more than we could chew? For somebody else to answer, but it seems that way to me.

Anthony Newman:

What did the central party use MyConservatives.com for?

Craig Elder:

MyConservatives.com is you know is interesting, it is a very interesting one. Looking at pure metrics we I think we raised 25% of the money that we raised online using MyConservatives based largely on the insight that the fact that people are. You know some people never give money to political parties but there are people who will give money to political parties but are uncomfortable with the notion of giving it to the central party that can be spent on frankly anything.

We worked on the insight there if people were able to give money locally to the candidates that they cared about and the campaigns that they cared, that they would be more likely to give money. I think the 25% uplift in online takings was evidence of that you know we can't argue with real hard cash. The thing for us was that MyConservatives, my only regret with MyConservatives I think it was a very innovative platform, I think it was a very well used platform. It took a lot of work, a lot of time and resource to get it built and then you know we had to hire Brittany specifically to run it and work with candidates.

The frustration for me is that I would have liked it to have-, I think it launched in September 2009 I would have liked to have launched a year earlier. I think it was asking a lot of candidates at that point in the electoral cycle and you notice that I don't say asking too much or too late. We were just-, we could have seen better results. We got good results but we could have seen better and we I very much look forward to seeing how you know Sam and Adrian continue to develop that for the next election because I think MyConservatives could be an incredibly effective campaign tool. But we were just a little bit late in the cycle and didn't the potential fully realised but that doesn't mean it won't be.

Anthony Newman: Did the central party have a policy on best practice for use of social media by senior party officials?

Craig Elder: There was never anything down on any foresheet of paper let's put it that way. Obviously, we spoke with people, we told them what they could and couldn't do but to be perfectly honest senior party officials know that what you say is on the record, whatever you say. They get that and this is just applying that common Westminster sense to what you say online. If you wouldn't say it in Parliament don't say it online. You know these guys are experts they know what they are saying and they know what to say, when to say it and who to say it to.

I didn't need to sit them down and explain anything other than you have got 140 characters to play with and you press enter, it sends. You know it is common sense for these guys, their communication as professionals.

Anthony Newman: How does it compare to people outside the party elite?

Craig Elder: I mean look you know, working as a professional in a political party, or a candidate in a political party, it leaves you with a set of skills that probably never quite leave you not least you know rambling endlessly and avoiding questions. It can get more interesting further down the chain, you know what I mean you can have party activists who say the wrong thing. You can have occasionally have candidates that say the wrong thing but you know by and large we as a party trust people to use their common sense. To engage their brain before they say something, sometimes that does go wrong. But I mean you know you would see varying kind of levels of not ill advisedness if you like but you see varying levels of quality with senior staff in terms of how they use Twitter and how effectively you used it.

You never saw them you know make any gaffs or anything like that but yes I mean obviously you know the aforementioned points about losing candidates. I guess as you get further away from the centre a person are sometimes less constrained and sometimes less well understanding of quite how public what they are saying is.

Anthony Newman: Did the central party have a policy on the websites of candidates and associations and if so how was this organised?

Craig Elder: There certainly wasn't any central policy, we didn't tell people what they could and couldn't do. Certainly, when the Conservative Party came to rebrand in 2006 this was a massive source of frustration to the branding team because they wanted us all to be able to run around all 300 or so websites and tell them to all to get the new party logo on there. We were obviously unable to do that because their local association to local candidates and they are empowered to do as they see fit.

As we mentioned earlier on our role was to provide a good technical platform whereby if they wanted to give us £150 we would give them a good well hosted solution which they could use at a local association website. But there wasn't a policy, there wasn't, "You must do this, you can't do that." There was, "We're here to help if you want us to help we'll help you for a very reasonable fee." The fee was basically

hosting costs, that was it £150 a year is just so you have got a space on a hard disk in a server which won't go down.

Anthony Newman: In terms of the role of the internet did the party take any steps to invest in training and education of party members?

Craig Elder: The thing is you know for us party conferences is when they came into their own, so you would have your own kind of like your digital stands and you have people working, you know standing there constantly offering up advice. Getting people on MyConservatives, you know encouraging candidates to update their profiles on Conservatives.com so on and so forth. I mean if you talk about party members you know even in this age of declining party membership that is still a very, very expensive task and the Conservative Party despite what people may think of it and I know you will obviously know the reality of this we are not rich. You know we are not cash rich.

We are very fortunate that we are supported by very kind donors and you know large donations through to small but undertaking a large scale training project would be difficult. I mean the view was to work with the candidates who needed that help. If you like to allow knowledge down the way but undertaking a training programme with party members would have been I guess unwieldy and unaffordable.

Anthony Newman: Did the party have a policy on collecting email address and if so how was it actioned?

Craig Elder: Yes, the party certainly had a policy on collecting email addresses. We inherited from our IT department in 2006 what we were assured was a 60,000 strong email hymn list. And one of the things about email marketing which remains incredibly key in communications, not political but just in general because it is one of the best direct response mechanisms there are. We very quickly found out that once we implemented a proper Ecommerce solution, once we had implemented a system that allowed us to see how many people had opened an email.

How many people had clicked on a link within an email and all these other things a proper Ecommerce platforms allow you to do not only the numbers opening it quite small. The numbers clicking things quite small but the list actually once it had been duped and dead email addresses been got rid off it was only 30,000 strong.

We found out quite quickly that associations had lists if not of that size then certainly quite a few thousand. We set about working with local associations to encourage them wherever possible to give us that data. If had been collected in the proper way and agreement had been given from constituents when they had signed up and given across email address and we were able to add them directly to our database. Where it wasn't possible to email those constituents one time and ask them, "We would like to sign you up to this list, would you like to?" Then allow them to sign up and fill in their own accord.

That activity combined with very heavy promotion of email signup on the front page of Conservatives.com and also working with affiliate schemes which I don't know if you are familiar with but also on a Lead Generation Schemes. Which are basically working with companies

who usually offer prizes if you sign up to, for example, Thomson holiday's mailing list. We did that with the conservative party and working with them was able to identify people who were most likely to be Conservative supports and therefore donors.

By the time election rolled around our list was half a million strong. So, going from 30,000 to half a million no main fee and it was done through co-operation with associations, very heavy promotion of email signup and then also working with lead generation firms who are incentivising people financially to join our list.

Anthony Newman: Did email play a role in the organisational process of CCHQ and if so how?

Craig Elder: I mean email I guess we have touched on this earlier on but the organisational process of CCHQ emails rolling that was the dissemination of policy and what lines to take. Just to make sure you had all the information you needed. I mean BlackBerry was one of the most vital pieces of equipment you could have. No matter where you were from the kind of you know the main lobby in parliament to wondering around some constituency the BlackBerry always meant that if something had just happened and somebody asked you about it you knew what to say or even in a TV studio.

Anthony Newman: Do all or did all CCHQ professionals have supplied to them a BlackBerry?

Craig Elder: Managers and above yes, managers and above.

Anthony Newman: How was that used between one another in terms of the communication element?

Craig Elder: I mean I can honestly say that I couldn't have survived without my BlackBerry. I mean your emails would be coming through so thick and fast and I mean you were just obviously...

Anthony Newman: A better way to describe what I am asking is, could you give me an example of your a typical two hour period in your day where you are using and interacting with your BlackBerry and what you're doing on that.

Craig Elder: I did quite a lot of work on the road to be honest particularly when Cameron Direct launched and I took their idea to broadcast that live. I found myself going on the road quite a lot to make that happen before we hired somebody else into come and do the job. For me it was just an ability to be able to do your job on the move. But one of the ways in which BlackBerry's work in terms of CCHQ structure in organisation in ways that mobiles can't is the ability to send around these lines to take.

If you say for example on election night where you have got you know MPs, you know sitting at a desk. Whilst the cameras are off them they can just flick through it see what is going on, see the information coming through. That's fundamentally changed the way that politicians receive information. It not by getting texts, it is not about having to

take a phone call. This way we will get you know full information in front of you a full brief, it can help to avoid quite awkward moments.

Anthony Newman: Was there anything different in the way the internet was used at CCHQ when compared with other organisations in general? You would be a good person to compare these because are now working in the more professionalised world.

Craig Elder: I mean I guess. I guess I would probably say to you we were always quite professional at CCHQ but I mean I think it is pretty much you know CCHQ is...

Anthony Newman: I should say more commercialised world is what I was getting at.

Craig Elder: Yes. I don't think there is a massive difference at all to be perfectly honest. I think that, you know I speak about a lot of things we did in the Conservative party in quite commercial corporate terms. I mean I speak about things like a corporate web presence for Conservatives.com because that is how you had to see it. You would think well if we we're the conservatives and we were AstraZeneca or we were Boots you know or we were British Airways how would we see our website and what's the function of our website and it is to serve our customers.

So, I think the web was you know one of the key things for us is to start using the web as successful people used the web. Let's stop speaking to the thousand people we already know use the web and support us, let's start speaking to the million that use the web that don't. You know that is pretty much-, that's the sea change if you like within CCHQ and the way that the web was used.

Anthony Newman: Was there much interaction between you, as the CCHQ professional, and people outside that, party members, supporters, in terms of the way you were using the internet, was there a dialogue?

Craig Elder: Yes I mean to be perfectly frank the dialogue between kind of senior members of staff and the wider party is usually quite limited purely because you are busy and you have kind of devolved that responsibility elsewhere in your team. But more junior members of our team would be regularly fielding them calls from kind of your members and supporters who have you know either enthusiastic in their local constituency or wanting to set up a website or they want to use Twitter or they want to know how to get involved with this web initiative. You know obviously you know at CCHQ you are available to any part of the Conservative Party that needs your attention.

But my personal contact big in the early days, limited in the late days because it was you know deputy head of departments it was difficult to be sitting there fielding calls where you are also managing agencies. You know giving interviews to Radio 4 and all this kind of stuff, you know it is just not the sort of thing I had on a day to day basis ultimately in my role.

Anthony Newman: Would that interaction come to you more as you just described it as a phone call or did you ever get letters and emails on subjects?

Craig Elder: A lot of emails, you would get a lot of emails. I mean when you end up-, when you are merging here in the new media like was when I first started one of your main jobs is dealing consistently with emails. That have either come via Conservatives.com or they would in to David Cameron's office. We would get a huge volume, a huge volume of information comes into David's office and his correspondence team which I think was ultimately six or eight strong, their job is you know fish out the stuff and see who needs it. So, we would get a lot of stuff sent to us, enquiries from the public, enquiries from supporters, enquiries from members asking us things about the website. Everybody got a reply.

Anthony Newman: Looking at the other part of my research based in the 1950s when television first became a political communication tool it caused a lot of controversy within the party membership about how it was being used. There was a lot of interaction and feedback from party members with critique on the way the party was using television at the time. How does that compare with what you experienced with replacing television with the internet in 2010?

Craig Elder: Yes, it is a really good analogy to draw. I mean TV still remains in prime spot; it might not even change in the next election. You know like I have already told you the biggest audience we got with WebCameron was when WebCameron footage was on TV. But kind of addressing your specific question. Was there resistance? Absolutely, absolutely and you know I have mentioned you know Francis and David and George and the backing they give us. Steve Hilton and the backing he gave us, Andy Coulson and the backing that he gave us and without that we would have been all at sea because if we had started from the bottom up we would have really, really struggled.

Now the thing that you know, the thing about the party is that you would sometimes find surprising examples of people who would make time for you. Now, Ken Clark is a man of give or take 70 years of age. I am guessing he doesn't spend a lot of time messing about on a MacBook or looking at his favourite websites; but he always had a lot of time for us. Always very keen to see what we were doing, always keen to get involved.

I certainly won't name any names in a negative sense but you would certainly see occasions where people didn't fully grasp the communications potential of the web and didn't quite understand why they should be making time in their diaries to speak to you know WebCameron or the web guy. That certainly wasn't common but it did happen and there was a certain degree of resistance in that respect.

Anthony Newman: Was there a particularly type of demographic?

Craig Elder: Not really, I mean like you know I guess one of the reasons that I Ken up there is that being older didn't necessarily make you less likely to want to interact something, you can be quite surprised. Sometimes you would see people, you know as long as you didn't work for candidates we were like, "Sorry I mean we would love to work with you but I am just really busy knocking on door, you know I have a got a job."

Sometimes you work with junior MPs who you think would be dying to get the exposure and they would just say, "Sorry I don't get this." Then other times you would be working with somebody like Ken whose you know former Home Secretary, Former Health Secretary, former Chancellor and you say, "Yes of course I have got the time."

So, yes you would see surprising, surprising on occasion-. You know guys like Boris Johnson who in their early days was a massive supporter and made mountains of time for us. But then you know you would see the flip side occasionally and you would feel like, "Well you are apparently young and fresh and you should get this stuff but yet you are not doing any of it," and that could certainly be frustrating. But I certainly believe that my kinds of you know counterparts in the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats would have faced exactly the same challenge.

Anthony Newman: Was there much critique from people lower down the hierarchy, members, supporters, non-party members?

Craig Elder: Not really, I think you know if things didn't work properly you know if we provided a service or a tool and it didn't work properly and then yes they would criticise and they would rightly criticise and we would work with them to make it work better for them. But we didn't see any resistance in that respect. I mean when MyConservatives was first rolled out people said, "Well I don't quite get what it is." I mean the solution for us was then to work with them on a one to one basis, you know pick up the phone and explain it. Then once we had done that we always saw enthusiasm.

Anthony Newman: We've touched on Facebook but I am interested on what the central party's view would be on how Facebook was used within the local campaigns.

Craig Elder: Facebook the way that it was used in the local campaigns was entirely to be decided upon by the local campaigns. We saw some really, really effective uses of it. You know we saw constituencies setting up groups, we saw existing MPs set up fan pages. We saw candidates set up fan pages and some of them running into the hundreds and thousands of people. The reason why Facebook is so useful is because it is kind of the viral nature. You know one of the things for our party particularly a party that is undergoing a lot of change is that the most vital people for us in terms of communicating that change are our supporters.

Now, you know during the election you know when I first joined the party I was 25 years old and Scottish which makes me an unlikely Conservative Party supporter. A lot of my friends would say, "What the hell are you doing, you know the Tories aren't for you," and you would explain to them you know why you had got involved and what you thought. They would then have a different view on the party based on the fact that one of their friends was a member.

Now if you take that view and you extrapolate it out to Facebook, what happens when somebody goes and supports a candidate and goes and supports a local campaign, goes and supports the big central Conservative Party on Facebook, they are saying to their friends and the average number of friends that a Facebook person-, a Facebook

member has is 150. They are saying on average to 150 people, “You know what I don’t mind that David Cameron and the Conservatives could be alright and I vote for them.” For us incredibly incredible valuable took whether on a local level or whether on a national one.

Anthony Newman: Is there something unique about Facebook in the sense that it is not geographically linked to a constituency. I suppose that’s my question is there something unique about it in terms of the way that you can use it for political organisation and political campaigning?

Craig Elder: I mean there is something unique about Facebook but it is not necessarily that. I am going to come in very, very high on looking at this, I am obsessed with Facebook. I don’t spend a great deal of time on it, probably not as much as people a bit younger than me, I am fascinated totally when I see younger colleagues kind of 21, 22 how much their life is organised around Facebook. What Facebook does is it reflects broadly speaking the way that we behave in the real world. It allows us to tell our stories online and politics has naturally become a part of that because we are complicated people. We are you know we are the people that we are. We have the friends that we have and the relationships that we are in. We you know go to the things that we go to but we also support the parties that we support and politics is naturally seeped into Facebook in that respect.

So, I would argue that Facebook’s success full stop and its success as a politic campaign platform is maybe not so much to do with the fact that it is not geographically linked we are just purely down to the fact that Mark Zuckerberg when he first invented it, first came up with the idea was looking to reflect real human behaviour. I think he has done that very, very effectively.

Anthony Newman: How did the party view bloggers and blogging?

Craig Elder: Bloggers and blogging - a very good question. 2006 when I first arrived the conservative party bloggers fear was in rid health in no uncertain terms and we started to see if you like the stars of the bloggers fear emerge. Particularly, Tim Montgomerie at ConservativeHome, Iain Dale, there were some smaller things going on around that area, Tory Radio was also quite bi in that period. Dizzy Thinks who almost unfeasibly married up technology in Tory politics - you know, really great bloggers. We set up a, you know stand for them at Tory party conference in 2006 and really tried to encourage people to get involved.

I mean the thing about blogging is let’s not confuse blogging with journalism. The thing is Iain and Tim are proper journalists and actually to some extent Tim is now a lobbyist, not a lobbyist but almost like a Conservative who runs a pressure group. I mean the ConservativeHome doesn’t represent the leadership of the Conservative Party nor should it. It represents the views of a certain parts of the Conservative party. So let’s you know stay off the technology, let’s celebrate the fact that what blogging does is gives a voice to people who otherwise wouldn’t have necessarily got themselves published.

I mean would Tim be a regular Times columnist now, would Iain be a regular Telegraph columnist now were it not for the fact that they got

their start on blogging, probably not and that is a great thing. But in real terms they are professional writers with a point of view and they can sometimes say things that are helpful to the party and sometimes say things that are maybe in some people's view harmful to the party. The fact that they were included on kind of senior briefings, the fact that they were sent press releases along with other journalists I think to me is as indicative.

You know if blogging was a like a weird kind of internet geeky thing our team would have dealt with them but our press team dealt with it because they are proper journalists. So, yes blogging sometimes helpful, sometimes a hindrance but I think you know sometimes during that 2006 to 2010 period the Conservative party bloggers fear was incredibly, incredibly good health you know throwing up mischievous stories both for ourselves and for the opposition. That's a really, really great thing. The only challenge for that group of people now is to continue that beyond the election.

ConHome is still going very, very strong but you know Iain's off the scene now. Des is not blogging very much. You could argue that the bloggers fear may very well be a tool of opposition but you know time will tell.

Anthony Newman: You mentioned specifically that the party deals or dealt with bloggers quite separately to the social medial element and that bloggers were dealt with through the publicity department.

Craig Elder: The press department.

Anthony Newman: The press department, the press office. So, could you describe what kind of relationship the party would have had, a little bit like you described the BlackBerry scenario in terms of its relationship with ConHome, Iain Dale, Guido Fawkes that sort of type of thing.

Craig Elder: Yes I meant the thing is I mean Guido is an interesting one because he's in theory and independent, I mean he is a right wing independent but he is nonetheless an independent he could sting you as hard as he would sting any of the other parties. He is a great guy but it doesn't change the fact that you know he likes mischief. You know Tim and Iain they would receive the same press releases as any other mainstream journalist or if you were political correspondent to the Telegraph you would get exactly the same thing as being you know the editor of ConservativeHome. But it is more than that; it is about that one to one relationship and about that access.

So, you know Tim and Iain would you know regularly be called up for one to one conversation by our press team if they said something that we perceived to be wrong they would call up and they would discuss why they thought that was wrong and press would amend on the story but it is more than that it is about being proactive with them and making them feel valued. Making them feel close to the central party machine and making them feel that they are not you know some guys tapping away on their laptops in their bedrooms which is absolutely not what they are doing. They are both guys working for professional offices.

It is making them one, feel like they are professional journalists but two, recognising the fact that they are professional journalists and treating them as such.

Anthony Newman: I have had a conversation with Iain Dale and he said that he didn't feel that he had a close enough relationship with the Conservative Party and also he offered to write a guide to blogging that would potentially be helpful for other people in the blogger sphere, candidates, activists and he said that wasn't developed any further. Do you have any comments to make on that?

Craig Elder: I mean certainly that offer was never come across my path but I mean knowing Iain as I do and knowing him to be a very trustworthy individual I have no doubt that offer was made to somebody and wasn't developed any further. I think that's a great shame because Iain's a really great writer, very passionate about the Conservative Party and is also a very effective communicator. I think it is a great shame we didn't take him up on that opportunity.

I mean you know I am obviously you know giving my last answer somewhere gingerly knowing that either one of Tim or Iain would have said that we didn't feel like we got the access that we should have had but what I can say absolutely categorically is they had the same level of access to any-, as any other journalist. If they feel that they should have had more than that is all well and good but I think you know it is kind of my duty, my responsibility to give my colleagues in the press office their due and say that they had the same access as any other journalist.

Anthony Newman: Last question.

Craig Elder: Yes.

Anthony Newman: David Cameron first used the internet with WebCameron and later said, "Too Many Tweets make a twat," is there any conflict in those two examples?

Craig Elder: That's funny you have mentioned that because on the way here I was recalling the Channel 4 event where I was put on the spot and was asked about, "Too many tweets make a twat," and my answer remains firm to this day. The thing about this was it was taken massively out of proportion not least because it was-, David swore and everyone was fascinated about that but we need to separate the use of the internet in a productive, in an effective and in a targeted way than with kind of blindly using the internet as much as possible and in an untargeted you know kind of spreading your message everywhere, not necessarily we need to be able to hit.

I think David was absolutely right saying too many Tweets make a twat, to be honest I still believe that to this day. I think the fact is if you spend a lot of your time on Twitter getting involved in needless debate and conversation with people who are ultimately just there to make mischief as indeed Kerry McCarthy at Labour did sometimes find herself doing. You do end up looking for want of a better phrase of

twat if you will forgive my language on a piece of academic research. I don't think those two things in any way contradictory.

You know David always believed in using the internet to reach a big an audience as possible in an effective way to communicate the values of the modern compassionate Conservative Party. He didn't believe in sitting at his laptop or on his BlackBerry every day replying to loads of stuff on Twitter. I think you know as far as-, you know I would certainly-, would I have preferred that David hadn't said it yes probably would of because people misunderstood what he said and it created a bit of a storm for us you know I find myself defending that statement a lot. But defend it I did and defend I still happily will, I think he had a point. It is just a shame people didn't understand it slightly better.

Anthony Newman: Craig Elder, thank you very much.

Craig Elder: My pleasure.

END AUDIO

3. Hugh Meares

Role in 2010: Chairman of Runnymede & Weybridge Conservative Association
Other Roles: Councillor for the Englefield Green Ward on Runnymede Council

Interview Date: 29 March 2011
Duration: 01:09:50

START AUDIO

Anthony: Anthony Ridge-Newman interviewing Councillor Hugh Meares. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today, Councillor Meares. Could you just start by telling me how you got involved with the Conservative Party?

Hugh: Yes, I got involved fairly late in life, having had a wonderful year, myself and my family, on the back of the Health Service. We were all 'rescued' and then somebody suggested that I might like to become a local Councillor.

All my life, this was the sort of thing I'd decided that I didn't want to do and during that year I felt it was time to perhaps join up and do something by way of public service. To my great surprise, I found that I enjoyed it and I became a local Councillor in Runnymede, obviously joined the party, and then moved on through various deputy chairman roles, political and fundraising membership, and ended up as chairman of the association during a very exciting decade of change. I was particularly interested to be the chairman of the association during the 2010 General Election, which I felt was a really important task which we, the Conservative Party, had in hand.

Anthony: Now you've just mentioned that you were chairman during the 2010 General Election. Could you just give a little bit of background of your role in the 2010 General Election?

Hugh: Yes, Runnymede & Weybridge is a curious seat because it's a particularly safe seat and the directions from the local party and from our MP and from Central Office was that Runnymede should primarily use its campaigning resources to assist other constituencies. We particularly helped in Richmond Park, where it was felt that we could make a material contribution, and I think we did and I think we found it really interesting devoting ourselves to a long campaign in another association.

Anthony: Could you give me some background on how the local party of Runnymede & Weybridge is organised?

Hugh: We're organised into a series of branches and we have a traditional association with an office and an agent and we're one of only two associations in the Surrey area to have actually made a small surplus in 2009/10.

Over Surrey there is a significant problem of how you run the associations going forward. All of the associations have got bricks and mortar, they've got cash balances and they're running at deficits and their memberships are declining.

So we have something of an issue as to how the party will be running in Surrey in, shall we say, five and ten years' time, because there's a limit to the amount of time that you can live off the reserves and then by 'selling the family silver'. We, in Runnymede, we're in a partnership grouping with our neighbours, Spelthorne. We'd like a third or fourth association to join us and I think that would then probably provide the critical mass for us to support a full-time agent and a staff of one or two to handle all the essential work to do with membership and canvassing and elections.

Anthony: You've been kind enough to give me your AGM Report that was delivered on 17th of March 2011, and covered the year of the General Election. I note from the report that you mention that cash-flow has been a problem throughout Surrey and you've just mentioned that you will be looking to take steps to join with other associations. Are there other things you can do internally to try and address this issue?

Hugh: It's a very difficult question and it's often quite an emotional one. There are strong voices in Runnymede and Weybridge that actually believe that we would do better if we split away from our partnership in Spelthorne and head our own local office in Runnymede.

I think the interesting question is, what do you actually do in an office, what are the activities that take place there, and do they actually have to take place there? As far as Cherry Orchard is concerned, which is our association office in Staines, I do work on the Cherry Orchard computers, probably one to two hours every day, but I probably only visit Cherry Orchard, apart from meetings, about four or five times a year, so almost all my work is done remotely and I suspect that this will be the model going forward which will have a series of agents who travel around the patch hot-desking from where they go.

Anthony: You've used the word 'remotely'. Presumably, the internet would play some role in that?

Hugh: The internet has been such an enormously powerful force over the last ten years and what fast broadband links, or relatively fast broadband links, both where I live in Englefield Green and in Staines, mean is that I can sit at my desk in Englefield Green, I can use something like 'Remote Desktop' or 'LogMeIn' to log straight on to the Cherry Orchard computers. I can print material out on the Cherry Orchard printers or I can print it out at home. I just don't have to travel every day down to Cherry Orchard.

Anthony: If that is the case, what is the role of the bricks and mortar?

Hugh: You probably need one main office every so often and I suspect that one over three or four associations might well be the right proportion of offices to associations. You need to have a Merlin computer that contains the central contact data, membership data and electoral roll data for the party, and you need to have somebody there who knows what they're doing with this application.

You need to have a high-speed, high-quality, big volume duplicator, normally a Risograph or a Duplo or a Rikoaz. Last year, I think,

printed 300,000 copies. You need to have some medium volume laser printers, black and white, and colour laser printers, and you probably want some sort of network sitting on a domain so that you have a group of network computers with the security that this type of information demands.

You probably also need to have reserves of paper so that you can do the printing during the election, and you may want to have things like stakes and posters and things of this sort.

That, really, is the only essential function of an association office. The other thing that happens in most of these association offices, which is meetings, can actually be achieved in a different way. You can hold meetings locally, you can rent halls for a relatively small amount. So I don't think that an association office needs to be a meeting place in the way that it was, shall we say, 10 or 20 years ago.

Anthony: Did the association office play an important role in the 2010 General Election?

Hugh: I think it played an important role with regard to printing and on the election day itself it played quite an important role. We have a bank of telephones there and we were able to have a telephone centre there, where the telephone operators were knocking up people who hadn't voted and we were knocking them up across Runnymede, in Richmond and in Woking. This is a sort of Geneva Call Centre idea and that's probably the most useful role that Cherry Orchard played.

Anthony: In terms of geography, how would an office that is shared between three to five associations work out?

Hugh: I think I've probably already given you the answer to that question. You're going to have to have one office that contains all the necessary machinery and, perhaps, one or two skilled operators. Apart from that, I think that little local sub-offices that could be really quite small, where people meet, where leaflets are delivered, where canvass cards are picked up. Those could be across the other associations and those might, for example, have some sort of local printing, some sort of black and white laser printer, they might have one or two PCs that were connected to the main office through the internet. The agent would then be hot-desking his way around the patch.

Anthony: In terms of the role of the internet, how do you see that being played out?

Hugh: The internet means different things to different people. There is an age divide here and there is a digital divide. The internet started off as a means of sending email messages, and to the younger generation now it's an enormously powerful communication device using new media tools, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter and so forth.

The difficulty that we have in the Conservative associations is that they tend to be populated by two sorts of people. There are the young and enthusiastic political volunteers, who join in their twenties, they work hard and they pass through. We then have a cadre of people who are there always. These are people in their fifties and sixties and seventies.

The difficulty that many of these people face is that they may struggle when it comes to putting a new cartridge in their laser printer.

So, they're perhaps not entirely hands-on. The internet, to an association that is run by this older cadre, is probably going to make less effective use of what the internet offers than might be the case, for example, in a young business or with some of the younger volunteers.

Anthony: Would some of these individuals require training to be able to ensure that this new type of office would function?

Hugh: I'm afraid I'm a pessimist here. I think that this age barrier can be almost insuperable.

Anthony: Does that mean, then, that there is a challenge to this type of arrangement with associations coming in the near future?

Hugh: I think it does and, of course, this is a problem that will wash its way out because the generation that is 65 today, in 10 years' time will be 75 and there'll be a new generation, which has perhaps been more hands-on during its working life.

Anthony: How did you campaign during the 2010 General Election?

Hugh: In what specific way?

Anthony: What was the main use of communication with constituents?

Hugh: The traditional way, when I first joined, of getting your message out and communicating with the voters, was to print material usually in black and white and to deliver it through the network of volunteers. We then had a wonderful three or four years where we began to collect telephone numbers into, what was then, the Blue Chip database, and we were able to supplement the physical deliveries with telephones. Telephones are particularly useful in the winter when the evenings are dark and people don't like to answer their doors and you can also get a very high hit rate compared to knocking on doorsteps.

In Runnymede we have some 80,000 electors, we have about 30,000 telephone numbers, but of those only 25% now are not TPS, so we now have a very small number of telephone numbers which we can use to make political telephone calls. So the telephone, having come in as a very important means of supplementary communication, has now disappeared.

We have a much smaller number of emails but we and all of the other associations are doing our best to harvest email addresses. That, then, raises another series of questions. We all get an enormous number of emails every day and it's hard work to answer our important emails and our work emails, and how we're going to respond when we get, as we have over the last year, maybe every two weeks we get an email from Eric Pickles; every two weeks one from Baroness Wallasey, and every three weeks one from David Cameron.

The plain fact of the matter is that this is relatively low-quality, undifferentiated marketing material, and we're just not going to read it.

Because all of the email addresses that are held on Merlin are available to the party centrally, what we have is the party involved in a communications programme in which the associations are not involved. What I believe they're doing is damaging our ability to use this communication.

I'll be a little bit more specific here. When you are doing a widespread email letter, it's quite difficult to know how to pitch this. Are you going to pitch this at the level of the Mail, or the Telegraph, or the Spectator? The difficulty with not really differentiating the email product is that everybody gets the emails and the people for whom the level of communication is wrong are very shortly simply going to direct all of the Conservative communications into their junk email box.

Anthony: You've mentioned email quite specifically. How did you practically use email during the 2010 election specifically?

Hugh: We made very little use of email. We only have around 1,000 email addresses. We did try to work up some quite thoughtful email letters but it was early days for us. It's a full-scale endeavour communicating in this way, as it's also a full-scale endeavour in maintaining a web presence. It's easy enough to create a web presence but you then have to maintain it and that requires continuing effort, which you are not necessarily going to get from a voluntary party

Anthony: Did you use a website in the election?

Hugh: Yes, and I don't think it was particularly effective.

Anthony: How was that website maintained?

Hugh: The party has quite an effective central website and they have put a lot of energy into this over the last two years. They have improved it considerably. Central Office made a content management website product available to the associations. It was pretty clunky, it looked pretty old-fashioned, it was just about adequate for putting up factual material.

I think this slightly depends on what you see a website for – is it a passive site where there's useful material, for example, councillors' names and addresses, contact points, the names of the local council official who deals with the rubbish when it hasn't been taken away? Or is it something that is offering news and marketing ideas? I think that the Conservative product that we had last year was a very old-fashioned, passive, fact-based website. There's everything to play for over the next two to three years as we see how this develops.

It's going to be difficult for associations because everyone enjoys setting up websites, but they do not enjoy maintaining them so much I think the energy for this will come from Central Office.

Anthony: How did your website compare to your neighbouring seat's, bearing in mind that Runnymede & Weybridge is a safe seat?

Hugh: I would say it was adequate and I think you've answered the question in posing it. This was a safe seat, this was not where our energy was going to go in 2010.

Anthony: Did the party monitor the content of your website?

Hugh: The party didn't. The party's monitoring of associations is another very interesting topic. The nature of a centralised database like Merlin, which is updated regularly into a central repository, means that the party at all times has access to our latest polling, our latest membership, our latest activities. So for the first time, the party is in a position to actually decide what performance metrics are important to it and to monitor those on a regular basis.

Now I was surprised in 2010 that, with the previous database which was Blue Chip, which wasn't all that easy to use but which, nevertheless, provided that central information to Central Office, that there was no area-wide or nation-wide monitoring of the metrics.

Anthony: Was the internet used at constituency level in order to organise local campaigns during the 2010 election?

Hugh: Yes. We used it extensively for this purpose. This comes back to the relationship between the branches and the associations because all the field activity has to take place by the branches. It's the branches that have the volunteers, they have the energy, and they have the local knowledge. So our principal role in the association is to motivate the branches and to monitor what they're doing, to encourage them when they're doing well and to encourage them and perhaps apply a bit of stick when they're not doing well.

During the course of an election, the branches will collect canvass information that has to somehow get onto the central Merlin system. Fresh canvass cards have to be handed back to the branches and then, on election day, this information has to be married up with the telling results coming from the polling stations, so that in the evenings we can identify the people who are our supporters and who have not voted. This is a classic 'get out the vote' campaigning technique.

In the past, this has all been paper-based. The branch would fill in the canvass card, it would then motor the canvass card over to the association office and this was the reason why you wanted an association office that was relatively nearby and relatively accessible. Volunteers would then put this into the computers and that information would then go out to branches.

We built an internet application that sat on top of Blue Chip, so that our branches were able to enter in their canvass information directly from their branch office, which was usually a bedroom or an office in somebody's home. They were able to pick up the results immediately, they could enter the telling results in immediately and they could then see who the people were who needed to be knocked up. Because this was all networked into the servers at Cherry Orchard, the telephone team at Cherry Orchard was able to see the same information in real time. We were able then to direct the telephone team at Cherry

Orchard to back up the key stress points in our constituency and in the neighbouring constituencies that we were supporting.

Anthony: How does that approach compare to the traditional approach before internet was used in that way?

Hugh: The traditional approach from about 1997, when Blue Chip was first issued to associations, was that each branch would have its own little committee room on campaign day. There would be one PC operating there, the telling results would be coming in to the committee room and then that computer in the committee room would be printing out lists for people to go out and actually bang on doors to get out their vote. In some ways it is the same but in the pre-internet days every branch committee room was its own little silo of information. In the 2010 context everybody's connected, which means there's mutual sharing of support and support can be directed to the point at which it is most needed.

Anthony: Are there any other pros and cons to both methods?

Hugh: There is always the issue of branch ownership, and I think one of the many reasons why the party has had a membership crisis over the last 10 to 15 years is that the whole nature of politics and membership, and people's attitudes to parties, have changed. One of the things that used to happen before membership was computerised was that the branches had responsibility for, and ownership for membership, so that every October they would go out and knock on the doors.

They knew the people. They said, "Hello Doris, how's the dog, are you going to Renéw?" This kept the branches in a healthy state of mind. Once the membership was computerised, we moved to a situation where the association would send out standard mail-merge letters, that's an impersonal form of communication, and it may not be followed up in a timely way. That probably was the only way to do it because this army of volunteers that we had in the 90s was gradually disappearing, so I don't think there was any option about that change.

What the new internet environment perhaps enables us to see is the possibility of the branches being re-empowered, in that all this membership and canvassing information can be available in real time, in an easy way, to the branches. They can then take up responsibility for managing their membership and maintaining contact with the members, the helpers, the deliverers, the supporters, the canvassers, which make up the party in the country.

Anthony: Did your activists use the internet in terms of email and social media in any way?

Hugh: The young ones, yes; the old ones, most definitely no.

Anthony: What is the role of the agent?

Hugh: That's a very difficult question and it's becoming more and more difficult to answer as the traditional agent is disappearing. Once upon a time to run an association office needed an office, it needed people there, it had files, it had paper and the agent was the person who ran

that office. In the modern digital age where, as we've already said, people can work from home and things aren't filed in paper form, they're filed as PDFs on their computers, they're all indexed, we have things like Merlin.

The question then arises - what is the agent there for? He fulfils one role that is extremely important. That is that the whole business of running a political party and running an election has now become very much more exacting, in terms of meeting strange legal requirements about how things are filed, how much money is spent, when they're recorded and bits of paper are sent in. So the agent fulfils that role and without an agent you are very likely to make a mistake.

The second thing that the agent can do is to see that the central data applications like Merlin are properly managed and the staff are trained. One of the problems that the party has is that Merlin, the new national database – not an easy thing to write, with perhaps 40,000,000 or 50,000,000 people on it, this is a major piece of software engineering – one of the difficulties with Merlin is that it has a user interface that does not seem to recognise that we are in a modern internet age where people expect applications to be intuitive, as easy to use as something you find on an iPad. It has an old-fashioned, unfriendly, unintuitive interface and it also tends to fall over. This means that Merlin needs trained operators to use it, and that means that behind those trained operators you probably need an agent to see that this is happening.

The agent has another set of responsibilities, which are branch building, party building and membership building. I think it's probably true to say that the current breed of agents that we're seeing are more skilled on campaigning and on the election sides than they are on the branch building and the membership. In Surrey we have one or two agents who are legendary for their skills as branch builders and fundraisers but, of course, they are now coming to the end of their terms.

Anthony: What was the workload of your agent during the 2010 General Election?

Hugh: We have, and we had, a part-time agent. During the six weeks of the election he was more or less full-time, working between two associations. I think we have this paradox that during much of the year one agent between two associations is possibly more than you need, but during the high point of an election it's rather less than you need.

We had some difficulties because one or two key things that needed to be achieved weren't quite achieved on the critical timeline. That put everything back and that meant that with only one agent serving two associations he became very overloaded in the middle of the campaign.

Anthony: Did the internet play a role in the agent's election tasks on a day to day basis?

Hugh: I think you'd have to ask Kim to get his views on it. I was speaking to him about this last week and he was saying that he had definitely noticed how the way in which he worked had changed over the last four to five years. In particular, that he was now able to do many things from home that previously he had to go to the office to do.

So I think that during the last election he was able to, perhaps, achieve more than he would have been able to had he - had everything that he was doing had to be done at the association office. He did a lot of work from home and from other places that he happened to be.

Anthony: In your agent's report, 'An Election Review of 2010', he mentions that there was significant competition for resources at Cherry Orchard, the association office, during that period. Does this create conflict within the association?

Hugh: It creates conflict in the association and between the associations in a grouping, but this is something that simply has to be managed. Perhaps what 2010 as a really important election, not only the local election but also the general election, indicated to us was that there was a very significant rise in the activities being taken on at the association office. Perhaps we hadn't anticipated these fully and we hadn't also realised that they were going to bump into each other. There's a series of critical paths – you disturb something on the critical path and everything else gets moved.

I think that this is an area where perhaps, if we were doing it again, we could improve. Looking forward to, shall we say, 2015 I think that my message to my successors would be, "Try and run with a shared agent between associations for most of the year, but come election time see whether you can find a retired agent to come on board and to take on some of that extra load during this key period of six weeks before the election proper."

Anthony: The agent's report also talks about the main administrative contribution during a parliamentary election. Talking about nomination papers, preparation for public mailings, organisation of hustings and the control of expenses. Did the internet play a facilitating role in any of these?

Hugh: No it didn't. These are very legalistic requirements. This is knowledge-based. The agent needs to be on top of the latest regulations; he has to keep a close eye on what all the volunteers are doing to see that, frankly, nobody slips up.

Anthony: The agent also mentions other bits of administration that filter in directly to the campaign, such as leaflets and photographs, and that he sent some reminders about getting hold of the photographs. How would he have managed these reminders?

Hugh: Ten years ago, the individual candidates would have come into the association office and they would either have brought a black and white photograph, perhaps taken when they were five or ten years younger. Or, he would have taken a photograph using a digital camera. What we now have is the possibility that the candidates can provide us with all this material during the year, in other words well in advance of the election proper.

You then have the difficulty that people are - and again we're talking of people mostly in their 40s, 50s and 60s - who are becoming councillors and who may be struggling with some of this new media. They're using their new digital camera, they're taking images that may be five

megabytes in size, they're sending these down the wire to us, they may not get through the email size limitation.

So it's not altogether easy assembling this but this is something that we did manage to achieve in 2010. We assembled a library, we then edited all those photographs and took all the redeye out and cropped them suitably. We then reduced them in size so that they could be assembled into publisher documents. Those publisher documents were then of an acceptable size so that they could pass between us and the agent, and between the agent and the printer. So the internet was pretty vital to this exercise.

Anthony: Focusing specifically on the reminders, firstly would the reminders have gone out by email? If so, the agent mentions that despite the reminders the photographs didn't come until the last minute. Did the digital divide play any role in this?

Hugh: I think that's too difficult to speculate on. What we're saying is, had these candidates been a little younger would they have found it easier and therefore done it more quickly? I suspect the answer is, no. I think that life is full of people that get things done on the first asking, and it's equally full of people who do things only when you've really pushed them.

Anthony: We've mentioned telling during the campaign, briefly, but could we be quite specific about the role of the internet in that process?

Hugh: Yes, and of course this is all going to change very shortly, because we cannot be more than one or two years away from a telling process that takes place straight through an iPad or some sort of mobile telephone device. What I'm talking about, clearly, is the collection of voters' numbers at the polling stations as they leave the station.

What that number enables you to do is to identify who has voted and if you have done your canvass with reasonable coverage and you've been assiduous over the years, you will understand how maybe 80% of your electorate are likely to vote. Canvass information in Runnymede and Weybridge is pretty reliable. We've done a lot of canvassing over the years and people are generally truthful about their voting intention.

Once we have those elector numbers coming out of the polling station, we more or less know how the vote is going to fall. So we need to capture those numbers back at the committee rooms, or at the association office – although, as I've indicated to you earlier, these now in electronic terms are one and the same. The information that's available at the association office is available in the committee rooms.

What will actually happen is that the telling slips, which are bits of paper filled in by a teller sitting outside the polling station, which will be walked or bicycled or motored back to the nearest committee room or to the association office. That will then be put into a computer running an appropriate election day piece of software. That information then goes down the internet to the main servers, so that everybody has the same information about the state of play.

This will be particularly important as the evening of an election day begins, because that's when people are coming back from work, that's when you've got a window of opportunity to go out and knock on doors and get people out and say, "Look I know you've just got back from work and I know you're about to sit down to supper, we are short of votes, it would really help us if you could get out and cast your vote."

You've got a window of about two hours where you can really turn people out and the only way you're going to get all that information together, the telling information, who you've knocked up already, who's since voted, the only way you'll bring all that together will be a real time application, and that means the internet.

Anthony: The agent's report also notes that in some areas there was a lack of a delivery network. Firstly, could you explain what a delivery network is and its role within the association and branches?

Hugh: If we have, in Runnymede & Weybridge, something like 35,000 households and we wish to deliver them a campaign manifesto or some other form of leaflet, like an 'In Touch' for example, to say how we're getting on nationally in government or locally in government, we have to find some way of getting that out to them. Even using a franking machine, which saves you around seven or eight pence a copy, postage, frankly, becomes unaffordable.

The only way to handle this is to have a network of volunteers who we call 'deliverers' and they will see that this material is delivered. It's not just a question of whether we have the funds, there's also the issue of election expenses, and during an election, even if you had the money, it is not possible to post your election literature and remain within election expense limits. So you have to deliver these by hand.

What the branches will want to do is they will want to have two types of volunteers – the candidate himself and the volunteers that are courageous enough and enjoy doing it – they need to go out and knock on doors and canvass and present the party and its policies. The ones that wish to help but don't wish to canvass; they can best serve the party by going out and delivering this literature.

What you do is you have a list of roads, you know how many houses that are in these roads because you've been doing it for years. You split the thing up into patches and you hand these out to your deliverers.

Anthony: Did email, in the 2010 election, play any role in the delivery network?

Hugh: None really, no.

Anthony: Is there any potential for internet to be involved in the delivery process?

Hugh: I don't think so at all. I think the delivery process is primarily about bits of paper, and the way that you identify your deliveries and you keep them on board is you meet them, you press the flesh, you ring them up. This needs to be a personal process.

Anthony: That would then suggest that there is an importance of membership and support. Is there a difference in terms of a member and a supporter?

- Hugh: Well, there's obviously a formal difference in that a member pays a subscription and he's entitled to vote in certain party matters, like the choice of candidates. I think what we've all noticed and been rather puzzled by over the last 10 years is how many people are clearly Conservatives, and are unflinchingly loyal and will always turn up regularly to vote, and will help, but don't actually wish to become a member.
- Anthony: Focusing on membership, over the last five years in the run-up to the 2010 General Election, your association membership dropped between 2006 and 2007. It then plateaued until 2008. Between then and 2010 there was a steady increase, although membership in 2010 was lower than in 2006. Is this the expected trend?
- Hugh: It would seem to be a trend that's very general across Surrey and my understanding is it's a national trend too. It's partly, I'm afraid to say, just people getting older, and that fantastic body of members that we had in the '90s are now getting very old and they won't be with us forever. So we have a natural attrition of our membership.
- We've then got to go out and raise new members and it has to be said that it's been a great deal easier to find new supporters and members in 2008, 09, and 10 than it was, say, in 2000 and the three years following that. The Tory Party and its ideas seem exciting once again, and what's really exciting is we're getting lots of people in their late teens and early twenties who are interested in politics and feel that the Conservatives have a more coherent and modern message than any of the other parties.
- Anthony: Did the internet play a role in this trend?
- Hugh: I think not in terms of direct marketing, definitely not, but the whole way in which the Conservative Party has re-presented itself as having ideas that are relevant, attitudes that are relevant and being populated by younger and more interesting and fashionable people, I think that has been one plank on which membership and support in the country has begun to rebuild.
- Of course, the other issue is when you get to the period when you've had more than 10 years of one party in government, it becomes stale, the wheels begin to fall off the economy, inevitably, at some stage there's going to be some sort of economic crisis. Being something of a pessimist, I suspect that this is the only real time when the people in the country at large really begin to focus on the achievements of government, is when something begins to go wrong with the economy.
- Anthony: The centrally-managed website of the Conservative Party allows for people across the nation to join up as national members. Has this played any role in the membership trends of your association?
- Hugh: Yes it has. It's the national site, it's easy to join, we get credited with the members. For a lot of the period that I was involved in our local association, we didn't get full credit for a national member, but there is no such thing really as a national member now. If a Runnymede

member joins up nationally he becomes a Runnymede member. So I think, yes, that's working well.

Anthony: Assuming that the general trend of membership is declining in political parties, which is more important to you as an Association Chairman – having an un-active member or an active supporter?

Hugh: I think this is an issue of semantics. If he's prepared to support us, that's the only thing that matters. Of course, a supporter won't just deliver, he'll probably turn up to our parties, he'll buy a raffle ticket, he's interested in what the Conservative Party and the local MP have to say. I think there's probably not a great deal of difference between a member and an active supporter.

Anthony: Did you use the internet to recruit new members during the run-up to the 2010 General Election?

Hugh: I didn't, no.

Anthony: Did the association employ any methods to attract new members via the internet?

Hugh: Beyond the general presentation of the party, no.

Anthony: Looking at the party's expenditure –

Hugh: ...if I could just come back into that. One of the reasons is that we have so few email addresses. Out of 85,000 people, I think we have some 850 email addresses and most of those are already people who are close to the party.

Anthony: What, then, does the local party do to attempt to get hold of email addresses?

Hugh: Well, you can capture them because there's something on a – maybe there's an issue, something like AirTrack for example, which has caused a great deal of local interest. You can have something about AirTrack on your website and you can capture email addresses when people respond to surveys. You can do the same thing with paper surveys - when you put any form of material out it'll say, "Please contact us if you'd like to help or if you're concerned about this and please put your name and address and email address in."

It's hard work and also you have to manage it. You've got TPS issues; we've had one or two members who've had inappropriate communications and they said, "Look, I didn't give you my email address for you to try and promote this or that service and I want you to take my name off your address list." Then you don't quite manage to do so and – not altogether easy. This is a skill in its own right and maybe this is something that the party needs to think more about.

Anthony: Turning our attentions to the expenditure and overheads, which is mentioned in the financial highlights of the AGM Report, it details that the main expenditure and overheads consists of postage, printing, telephones, the office establishment, salary costs of staff. Did the internet play a role in increasing or decreasing these costs?

Hugh: Unquestionably, it played a role in decreasing them. If you consider what goes on in an association office, and there's I think we said earlier – it's not the fact that it's bricks and mortar, it's not the fact that there are employed staff or volunteers there. What matters are the useful activities that take place there and these associations are primarily about campaigning. So if you see that the money that is being raised over the association's being spent on election material, election campaigning, telephoning, printing and to some extent postage, then you will probably feel confident that it is going in the right direction.

You will expect to see some degree of expenditure on staff. As we've already considered, you're going to need some form of permanent staff there to put all this information in. There are issues of quality, timeliness, training which indicate that you can't just do this with volunteers. You're going to need some form of agent. I don't think you're going to see a full-time agent on any, or on many, association's profit and loss accounts over the next 10 years. I suspect that we will all be looking to part-time or shared agents.

We would ideally be looking for around a quarter of an agent and, as I've indicated already, this way of lean working, it's only possible in a modern office where everybody has the internet, has remote access to the office, remote printing and so on.

Anthony: Turning our attentions to the local branches within the association, and their financial records, the highest performing branch in the report was Virginia Water and Thorpe branch. The lowest performing branches were the CF branch and the Egham Hythe branch. What are the reasons for the differences in performance between these branches?

Hugh: The two bottom ones are easily explained. I don't think that Conservative Future is about raising money. Their memberships are £5 a year. The sort of age group that you want in Conservative Future isn't going to have the money in their pockets to contribute to the party in that way. This is building for the future.

You mention the Egham Hythe branch. This is an area that was solid Labour until recently. I don't think its demographic suggests it's going to raise a great deal of money, and the fact that the Conservative presence there is relatively weak is another reason why it's not going to raise a lot of money.

The question that you might have asked is, "Why is it that some of the branches in the more solid and wealthier areas raise very different sums of money?" That, frankly, is down to the branch chairman, and not the current branch Chairman, the branch Chairman over the last 10 years. If a solid branch has been built, these people are all mates, they've been doing it for a long time, they enjoy each other's company, and that's certainly what you have in Virginia Water.

Anthony: Excluding Conservative Future, the CF branch, does the internet play any role in the way these branches are run?

Hugh: Almost none.

- Anthony: If so, how are the branches organised in terms of communication and general day-to-day organisation?
- Hugh: I think we've perhaps really answered that question. All of the branches, without exception now, have adopted the internet as a messaging tool, but not very much more than that. I think, as we've said earlier, the type of people, the type of age, the type of skill and the type of interest suggests that, for the time being, these branches are going to continue in fairly traditional ways.
- Anthony: What was the role of the Conservative Future branch in the 2010 General Election?
- Hugh: It was quite disappointing in a way. The Conservative Future branches in Runnymede tend to focus around Royal Holloway, for obvious reasons - a very important, energetic university and there's a good interest in politics. So we tend to see Conservative Future groups form one year, then they wither again and then they re-form.
- In 2009 we had a very strong Conservative Future; in 2010 it was much less strong and didn't really have the time to turn out and contribute on the doorstep. That's not something which we can criticise in any way, because people who are at university, they've got degrees, they've got exams and there's a whole series of things competing for their time.
- Anthony: I'd like to focus finally on the role of Merlin. First of all, what is Merlin 2 and how does it differ to the original Merlin?
- Hugh: Merlin is a non-trivial application. We've seen from things like the National ID Scheme, the centralised hospital record, that building databases that cover the country is a very difficult thing to do.
- What Merlin, I think, has done quite successfully is to build a solid back end which is focused primarily on the contact rather than the electoral roll record. The way that Blue Chip operated was that it focused on the electoral roll record, with the obvious difficulty that the main key to this roll, which was the polling district and the roll number, changed every year. Then behind that you had people moving addresses - Miss Brown would become Miss Smith, Mr John Smith would have a son who he would call Mr John Smith. You have a whole series of identity-matching issues.
- Merlin is better-built. It has a contact database as its core and that is then attached to the electoral roll, which changes every year and as people move around. It also has a membership system which is added on, and a branch system, so contacts can exist within a constituency where they have an electoral roll identity. They can exist within one or more branches to which they belong and they can have membership history.
- So the underlying architecture of Merlin feels right. The difficulty with Merlin is that its user interface is really quite poor. The whole appearance of it is non-intuitive, it doesn't have a modern feel about it, it tends to fall over and things are very difficult to find. To take a simple example, if you wanted to print out some canvass cards, which

is a pretty basic thing you'd want to do, you've probably got to go through five or six screens before you get there.

This has meant that the party in the country, which would always have found the transition from Blue Chip to Merlin something difficult to manage, the task has been made more difficult than it needed to have been.

It's also not been helped by the fact that Central Office perhaps haven't had enough training and induction as these machines were rolled out. Our box arrived on the 1st of October last year. It had a few instructions in and it didn't work until the 23rd of December, because it actually needed a Central Office intervention to make it work. The machine that arrived was a three year-old Dell, they'd all been bought as a single lot, it was running Windows XP which is an obsolescent operating system designed in 2003, now very close to being end of life. The whole thing was not as forward-looking as it might have been.

From the point of view of the individual associations, the membership side was very difficult because the data migration from Blue Chip was chancy and troubled. The agent in two of our adjacent constituencies, as they've gone through their membership Renewal process in the New Year, they've found that members appear to slip from view when they know jolly well that these are paid-up members. This has caused a great loss of confidence. None of that, of course, will matter because it will all wash through as the fresh memberships go on in 2011.

These are the sort of glitches that lead to a loss of confidence and I'm afraid that, whenever one goes to a Conservative function and people start talking about Merlin, it does not get a good press.

Anthony: What are the specific differences between what Merlin 2 does and what Merlin originally did?

Hugh: I can't tell you as I never saw Merlin 1. What we have done locally is what we did with Blue Chip – we wrote a package that was a read-only package that sat on top of Blue Chip to get us the sort of reports that we wanted, particularly some of the more analytical and data-mining tools. We've now plugged that into Merlin and that's giving reasonably good results.

Anthony: In your Chairman's Report, you mention that Merlin 2 has been rolled out to all constituencies for membership and campaigning. What is Merlin's role in membership?

Hugh: It's absolutely critical because you have to find some way of recording the fact that people have joined up. You're handling their money; sometimes they pay in a single payment or a multiple payment. You've got to keep a record of all of that. Any sort of membership system is quite complicated and it's best done on computers.

Then come Renewal time, of course the subscription lasts for a year. You then want to have good warning that the Renewal point is coming up because you may want to contact the member, say, "Thank you for being a member last year, I hope you'll continue." If it's a standing

opportunity of remote access they would like to have. I use the word 'apparently' because, actually, the old security model for the way that Merlin strips its branches is actually desperately weak. So we have the paradox of data that is completely insecure, whilst blocking people out from accessing it.

Anthony: This situation with Merlin, in terms of security and other issues that you've mentioned - Merlin seemed to sit between the Central Office and the local associations. What role, then, does Merlin play in the relationship between CCHQ and local associations?

Hugh: I think that depends on your point of view. As a local association you will be very much aware that 'Big Brother' might be looking over your shoulder. For example, in February this year we got a letter from Head Office saying, "We can see that some of you haven't started using the membership system. Please start using it quickly and if not we may have to send a team in to support you."

Looking at it from Central Office's point of view, for the first time I think we actually had the opportunity to manage the party in the country to get real time information about what is actually going on, as opposed to what people say is going on. I think this could be – this will be a marvellous management tool once Central Office begins to use it. I'm not yet convinced that Central Office has yet adopted the methods of modern management in driving their associations through the country.

Anthony: In your report, you mention that branches will be able to access Merlin remotely. How does the remote access work?

Hugh: Well, Merlin has a client application but that will only work within a closed network, and it has no provision at the moment for branches to access the Merlin machine. There is a different way of doing this, which is to multi-home the Merlin machine so that the Merlin machine not only sits on its private, highly secure network connected to Central Office, it also sits on the local sub-net of the association. That then permits the branches to remote in to that local sub-net and then to get on to a machine that will access Merlin.

Anthony: How does your association compare to that of other associations locally to you, and with a view to how that then relates to other associations nationally?

Hugh: I wish I knew more about that and I think the sort of person you'd want to address that question to would be somebody like Nick Wood-Dow who's been a past Chairman of the Surrey area.

Obviously we work very closely with Spelthorne, with whom we are grouped, and the points of likely similarity and difference are really quite marked. Spelthorne seems to have a rather different demographic; I suspect that Runnymede and Weybridge will perhaps be closer to somewhere like Surrey Heath than they would to Spelthorne. We have a different type of volunteer. In some ways they're stronger, they've got more volunteers, the volunteers are still running things like coffee mornings that haven't taken place in

Runnymede for a long, long time. Runnymede is more progressive, I would say, in terms of its management tools and its management skills.

Looking to the South, and without being specific, I think that both of the associations to the south are fairly conservative in terms of their understanding of how modern offices would work. One association is very well-funded, which means that it still has an agent and two staff and operates a very high-class act from there, which we couldn't hope to emulate because we don't raise funds in the way that they do.

Another one of the neighbouring associations struggles significantly doesn't have offices as good as ours, are weak on IT skills and frankly struggled in the 2010 election. I think they hadn't really had some bitterly contested elections for quite a long time.

The Surrey AGM which I referred to earlier pointed out that our membership per 10,000 Conservative voters is at the low end for Surrey, but that our membership is rising. In fact, we were one of only two associations that I mentioned whose membership was rising, and we are one of only two associations in Surrey who are operating at a surplus.

So, confused answer; confused message.

Anthony: How is the groupings of associations nationally, the National Group of Associations, managed by the central party?

Hugh: I don't know but at the Surrey AGM in November this was a topic that was vigorously discussed. Everybody realised that the ways of working were going to have to change and that grouping, in some form or other, was inevitable. What was puzzling was that that meeting took place in November and very little, in fact nothing, material has actually come out of that meeting.

I suspect what we may have is the sort of process that's quite common in voluntary organisations, that difficult decisions aren't taken overnight. They're mulled about one year, they're talked about another year and finally solutions begin to emerge, but quite a lengthy process. This is partly being driven by Julian Walden, the Surrey Area Director. I keep in regular contact with him. I keep emphasising the fact that we need to move forward ourselves, and he is supportive of the idea and recognises that this probably is going to be a very general trend, but it isn't actually happening as we speak.

Anthony: Has the internet played any role in facilitating a closer relationship between your association and other associations further afield?

Hugh: I don't think it has, I really don't think it has, and were this to take place it would take place either through the Surrey Area Chairman or through the Surrey Area Director. The form in which I would expect that process to begin would be through the request for regular information, if this doesn't already emerge through Merlin, or, if it does emerge through Merlin, regular meetings or regular contact saying, "We looked at the statistics for the first quarter of the year and you're doing well, or you're not doing well, please tell us about this." We're not seeing this type of management approach yet.

Anthony: That's fantastic. Thank you very much for your contribution.

END AUDIO

4. Iain Dale

Role in 2010: Author of and commentator on the Iain Dale's Diary blog
Other Roles: LBC Radio Presenter, former Conservative candidate

Interview Date: 3 May 2011
Duration: 00:38:03

START

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How did the "Iain Dale's Diary" blog come about?

Iain Dale: I began blogging when I was a 2005 Conservative parliamentary candidate for Norfolk North. There was no agenda with my blog. I am not very technical and found other types of websites complex. A friend in the US set up a blog for me and I liked it because it was simple to use – it was something you could just do.

As a candidate, my blog developed quite a following. I was getting over 800 hits per day, which seems like nothing now – but was a lot back then.

I had worked on David Davis's leadership campaign and when that didn't turn out as we had hoped, I thought I'd use the blog to give the world my views. Due to my contacts inside Westminster, I was able to break stories and build an audience.

It also got me back on the media circuit, after a lull after having been a candidate. The blog gave me profile – it was my USP.

However, since 2010, I realised that I couldn't do it properly. I couldn't give it the time that my audience were expecting – which was in excess of three to four posts per day. I couldn't do it with two full time jobs – it was just too much.

So, although I made some money at it through advertising - which wasn't very much – I decided to have a four month break.

I am about to start a new political website and blog that will involve contributions from my friends, I have had about 80 people come forward and offer to write for it. I will write one a week.

I have to say that if it hadn't been for my blog, I wouldn't have got my Telegraph column and after that my LBC show came.

I didn't set out with an agenda, the blog just evolved.

Anthony Ridge: Newman: What is your account of the role of blogging in the run-up to the 2010 General Election?

Iain Dale: I find that party conferences and elections are the worst times for blogging. There is so much going on. I didn't have much time to blog. I went to two of the TV debates and reported on

those - but after the debates, no blogs had any real effect in the election. No one broke any effective stories in the mainstream media. I really don't think blogging had much impact on the campaign.

The TV debates dominated the campaign and squeezed out any other medium.

I'm not in favour of the way the three debates were spaced out evenly in the three weeks before the campaign. It would be better to have two debates at the beginning of the campaign – it would then give the election some time to breath.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

What is your assessment of the Conservative Party's relationship with internet technologies?

Iain Dale:

The Conservative Party seemed to understand the power of email in the lead up to the 2010 election and before that. I remember as far back as 2001, when email was being used quite extensively. The party had been thinking along these lines for a while, for example in the 1980s they brought in Sir Christopher Lawson, who was the head of marketing for Mars.

Conservatives seemed to be well ahead in embracing technological innovation in 2010, but, of course, they had the money for it.

It was only after the 2005 general election that the party looked at using the internet from a campaigning point of view. Before that, and to a large extent after 2005, the party was in fear of the internet and its applications.

Francis Maude was the one in the party who broke away from the idea that the internet is something that should be avoided in campaigns. He argued that the party should attempt to master it.

However, CCHQ didn't really do much to beef-up its internet operations. There was every opportunity to contact the many Conservative bloggers – they could have used us to beef-up the campaign and develop a greater influence.

The party certainly didn't ask me. They did a bit with Tim Montgomerie on ConHome, but it was not that successful.

Things got better with Andy Coulson, but I was one of the Country's leading Conservative bloggers and he didn't speak to me more than about five times during the run-up to the election.

Conversely, Labour did try to manage their blogging community – but, as you would expect, they did it with the typical top down approach.

There was the perception from others that I was given my daily marching orders by the party, and off I would go to put them into action on my blog. It was nothing of the sort – in fact, quite the contrary.

At the time, I was championing the methods used by the Obama presidential campaign. But the Conservative Party were very slow in learning from this example.

My impression is that the internet didn't play much of a role in the last campaign in terms of reaching voters.

In line with Obama's campaign, the Conservatives did eventually develop "myconsevatives.com" – but it was far too late in the day. Sam Coates played a role in progressing it forward – but he was also brought in later in the lead up to the campaign.

The actual functionality of "MyConservatives" did work. But it was unsuccessful as a campaigning tool because it didn't have enough time to mature. Candidates should have had access to it as soon as they were selected, so they could have started raising money from the outset. Most had it less than six months before the election.

As far as blogging is concerned, candidates seemed too afraid to actively use blogs and Twitter. They were often worried they would say something wrong and there would be consequences if they deviated from the party line.

I offered to write a candidates guide on the best practices for the use of blogs and Twitter. The party initially thought it was a good idea, but nothing happened.

Any candidate with a massive email database did really well. Some thought that if they had 500 email addresses for constituents they'd done a good job. Some candidates had collected thousands. To be effective, these types of initiatives need to be led from the centre, but they were not.

Resourcing was the reason this was not the case. Although the party brought in a couple of people on the internet side, it was to give the appearance that they were doing something – when actually they were brought on too late to do anything significant in terms of campaigning with the internet.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

Who were the main figures in the Conservative Party working in internet matters?

Iain Dale:

Sam Coates was one of the driving forces behind the party's use of the internet.

Rishi Saha, who was previously head of social action, was moved to lead the online operations. However, he didn't have the depth of understanding in terms of internet campaigning.

Rishi saw the party website as more of a PR opportunity rather than a tool for raising campaign funds and reaching voters.

The Conservative Party have always operated by putting people into the wrong jobs and not making the best use of what is available to them. This is because CCHQ is governed by a culture of small-p politics.

In 2006, Francis Maude sent Tim Montgomerie to the Republican Party to write a paper on how they were using the internet. He wrote a good paper, but it was put on a shelf and not used.

CCHQ becomes the preserve of the party leader – well, for example, David Cameron made his best friend Chief Executive.

Before the general election, Cameron engendered good relations with the CCHQ workers who were brought in. Many of whom were young twentysomethings in slick suits with something to prove. Interestingly, Cameron hasn't been seen much in Central Office since.

END

5. Jonathan Isaby

Role in 2010: Co-Editor of the ConservativeHome blog
Other Roles: Former Telegraph journalist

Interview Date: 31 March 2011
Duration: 1:00:43

START AUDIO

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Anthony Ridge-Newman interviewing Jonathan Isaby of ConservativeHome. Well thank you Jonathan for agreeing to be interviewed and I'd just like to start by asking you how you got involved with ConservativeHome.

Jonathan Isaby: Well the site was obviously founded back in 2005 by Tim Montgomerie when I was still working at the Telegraph. And over that following three year period I came to hugely respect the site, and Tim, and the work that it did in terms of reporting what was going on in Conservative politics and basically providing a service that was nowhere else provided.

And then in 2008 Tim's deputy, Sam Coates, was moving on and he needed a new person to come onboard for the site. And I think I and 164 other people applied for the job and I got it. And I've been there – well I got the job in the summer of '08 but didn't actually start until I'd left the Telegraph finally at the end of October, beginning of November 2008, but have been there ever since.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How is the blog actually organised in terms of staff and process?

Jonathan Isaby: Well when I joined there was Tim and myself with Harry Phibbs as local government editor on a part-time basis. Now, since the general election, we've had a third full-time member of staff come onboard in the form of Paul Goodman, former Member of Parliament. And we are currently in the process of recruiting an assistant to the editors, another person who would be able to kind of help with putting the news links together and research and comment moderation and so on.

And so between the three full-time staff at the moment we divide – each of us is on duty two or three days a week duty editing the site. So putting together the front page of a morning, which involves getting up at half five or so, reading all the papers online, summarising the main stories by nine o'clock, as well as putting up our own unique content onto the site at that time.

And then during the course of the day reporting things as they happen, posting opinion pieces if there's a particular timely thing that is submitted that needs to go up, finding video content from YouTube and Sky and the BBC and ITN and other sources to share with our readers. And indeed yes, kind of

following the comments that are being made and moderating those when necessary.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How does the organisation of the ConservativeHome blog compare to working in more traditional media, for instance the Telegraph?

Jonathan Isaby: Well I mean the blog I suppose is extremely liberating in that you don't have that massive food chain of editors and news editors and lawyers and all kinds of people making various demands of you. Or indeed instructing you what to write or how to write it. The nature of the blog is very much that you publish what you want when you want and how you want.

I mean that's not to say that we don't adhere to the libel laws of the land as one had to when one was working at the Telegraph. And indeed there is a sense of structure to what we do in that a newspaper has a news section, an editorial section, a politics section, an international section.

We have got our own sections in terms of categories of post, whether it be the Tory diaries, the parliament coverage, the local government coverage, the op-ed stuff, our comment section. And indeed some of that is obviously just reporting what happens on a day by day or hour by hour basis if necessary whereas there's also other stuff which is kind of scheduled in advance.

And we'll commission opinion pieces from people. And those – we generally have a grid in advance, at least a week in advance, of what is likely coming up opinion wise and we – rather like a newspaper you'd shift around who gets what slot depending on what's going on.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Is there something about the nature of the internet and subsequently blogging that is attractive to journalists and people with an interest in Conservative politics?

Jonathan Isaby: Well I mean it's interesting that there are increasing numbers of so-called mainstream media, journalists, who are now blogging. And I think a lot of them rather like the freedom that it gives them; that you're not writing to a specific word length to fit in a certain bit of the paper. You literally write as you wish.

And if it's a very short little nugget you want to share with the world you just write it up short. Or you can kind of write a far longer analysis piece if you want.

And I suppose yes you can also I suppose be a bit more informal if you wish through the medium of blogging.

You could also obviously put video content in there and link to what other people are saying in a way that you can't in a traditional paper.

So it's a lot more interactive and in that sense it does encourage interaction between the reader and the author in a way that you wouldn't in a traditional newspaper which is kind of a one-way communication means.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How would you describe your political affiliation?

Jonathan Isaby: Well I – is that me personally or the site?

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Both you and the site.

Jonathan Isaby: I mean the site represents a broad church of Tory opinion. And certainly between the three of us on the editorial team we are by no means carbon copies of each other. There are some things that we agree on and there are other issues where we diverge and sometimes indeed take opposing views.

I mean my own personal politics, I got fascinated by politics when they started televising the House of Commons in 1989 when I was in short trousers and I suppose throughout my teenage years. I mean I joined the party in my own right in 1993 I suppose during my teenage years so I was a bit of a kind of Daily Mail Tory if you like.

And then at university – I went to university in York, got heavily involved in the Conservatives there and was vice chairman and chairman of the university Conservatives. And that kind of opened my eyes up to a more libertarian conservatism if you like and I suppose that's the strand of conservatism that I would probably identify with now in the main, personally.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You've mentioned in previous responses the word freedom a number of times in terms of use of the internet and blogging. And you've just described yourself as a libertarian blogger. Would you say those two things go hand in hand in terms of the work that you do for ConservativeHome and your role in the Conservative Party?

Jonathan Isaby: I guess that is a kind of – freedom is a defining feature of my outlook I suppose, whether it be the freedom to not have to pay as much tax to government, the freedom to not be beholden to Brussels in everything we do, or indeed freedom in a more civil liberties sense; all those things.

I think the internet has – in terms of the blogosphere there is more of a kind of libertarian tinge to blogging and the kind of outlook of bloggers than there would be probably in the country at large. And I think the medium does – is well suited to that.

And it's arguably – you could argue it's one of the reasons that perhaps the Labour blogosphere hasn't been as successful thus far, because a Labour, left-wing mentality is instinctively more statist, more top down rather than bottom up.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Certainly in terms of the Total Politics site, which lists many of the political blogs in the blogosphere at the time of the general election and since, there appeared to be far more Conservative blogs. Would that be in line with the type of libertarian ideology that we've just talked about?

Jonathan Isaby: Well I think that comes into it. And certainly I mean the initial setting up of LabourList, when Derek Draper was involved with it, was the textbook example of how not to do the blogosphere.

It was the Labour Party attempting to instil this particular viewpoint on everyone from above whereas the best blogs are the individual ones who do their own thing and engage with each other and let ideas flourish and argue causes rather than say the more kind of statist mentality.

Sorry, what was the rest of the question?

Anthony Ridge-Newman: It's okay. I'll move on. I think you answered it. In terms of the success of the ConservativeHome blog, how would you compare that to the other leading blogs of the other main political parties?

Jonathan Isaby: I mean ConservativeHome is unique in that I believe it is a one-stop shop for – I mean one thing that we do that none of the other blogs for instance – I mean Lib Dem Voice is probably the most well known Lib Dem blog, on the Labour side you've got LabourList, Left Food Forward; all of which do a lot of comment, a lot of opinion related posts, people just putting their views out about things.

And Lib Dem Voice, and I suppose the Labour sites too, are relatively good at kind of internal party news. But what ConservativeHome does that none of the others do is that fantastic service at nine in the morning of summarising the day's news, for but specifically aimed at an audience of Conservatives.

We specifically go through all the papers to seek out the Tory stories and the Tory slant on the big stories of the day which no-one else does.

And we also, in terms of our coverage of parliament and local government, are writing about things which just isn't done elsewhere. You get – obviously individual bloggers will cover those things but so putting everything together into that one package, it is pretty unique I think.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In your opinion, what is it about the way you address the Tory stories that come in the press and report on some of the issues within the Conservative Party that makes the blog so successful?

Jonathan Isaby: Well I mean I think between the three of us who run the site we are all I think pretty well connected within the party; which is essential in order to be able to write in an informed fashion. But also I suppose another aspect is that we do our regular grass roots surveys. Every month we do a survey of Conservative members and extrapolate statistics about all kinds of things.

We do a regular – obviously a regular rating of the cabinet; so kind of who’s up, who’s down.

But also ask questions about policy and the direction of the party and all those kinds of things; which I think is also quite important in terms of giving ordinary party members a voice in a party which is far from democratic and doesn’t have many opportunities for that.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You've mentioned that the party is far from democratic. Do you see the role of the blog central in changing that perhaps?

Jonathan Isaby: I mean the internet is a democratising force in that anyone can set up their own blog and have their voice heard; the barriers to entry are minimal; whereas you couldn’t just go and set up a newspaper off the cuff. So in that sense the internet definitely has been a democratising force.

Whether you can necessarily argue that it kind of will encourage more democratisation of the party, specifically of the party, I'm not sure. But suffice to say I think certainly through the surveys we do members are able to get messages across in a way that there really isn’t any other way to do.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How does the blog generate revenue?

Jonathan Isaby: Well the major proprietor, major shareholder of ConservativeHome, is Lord Ashcroft. Also involved – and the original financier of the site, who is still involved to a degree, is Stephan Shakespeare. And obviously with that ownership we have a kind of financial cushion there.

At the same time, the site takes some advertising which brings money in.

There is also a sister organisation called conservativeintelligence.com which hosts conferences which obviously people pay to attend and that brings revenue in. There is also an off-the-shelf subscription briefing service that we run that every week those who have subscribed to said list get a weekly email digest of our insight into Tory politics for the week.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of what the blog covers, it tends to be fairly free and frank, especially about matters concerning Conservative Party organisation.

In terms of the way the blog is funded, are there any issues of independence and freedom in terms of the major stakeholders having a say in what gets reported and what doesn't?

Jonathan Isaby:

Not at all. I mean complete editorial independence. Never have the proprietors in any way, shape or form tried to influence what we write or how we write it or what we cover. I mean it's simply not an issue.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

And could you give some background to how the relationship between the blog and the Conservative Party has developed over time?

Jonathan Isaby:

Well I mean a lot of it I suppose depends on personalities. And I mean the site – the genesis of the site when Tim set it up was massively pushing against the plan to take away the right of party members to choose the party leader in 2005; which the campaign being waged by Tim at the time won. And so in that sense that was a move against the party.

And I suppose the next big thing that the party – where there was not necessarily conflict but where the site challenged the party was over the A list when the site back in '06 was very sceptical about the A list. And when the A list was decided on, the site sought to establish who was on it and did so within 24/48 hours; much to the annoyance of the party.

But again that's a factor of the way that the internet works and the speed at which messages can get across and that information flows. And again, people saw ConservativeHome as a kind of democratising force in that sense I suppose.

But no, we have very good relations with all kinds of people up and down the party. We're talking to cabinet ministers, special advisors, press officers, you name it; kind of people on a daily basis.

And I think – yes I mean David Cameron I think has said this himself in the past. There are times when he and others will be frustrated at ConservativeHome. But I think they all respect it. And certainly they know it is very widely read within Conservative circles, and wider than that, and therefore it's important that they engage with us; which they do. That was when David Cameron had Tim and I up into his hotel room at a conference last year.

Yes, so they engage with us and obviously seek to persuade us when they think that we have – we're on the wrong track. But obviously we're trying to put messages out to them too.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

When the blog first came about was there any input from the central party machine on the aims and objectives of the actual site itself?

- Jonathan Isaby: No. I mean there just never has been. I mean the whole point about ConservativeHome is that it is completely independent of the centre.
- And I mean obviously I only joined in 2008 but it was set up in '05. But as I say, in '05 there was that considerable element of the site campaigning against the effort by Michael Howard, who was then leader, to take away the right of party members to have a vote in leadership elections. So in that sense there's never been any suggestion that the centre was trying to dictate an agenda. I mean far from it.
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: And is there any dialogue on a day to day basis from the central party machine?
- Jonathan Isaby: Oh I mean there's dialogue, absolutely. I mean like any journalist I get press releases from the party. And similarly I will phone up press officers, phone up ministers directly if necessary, whoever, if there are questions I want to ask that are going to inform the way I write; of course.
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: How does ConservativeHome go about getting its information?
- Jonathan Isaby: Well I mean very much like any journalist would do. You're obviously scouring other sources: other blogs and the newspapers and so on. But at the same time I am accredited as a lobby journalist at the House of Commons. I spend time talking to MPs and others around the Commons and putting together what people have told me and formulating it into journalism.
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: Is there any stage in your daily cycle that you feel that your judgment may come in conflict with your connections to the party?
- Jonathan Isaby: In what sense?
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of an editorial sense. In terms of what information you hold and what information you post on the site.
- Jonathan Isaby: I think any journalist in any situation is always going to have to make those kinds of judgments. Yes, I mean clearly ConservativeHome is not trying to be a straight down the line, completely neutral, unbiased source of information. We clearly – I mean I – some of what we do is utterly straight news reporting of so-and-so said this, there you are. But obviously there is editorialising as well. And people know that's what they're going to get. So I don't think we're selling anyone short or misleading anyone in that sense.
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: Does the party, to your knowledge, ever take any steps in order to prevent any information getting into the hands of ConservativeHome?
- Jonathan Isaby: I don't think they've ever acted in a way specifically to try and stop us getting information. I mean clearly there are times

when the party would want particular information in the hands of no journalists. I'm not aware of any attempts specifically to target us on anything like that.

I mean say the A list situation back in '06 was something where ConservativeHome took the lead in establishing who was on that list. And that was information which the party didn't want published but the site did and they had to lump it.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You've described the site and your role in the site a number of times as journalistic during this interview. And recently Harry Cole, a former Conservative blogger, was featured on a Channel 4 political programme, '10 O'clock Live', and the strap-line described him as a journalist. Would you say there is a trend within the blogosphere of bloggers considering themselves as journalists?

Jonathan Isaby: I mean it's not for me to say how other people should describe themselves. I am a journalist. I worked for the BBC for four years. I worked for the Daily Telegraph for five years. I have worked for ConservativeHome for two and a half years. As far as I am concerned, I am still pursuing a journalistic career by doing ConservativeHome. I suppose a lot of bloggers would regard themselves as kind of individual citizen journalists. If they want to call themselves that I don't object to that.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Did you have a role in the 2010 general election?

Jonathan Isaby: Well, in that obviously I was co-editor of ConservativeHome throughout it. I was writing about the election every day on the site. I also spent some time helping a few friends who were candidates in different constituencies along the way.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And from your perspective, what role did the internet, in terms of social media like Facebook and Twitter, blogs, email, play in the general elections process?

Jonathan Isaby: I think it's had a role in just massively speeding up the news cycle. I mean it's not really a cycle anymore because it's just 24/7 whereas kind of pre 24 hour cable television and so on, once 'Newsnight' had aired that was it until the 'Today' programme. And between the 'Today' programme and the 'One O'clock News' you had a lull and all the rest of it; whereas it's now just constant.

And I suppose in terms of how the internet was able to cover what was going on. You had – it was just – for instance when the Gordon Brown incident in Rochdale happened it was just relentless. And the blogosphere just went absolutely nuts. And like with the rolling news channels it just became the only story in town. And I suppose in that sense it serves to potentially exaggerate the coverage of a particular incident because everyone's talking about that one thing.

And I suppose what else about the internet and the election? I suppose through kind of viral videos and blog posts and so on

one was able to do a lot of holding to account the other parties and quite a lot of attack dog stuff.

And I suppose in a sense bloggers supportive of different parties were able to be more edgy in their campaigning and their criticism of other parties than the parties formally themselves.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of technology in general, how do you see that taking a role in Conservative Party organisation? And when I talk about technology I'm specifically talking about internetised technology: mobile phones, iPads and the applications that we see on the internet.

Jonathan Isaby: I mean I'm not hugely au fait with any particular plans the party might have or what the party might want to be doing. But suffice to say, all those devices have revolutionised the way that we live our lives and the way we communicate with each other and organise ourselves. And it is inevitable that those things will influence the way that politics is done in the same way that it influences any other aspect of people's lives.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Is there anything specific about the nature of the political sphere – of which you are a part – that differs to that outside the sphere?

Jonathan Isaby: Oh, I don't know. I'm not sure. I haven't really thought about it.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: That's fine. In terms of how people interact with the site, the ConservativeHome blog, do you consider that to have played any role in the cultural organisation of the Conservative Party?

Jonathan Isaby: In terms of how people react to us?

Anthony Ridge-Newman: How people interact within the party on policy issues, on getting their information, communicating with one another.

Jonathan Isaby: Well I mean certainly I lose count of the number of people who will say that they rely on ConservativeHome as their primary source of information about the Conservative Party and indeed generally find it more reliable/quicker/more comprehensive than the official party website; which by its nature is very anodyne. And in that sense I think when Conservative MPs and others within the party have got an announcement they want to make or something that's going on that they would regard us as a very important medium that they need to engage with.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: One of the specific features of the ConservativeHome blog, which isn't seen on other party sites, is the page or the blog feed that gives information about candidates and seats. Has that played a role that has been different to the traditions of the past?

Jonathan Isaby: Well I suppose – I mean again that's a section which is unique to the site and provides information that is not available in any

traditional newspaper but is a specialist – it's a niche market. But it's one that we've got a lot of people interested in. Sorry, I'm throwing my wedding ring around. (Laughter)

Historically, I suppose sometimes the party would officially not want to have internal selection information out in the public domain. But I would say that the nature of the information filter is such that it gets to us anyway. So I think the party before the last election became resigned to the idea that, "Oh well, ConservativeHome will find out anyway – so we might as well just release it." I suppose in that sense the medium of the internet has assisted with creating a bit more openness and transparency about how these things are done.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Through my work in observing the party and ConservativeHome simultaneously, in the run-up to the general election and after, I noticed a number of incidences when something would be released on ConservativeHome and shortly after the party would appear to react.

One example was that a note was placed on ConservativeHome that candidates had not really been thanked for the work that they did in the party. And shortly after as a candidate I received an email from Baroness Warsi. Is that a coincidence or do you see that ConservativeHome had a specific role in that type of scenario?

Jonathan Isaby: I think on that one I think we – I mean I'm not sure because it was so quickly after I'd posted it that it actually – I think that email went out. So perhaps on that occasion it was just a coincidence. But I think that is an example of how we – ConservativeHome – can speak out on behalf of the grass roots or candidates or sections of the party and allow a voice to be heard at a high level which actually then can provoke a response.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Would you then consider that ConservativeHome and other blogs like it have some degree of power within the party?

Jonathan Isaby: I'm not sure. I think it's probably more influence than power. I think there's probably a subtle distinction between those two things. Yes, I mean certainly before I joined ConservativeHome I took the view that it was influential and I have certainly no reason to believe that it's become less so since I have been working there. Indeed I would like to think that it has become more so.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: What is the relationship between ConservativeHome and other traditional media like broadcasters, radio, rolling news?

Jonathan Isaby: Oh, I mean it's very strong. I mean Tim and myself – and Paul to a degree as well – are called upon by television and radio broadcasters as pundits, as commentators, as people whose voice they think is worth airing. And I mean likewise the newspapers. ConservativeHome is quoted regularly in the

newspapers and indeed we break stories which are then followed up in the traditional media as well, so...

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of opposition parties they often use comments and items featured on ConservativeHome as a tool to fight general elections. Do you have a perspective on that?

Jonathan Isaby: I don't think opposition parties have used us very much in that way. I mean certainly you said comments, you mean by the kind of comments underneath the fold?

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Yes.

Jonathan Isaby: I mean I don't think they have. And I think – I can't think of any instance where that has happened. And if they tried to do that I think it would – I mean it would be ridiculous because everyone knows that anyone can comment on ConservativeHome in the way that anyone can comment on Left Foot Forward or Lib Dem Voice or whatever it might be and-

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Well I can give you an example because it happened during my campaign in Anglesey when the Plaid Cymru candidate put out a leaflet that criticised the fact that people had noted on ConservativeHome that I wasn't Welsh enough to stand in Ynys Mon; among other things.

Jonathan Isaby: Well I wasn't aware of that at the time. I mean I'm certainly aware that that's widespread because I think if one party – but basically any party can play at that game and kind of I don't think you can take the comments of readers on a website with the same reverence that you would the pieces by the authors or the commissioned op-ed writers whoever they might be.

I mean clearly when people have – I know Tim was quoted I think by either Tony Blair or Gordon Brown in the House of Commons when he'd said something on the site which took a particular perspective which he was unhappy about. I can't remember what it was.

And I think the other day Andy Burnham quoted a Tory MP who'd written a piece on the site saying one thing. I mean that's the nature of politics. I mean wherever people write or say things they potentially are going to get it quoted back at them.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: I noted at one point there was a change in ConservativeHome's attitude to its comment moderation. At one time it would leave pretty much all the comments on there and that seemed to change. Was there a particular reason for that?

Jonathan Isaby: I mean it's all about the thing that with freedom comes responsibility. And there have been occasions or certain individuals who have taken liberties in terms of the comment facility.

And we took the view a short while ago that for the time being we would moderate comments in order that anything that was particularly offensive or off topic or libellous wouldn't even be able to get up there before we could remove it as it were.

I mean it's an ongoing discussion about whether that's the best way to do it or not. It can be frustrating in that it can slow down the pace of a discussion that might be going on amongst commenters. But at the same time we clearly don't want to get ourselves into a position where people take advantage of that facility to libel people or to be gratuitously offensive.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So would you then say that is your understanding of the nature of blogging and its role in the political sphere is changing and evolving, adapting over time?

Jonathan Isaby: Yes. I mean of course it is. And it's like any medium, the way you do things is going to change and evolve over time depending on circumstances and what's there. No, it's definitely fluid.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: What are the central aims and objectives of ConservativeHome?

Jonathan Isaby: Oh, the aims and objectives are to inform our readers on a daily basis, an hourly basis and a minute by minute basis if necessary about the things that are going to be important to them, that they're going to care about.

Yes, so our aim is to kind of inform our readers of what's going on in Tory politics and the world at large from a Tory perspective on a daily basis. And to provide a platform for debate and discussion of policy areas and issues and so on that are obviously important to the Tory party. And indeed to provide an outlet for information that wouldn't – that isn't there in any of the established media.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: You mentioned that 'platform' which is a heading on your site.

Jonathan Isaby: We've actually changed it to 'comment' now but yes.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: 'Comment'. And it's certainly still used as a platform for individuals to have their say. And how is – how do you go about editing the content of that and how free are people to really say what they think?

Jonathan Isaby: Oh, I mean people do say what they think. There is a piece by Philip Davis, a Conservative MP, up this morning which is highly critical of the party. In fact let me find it.

He's basically taken exception to the tobacco display ban that Andrew Lansley is promoting and Philip Davis refers to him as a, quote: "So-called Conservative Secretary of State for Health". This is quite robust.

But no, I mean in terms of the platform it is a platform there for the Conservative family to discuss issues and so there will be times when you get completely contradictory articles by different authors.

The other day we had a piece, somebody saying, "I think the census is intrusive. I'm going to refuse to fill it in." And somebody else saying, "Well no, don't be silly. It's very important and we should all be filling it in." You do get a bit of reaction to each other's pieces like that.

But it is there so effectively for Conservative supporters, Conservative counsellors, Conservative MPs, Conservative members, candidates, MEPs, you name it, to have their say.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Why would a Conservative candidate or a Conservative MP be critical of the party and the leadership through the blog?

Jonathan Isaby: Well if they think that the party is doing the wrong thing then they want to make the point and argue their case. And ConservativeHome is the ideal place to do that because they know it will get noticed and it will be seen and read.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Do you then think the blog is challenging party unity and party discipline that we would have seen traditionally?

Jonathan Isaby: No, because – no, the discussions that we promote would go on but just in a more traditional format. And it would be rather slower paced.

You'd have a – it would be through the pages of a monthly newsletter or something whereas the beauty of this is that you can post something and someone can respond within hours.

And traditionally – newspaper traditional lobby journalism has always relied on free and frank discussion of political issues and personalities and so on. And it's nonsense to suggest that in some way we're creating divides that weren't already there.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Presumably the nature of the internet being cheap, being easily accessible and the content being permanent unless removed, allows greater access and readership of the types of issues that might be posted on 'comment', or previously 'platform'?

Jonathan Isaby: Yes. I guess so, yes.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So therefore is there something different about the new way of challenging the party to the more traditional ways?

Jonathan Isaby: Well I guess it's certainly speedier and more instant. And you can reach a lot more people in a far shorter space of time.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of your readership do you have any idea of how many regular readers you have at the site?

- Jonathan Isaby: Tim kind of looks after the numbers and all that kind of thing. I think we were saying kind of 40 or 50,000 a day but if you want a specific answer then email him and ask him. I mean I don't – I can't give an authoritative answer on that. And as you know there are all kinds of different ways of measuring readership on these things. So it depends how you measure it as much as anything else but...
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: Is the readership something that's particularly important to you as editors of the site?
- Jonathan Isaby: Well I mean obviously like any media outlet the more people who read us or look at us the better, obviously. Though I suppose it is particularly satisfying that we know that we are reaching the highest echelons of government on a daily basis.
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: Do you take steps to push up the readership of the site?
- Jonathan Isaby: Well I suppose it's not like a traditional – I suppose it's not like a newspaper in that a newspaper might take out adverts on the Tube or something to try and promote itself.
- I mean one of the things that you can do on the internet that you can't do with traditional media is the kind of cross-fertilisation of kind of interacting with other publications, with other bloggers, with other journalists, through Twitter and elsewhere.
- So one can mention – you link to each other's posts and effectively drive traffic to each other through that means which is one way that you get people coming to you and hopefully staying with you.
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: How important is the role of social media in terms of ConservativeHome?
- Jonathan Isaby: Well I mean we have – in terms of our Twitter feed now every single post that goes up on the site is tweeted. And obviously you then – hopefully our followers will sometimes be re-tweeting that as a means of driving traffic to the site.
- And the three of us on the editorial team all individually tweet as well. And we've also – we've got a separate Twitter account called 'Must Be Read', which is on the front page of the site as well as on Twitter, which is us linking to other people's articles or blogs which we think are worth reading; which again is obviously helping to inform our readers but hopefully also creating goodwill with those authors who might reciprocate.
- Anthony Ridge-Newman: You've mentioned Twitter. Does Facebook play any role in the life of the site?
- Jonathan Isaby: We haven't done so much on Facebook. I mean there is – there was a Facebook group for ConservativeHome readers and occasionally we message the however many thousand people that are members of that with information about what's going

on or things they might want to read and so on. But we haven't done a huge amount. Although the one thing I did do on Facebook in 2009 was my Save General Election Night Campaign which was based through Facebook and...

Anthony Ridge-Newman: So would you say it's fair to say that Twitter, for use in terms of ConservativeHome, is used for driving traffic to the site and Facebook would be used on the odd occasion when you might want to organise an event for instance?

Jonathan Isaby: Yes; or to inform readers about our monthly survey or whatever. But yes, we haven't done as much on Facebook. I mean perhaps we should have done but there's only so much one can do I suppose.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: In terms of the party and your affiliation in a more general sense, what would you say being an editor of ConservativeHome has brought to that relationship?

Jonathan Isaby: Give me an example of what kind of thing you mean.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Have you – I have to be very careful not to lead you in your answers so that's why I'm very careful about how I ask the questions. Have you developed closer links with the party since you've been an editor of ConservativeHome and has that been a benefit for your role in the party?

Jonathan Isaby: I've been in and around the Conservative Party for nearly two decades in one way shape or form. And one of the reasons that I was hired in '08 was because I had good contacts within the party and therefore was well connected. And obviously since joining ConservativeHome those have been reinforced. Obviously I've got to know some people that I didn't know before.

But I suppose I am in a position where I – uniquely in Westminster – in that I am known and do know basically every single Conservative MP. Because obviously when – before they were elected – and obviously half the current House of Commons Parliamentary Party are the 2010 intake. And obviously before the 2010 election I was interacting quite a bit with candidates.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Do candidates feel it within their interest to have a good relationship with you and others at ConservativeHome?

Jonathan Isaby: Absolutely, yes.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: And is there something interesting to you about how that has changed in the sense that that may be different to traditional media?

Jonathan Isaby: Well it's different to the traditional media in that we offer them an avenue for publicity and an opportunity for a platform which the traditional media simply wouldn't have afforded them. I mean I suppose – I mean back in the '90s some of those big

selections in very safe seats you might get a couple of lines in the Daily Telegraph. But even – I mean the Telegraph now wouldn't kind of care about candidate selections really. So we are a kind of unique market for that kind of information.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Is there a type of candidate that is more inclined to want to have a presence through ConservativeHome? For instance – dividing it into three categories – so, seat candidates and MPs; target seat candidates and MPs; and non-target seat candidates and MPs?

Jonathan Isaby: I'm not sure one could draw lines like that. I mean if you look at the kind of people that write on – who write regularly for us there's a genuine complete mixture of – I'm just trying to think of examples off the top of my head really but Mark Field has a very safe seat in Westminster and writes for us regularly.

Charlie Elphicke fought marginal Dover and won it and still writes for us regularly as an MP with a marginal seat.

But then equally there are other people who – I can't off the top of my head think of someone but there have been candidates who fought difficult seats who write for us too and...

Anthony Ridge-Newman: I suppose what I'm getting at – and there's no right or wrong answer – I'm just interested if you have noticed any tendencies or trends in those types of three categories that are coming forward?

Jonathan Isaby: I can't say I have really, no

Anthony Ridge-Newman: Okay, that's fine. We're coming to the end now. I just have a couple of last questions for you. Many academics consider David Cameron as having led the way in terms of the use of the internet as a new political communication when he launched WebCameron. He then went on to say, "Too many tweets make a twat." Do you feel there are any conflicts in those two ideas?

Jonathan Isaby: Well I think his latter comment was rather light-hearted. I mean I think the slightly serious point about the Twitter comment I suppose is that it is a medium where you can say something on the spur of the moment, press a button, and then perhaps afterwards think, "Was that the sensible thing to say?" Because we all know what you say on the internet is there forever and can't be taken back.

But I think you've got to be mature and grown-up about these things and also accept that what is there is there and that to not engage with the internet and social media and all the rest of it would be to say, "Oh well, we're not going to engage with television. We'll just engage with the print media." I mean you can't afford to do that.

Anthony Ridge-Newman: If hypothetically the internet vanished out of existence and was unable to be used during the 2010 general election campaign,

in your opinion would it have made any impact on the nature of the party and the result?

Jonathan Isaby:

I don't know. I mean it's such a hypothetical question. I don't know whether it necessarily would have changed the result but it certainly would have changed the way that the campaign unfolded and the story was told.

Anthony Ridge-Newman:

That's excellent. Thank you very much.

Jonathan Isaby:

Alright.

END AUDIO

6. Oliver Cooper

Role in 2010: Key London Conservative Future activist

Interview Date: 31 March 2011

Duration: 1:02:36

START AUDIO

Anthony: Anthony Ridge-Newman interviewing Oliver Cooper. Thank you, Ollie, for agreeing to do the interview. Could you just start by telling me how you got involved with the Conservative Party?

Oliver Cooper: I got involved – I joined the Conservative Party on the day of my 18th birthday. It started off as a reaction to my parents, who are from the far Left, and I gradually realised that being a Conservative and being a classic liberal was really for me, and they forbade me from involving myself in campaigns, but I joined up and I campaigned in the 2005 election off the back of that.

Anthony: And what was your role in the 2010 General Election?

Oliver Cooper: I campaigned very heavily in my local area. I would have wanted to campaign further afield in other areas, but we had a three-way marginal in Hampstead & Kilburn, and our local candidate was probably the best candidate I've ever met and, as a result, I couldn't see anywhere else to campaign except the local areas, so I campaigned day, and literally, night to make sure he was elected. Sadly, he fell 42 votes short.

Anthony: And, did you have any campaigning experience before the 2010 General Election?

Oliver Cooper: I had, I had a more formalised role in the 2008 and 2009 elections in London. The Mayoral Election, the Boris Johnson one in 2008, I was involved very heavily with Conservative Future in both campaigning myself and in organising it, and in the 2009 European Election, I was still involved with Conservative Future, and I campaigned very heavily in, obviously, trying to get out the vote in the core Conservative areas.

Anthony: Were there any differences between the way you campaigned in the Boris campaign to how you campaigned in the 2010 General Election?

Oliver Cooper: Very much so. I mean, the Boris campaign and, for that matter, also the 2009 European Elections, it was a matter of getting out the vote because, of course, it's an election across the entire area. So getting people to realise and getting people to organise an election on a national – on a regional basis, on a London-wide basis, as opposed to a constituency basis, was hugely important. I think that was the major difference between them, and that's always going to remain so long as we have that distinction.

Anthony: Why did you join the Conservative Party and get involved in campaigns?

Oliver Cooper: I'm very opinionated and I'm very driven by a sense of injustice in the world and so, as a result, I was driven to politics, and the Conservative

Party is the natural driver of change in the direction that I want to see in greater freedom in our society. Why I was involved in the campaigns? Again, it's a sense that, if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. And, as a result, this is why I'm very heavily driven to campaign wherever and whenever I can, most week nights in election time, every weekend, even outside of election I have to campaign, because I reckon if I don't, I feel pretty bad about not having been part of that solution.

Anthony: How would you define your political allegiance?

Oliver Cooper: I'm a Conservative. I was – I was not born a Conservative, I was born to two members of the Communist Party of Great Britain, but I certainly will die a Conservative. But, within that, obviously the Conservative Party's a very broad coalition.

My position is, some people would say, on the right of the party, I prefer saying a classical liberal line, I'm very comfortable with the coalition with the Liberal Democrats, I think they bring a lot to the table in terms of what we are as a party, and as a government, and I want to see, as I said, the government being in the direction towards freedom, and I do see candidates that want to move it towards freedom faster, or more assuredly, as better candidates than the ones that don't.

Anthony: What does classical liberalism mean to you?

Oliver Cooper: It simply means that the government respects that it has to live within boundaries, and those boundaries aren't relative, they're not set by public opinion, they're boundaries that are set by both principles – constitutional principles as well as a philosophical basis of their government. As a result, if a government says, "We want the classical liberals, we believe in freedom as our guiding philosophy," they're not going to announce policy simply to win a couple of points in the opinion polls and they're going to be more consistent in that matter.

I think the Conservative Party is fundamentally a classical liberal party, certainly after Thatcher it's been a classical liberal government. The problem is, of course, the way they govern is like every party, on a press release, sort of, basis. And, as long as you live by press cycle, you can't necessarily say that any party, or any government, has a guiding philosophy.

Anthony: You said that during the 2010 General Election you were a member of a campaign team for your candidate in Kilburn. What role did you have on that campaign team?

Oliver Cooper: I didn't have a formalised role, our campaign wasn't hugely interested in giving out titles and so on, but I was certainly the most active activist in our ward. It's a very safe Conservative ward, in which I live, and I'm now a chairman of a very safe Conservative ward next door and, of course, as a result, it's a matter of trying to drive those people to get out. And, I suppose, I was probably the leader in that particular ward, in trying to get out the vote, although I'm not – there wasn't particularly a title that went with that position.

Anthony: When I talk about the run up to the 2010 General Election, I'm talking about the beginning of the previous parliament, really, and that was about a five-year period. Over that time, in terms of your campaigning with the Boris campaign, the 2009 European Elections and, closer to the actual date of the actual 2010 General Election, what would you describe as your typical campaigning practices?

Oliver Cooper: Well, it would differ across all of those. As I said, geographically, we concentrated our effort in very different places, depending on in which election we are fighting at that time and, as a result, we had to use different strategies. If you have to, as Conservative Future, focus your attention – instead of focusing your attention in Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea trying to drive out the true blue voters in the Mayoral or the European Elections, you actually have to focus on the seats that aren't true blue. Then it means you do use your organisational strengths in different ways, and you maybe play on different organisational strengths.

Anthony: What are those organisational strengths and weaknesses?

Oliver Cooper: Well, the advantage for young people is that, obviously, one, we have a social network that is based on age rather than location and, as a result, we feel fewer inhibitions about going across geographic boundaries and campaigning in areas where we're needed most. Whereas most activists would campaign in their back yard, year in, year out, maybe decade in, decade out, even if that campaign is either a lost cause or an easy victory. Whereas, Conservative Future can be directed to places more easily, according to what the party needs, and also we're better at using technology to achieve what the party needs as well.

Anthony: In terms of practical mechanisms, how are those campaigns organised?

Oliver Cooper: In terms of Conservative Future, the first thing you do is start on Facebook. You would say, "I want to have a campaign day", because my agent in this constituency, or my chairman, or my candidate has said, "I want to have this many activists out." You would talk to them and either get money for refreshments or a lunch or so on. We could then pledge that to our activists and put that on Facebook and you get more people turning up. If you have done your job in getting money from the association for refreshments or lunch, then it is a much easier sell.

Anthony: You as an activist, did you actually use Facebook in that way?

Oliver Cooper: I organised council by-election campaigns in the local area, in Hampstead & Kilburn, leading up to 2008 and 2009, and we managed to get a lot of local campaigners from UCL, King's College London, LSE and so on. We did, explicitly, go out saying that we need to get young people involved, because, frankly, the old people are going to campaign in their backyard. The young people are the added bonus that are going to push you across the finishing line. So, we did use Facebook very heavily. I think I set up probably 10 campaign day events for every by-election going, and it is tried and tested - and it seemed to work.

- Anthony: Can you talk me through, step by step, the process of using Facebook in order to achieve a campaign day?
- Oliver Cooper: Right. Well, it, I mean, Facebook's internal mechanism has changed slightly since then, but we still have a central hub of, obviously, a group or a page on Facebook that you would recruit, not just your friends in the local area to, but across London, as I said this large social network that organises based on age into it. And, of course, they're going to join this group, no matter whether they're actually interested in the first place in campaigning in Westminster North or Hampstead & Kilburn or Hammersmith, they're going to join it simply because other people are, and they might get something interesting out of it.
- And then, when you start organising campaign days and creating events on Facebook, people will start going in slightly larger and larger numbers, and the words Hampstead & Kilburn will stop looking like words on a page and start seeming like a real achievable victory and, again, a new social network, I guess, for them, in that area as well as in their age group.
- Anthony: Facebook is an internet application. What does that have that traditional media don't have, in order to facilitate this social network and this gathering and this organisation of campaigning?
- Oliver Cooper: Well they have – certainly they have a captive audience, in a way that even television doesn't, especially newspapers don't, and we don't have any other mechanism. People log onto their Facebook every single day and, if you do pester them, then, in effect, they will cave in, which is why, if you do organise 10 campaign day events and only 10 of your activists in your group of 300 friends on Facebook turn up, that is still 10 activists more than you would have otherwise – and 10 times your 10 campaign days is probably more activists than you will be able to put on the street than the association will itself.
- So, it's having that captive audience and being able to effectively pester them and, maybe stepping on Facebook's terminology, sort of, poke them a bit in trying to get them out and you should be very unreserved in, I suppose, harassing the people that you're trying to get out and campaign for you.
- Anthony: You, as an activist, have been practicing this over the last five years, since Facebook came about. Who taught you how to use Facebook for political issues in this way?
- Oliver Cooper: I don't think anyone taught me, per se. I joined Facebook in 2006, when I first went to university. I had never heard of it before the day I signed up for it and there were very few people at university that were on it at that time. One person that used it very effectively was the president of my conservative society at UCL - Richard Jackson. He was very effective, and still is very effective in organising events and organising complete campaigns for CF and for otherwise on Facebook. He did not teach me - he did not sit me down and lecture me on exactly how to do it, but it is good best practice to copy, and it is pretty simple best practice to copy.

- Anthony: Would you consider, if you hadn't been taught to use Facebook, that the process of developing a Facebook group is something that evolved organically within Conservative Future?
- Oliver Cooper: To an extent, I mean, there is a great diversity of opinion about how you go about doing these things. Within Facebook we have had groups and pages and then new groups have come along, and these different architectures are used by different people. I guess there is a bit of an evolutionary aspect to it, in that the people that cannot use Facebook particularly well are kind of nudged aside by other people in the organisation in Conservative Future and told to follow the UCL Conservative Society group's structure. They get 400 people a year going to their event, so they obviously know what they're doing. And, I guess, best practice spreads that way. Because there's certainly no training days or courses that I've been to on how to use Facebook to get people to campaign.
- Anthony: You mentioned a lot about various different groups that you've been involved with, with Conservative Future, some of which are university-based groups, which have a presence on Facebook. Could you describe which groups you've had a relationship with through Facebook and how those groups interact?
- Oliver Cooper: Do you mean relationships solely through Facebook, or through...?
- Anthony: Both on and offline.
- Oliver Cooper: Well, there are some groups that I've encountered through Facebook that I've then had real world experiences with. In fact, because I am a classical liberal, my beliefs aren't generic Conservative Party beliefs. As a result of this, I have encountered a number of ideological groups, interest groups and so on, that I've encountered on Facebook, that have effectively been marketed almost virally when it says 23 of your friends are now fans of the, I don't know what it would be, Free to Choose, or something else I would never have heard of before, or saying, you know, 17 of your friends are now attending The Next Generation at the Adam Smith Institute. I would never have come across them in the first place.
- The Adam Smith Institute's probably the better example. And, as a result, if you know – if you do have a well-developed social network, in real life and on Facebook, these things almost suggest themselves in the way that Amazon would suggest new books to you, it's almost saying, "You have 12 of your friends are going to this event, it's probably something that you'd be interested in too." And so, it's very easy to come across new groups if you are plugged into that, and so it's a huge advantage to groups in that, sort of, part of the political spectrum and, you know, geographically within a certain area, to be able to rely on this snowball effect that Facebook allows you to achieve.
- Anthony: For a Conservative activist, is it better to be linked to, say, one specific Facebook group that services your local geographical area, or as many different Facebook groups as possible?
- Oliver Cooper: I would definitely say as many Facebook groups as possible. I mean, Facebook, I think, has a limit of 300 groups you can join and unlimited

pages and I, for two years before they introduced pages, had joined 300 groups, and had to weed out all the ones that were of sectional interest, that every other student would join, about hating 9.00am lectures and so on, and just dropped out of all of them and said, “I want to be a fan of Hammersmith Conservative Future and Cities of London & Westminster Conservative Future and so on,” because those groups actually benefited me.

Those groups actually advertised events that I’ll be interested in, maybe not as regularly as I would organise them if I were in charge, but if you got 300 groups inviting you to every event that they’ve got going, then that’s the best way to keep plugged in. It’s probably a better way than Conservative Future’s own website or any other medium. It’s certainly the best way to keep track on lots of information at one time.

Anthony: Again, is this something that happens by word of mouth, this idea of signing up to lots of groups, is it something that happens organically, or is it something that the Conservative Party teaches and actively encourages?

Oliver Cooper: I don’t know if the Conservative Party teaches and actively encourages it. There are groups that organise explicitly social networking, campaigning days, or training days, Young Britons’ Foundation is one that comes, most obviously, to mind. But, there’s no, I guess, formal training.

But, if there is someone that, as I said, is annoying, that sets up a group and then invites all his or her 600 Conservative Future friends, or Conservative friends to that group, most of them are going to say yes, even if they’re not those people that actively go out there and choose to sign up to groups, they’ll say yes. And, once they’ve said yes, you can contact them as much as possible, without having to call them all up individually. And, as a result, if you’re a campaigner, you can get people out, if you’re just that extra bit more assertive than you would be otherwise.

Anthony: I’m trying to get to the bottom of what actually is pushing this trend, and one of the ideas that’s just sprung to mind, do you think that tribalism has played any role in people signing up to lots and lots of Facebook groups?

Oliver Cooper: In terms of competition with other political parties’ organisations, do you mean?

Anthony: Not necessarily in terms of competition, but in terms of, perhaps, identity and the sense of the need to wear the Conservative tree or motif or logo on one’s sleeve by joining as many Facebook groups.

Oliver Cooper: I don’t think it’s that at all and, particularly in our age group, being Conservative is something to, kind of, keep under wraps, rather than wear on one’s sleeve. I wish it weren’t the case, but it is, and so joining 300 Facebook groups is maybe – of Conservative Future Facebook groups and being a fan of 500 Conservative Facebook pages is not going to send out a good signal, and so I don’t think it’s that at all. When it does come to inter-party competition on Facebook, I think the Conservative Party does a lot better at organising, particularly

Conservative Future, does a lot better at organising its people on Facebook than any of the other parties.

And, I've seen a lot of friends in the Liberal Democrats and Labour and UKIP try to organise on Facebook and get much worse reception. So, obviously, there are a lot of Conservative people that, even if they're not wearing their heart or their tree on their sleeve, are signing up to these groups. That's obviously a better way to get people out and campaigning and involved than whatever the Left is doing.

Anthony: What is it about the Conservative Party that means it's more successful in using Facebook?

Oliver Cooper: I don't know if there is anything that is necessarily something like the Conservative Party itself. The Conservative Party has a very well-organised, digital engagement team at headquarters, but the associations and the established activists, the older activists, aren't any more computer-literate or biased than any other person and perhaps, in many cases, they're less computer-literate and biased than other people. I think it's the – perhaps the sense, certainly that springs up at universities, that Conservative activists in physical friendships and relationships maybe don't have as many people that embrace their ideology as people from the left do.

They almost as a natural reaction not to show off that they're Right Wing or they're Conservative, but to enable them to be Right Wing Conservative, reach out on Facebook. And so, as a result, I have people add me every day as a friend that I've never met that are Conservatives. I sadly have to say no to them because my Facebook is more of a private thing than that, but the – that might be one explanation, but I can't think of anything that's structurally within the Conservative Party beneficial towards using Facebook as a tool necessarily.

Anthony: It is fair to say that you're one of the younger members of the Conservative Party, and you mentioned the older age category. Do they have the same type of participation with social media?

Oliver Cooper: It depends what you mean by the older – I mean, I was, I have to say, I had to block my grandmother on Facebook, because she was posting on my wall almost every day and, I mean, she's 86. So, obviously, there are people that will be members of Facebook, it does tail off, and the people that are older tend to use it in more heterodox, more unusual ways, than I've seen best practice being used amongst younger people. So they obviously are less susceptible to this evolutionary improvement in the way they use Facebook, and obviously they're fewer in numbers on Facebook.

Obviously, if you want to reach out to them, traditional media is the way to go, and the same applies to their use of Twitter, or their use of other social networks. They're less involved and each individual is probably less likely to pick up on the best practice that we each, I don't know, take for granted, I suppose, in the younger age group.

Anthony: You've mentioned that you're a classical liberal and that you believe in freedom, is that something that is common with Conservative Future?

Oliver Cooper: Yes, I think it's probably the most common political philosophy within the Conservative Party, sorry, within Conservative Future, and, from my point of view, that's a good thing. Obviously, we don't want to be exclusionary in a way that is very tempting if you are in a plurality of people within an organisation.

The Conservative Party is a broad church and particularly at, in the older age groups, there are people who are more socially Conservative than the classical liberals are, although just as sceptical about the European Union and just as sceptical about big government, and so, as a result, yes, we're very popular, I guess, but we don't try to push, or throw our weight around, in that respect.

Anthony: Does the internet, as a medium, have any properties that correlate with your ideals in classical liberalism?

Oliver Cooper: Very much so. The internet is seen within the libertarian, classical liberal community as being the biggest and best tool that has probably been put at our disposal since the printing press. There are online communities and interests and ways of organising that can bypass government all together, with regulations that they want, it gives an internationalist aspect of competition and discourse that means that you can, in a real sense, benefit from the countries that do embrace freedom the most, on whatever particular issue.

And things like Wikipedia was set up as explicitly – the founder of Wikipedia set it up explicitly to show that libertarianism worked, to show that spontaneous orders could create a society that worked harmoniously, without anyone trying to create a master plan. The same is true of Skype, it was founded by a libertarian, the same is true of eBay, it was founded by a Libertarian. And it's no coincidence that's the case. Facebook is not founded with that philosophy in mind, but it's just as capable of improving our ways of communicating, without relying on traditional or government-controlled mechanisms.

Anthony: You say it's no coincidence that a number of types of internet media have been brought to bear by libertarians. Do you think the same could be said about Conservative Future's use of Facebook?

Oliver Cooper: Potentially, I'm not sure the reason that the Conservative Future net uses Facebook in that way is because of any guiding philosophy. I mean, on Facebook, what you meet, what you encounter, on a day-to-day basis depends on which friends you have, and most people's friends in my age group is – are left wing, and so it appears to us as though Facebook is not necessarily this Libertarian medium, nor can we necessarily exploit it in that way.

But I have, as a result of being on Facebook, had opportunities to link into the libertarian network in the United States, the libertarian networks in Australia and Switzerland, where my family lives, and New Zealand, where my family came from, and all sorts of places in the world as a result of that. It's just not something that is obvious in the first place, but it's certainly a benefit that comes from it.

- Anthony: With that in mind, could Facebook be considered as a liberating application?
- Oliver Cooper: Oh, absolutely. I mean, we wouldn't all be on Facebook if it were an enslaving application, I suppose, but it gives us more ability to choose to link into the networks that we want, whether we have personal, physical connections to those networks or not. And so, in that respect, it is very, very useful in being able to transcend national boundaries.
- Anthony: Why would a candidate use Facebook?
- Oliver Cooper: It depends, do you mean a candidate that had been selected...
- Anthony: For the parliamentary elections.
- Oliver Cooper: Already selected. Quite simply, every candidate is campaigning to get our activists in two senses, the first is they want to get activists in the local area, get people that are leaning towards the Conservatives to be Conservative members and therefore go out and campaign for them. But, also competing for that scarce resource of people that have no great affiliation to their local area or their local candidate or their local campaign, and are willing to transcend areas geographically, and go from one area – where they live, to campaign for you, because you use Facebook.
- And, if you can do that, as I said, you can increase the number of activists you have on the street in a campaign by 50%. Or, quadruple it on any one given day, if you have a Facebook-driven campaign day. So, it's very useful in that respect but, to an extent, there is a bit of a cannibalising each other's activists, and a bit of competition between people, even within the party, to make sure you get the most effective campaigns going.
- Anthony: Why would an activist use Facebook?
- Oliver Cooper: We, as individuals, already use Facebook for all other reasons in our lives, and it's not a huge, great step to then go, "Oh wait, there's a campaign day in Hammersmith on Saturday where there's a free lunch with a free drink involved, I'll click yes attending." So, it's not maybe as an express, an overt decision as a candidate would to use Facebook for his campaign, but it's still, you know, it still yields the same result without quite so much effort on our part.
- Anthony: If individuals use Facebook in every other way in their daily lives, like you've just suggested, why then is it the Conservative Party is suggested to actively use Facebook more than the other parties for campaigning?
- Oliver Cooper: I don't know. There's one hypothesis that I have, is that Conservatives, at a younger level, are outnumbered in their everyday life at university or, to an extent, in their job by people that – but people don't share our philosophy and, as a result, do instinctively look out to build connections with people that they don't know through those means, and that means meeting people on campaign days and connecting through Facebook to enable that. But, I don't really know, but if that was a guess then that would be the one I'd make.

Anthony: Are you the administrator for any Facebook groups?

Oliver Cooper: I am yes, I'm an administrator for – I don't think any Facebook – I'm an administrator for a couple of Facebook groups and a few Facebook pages as well.

Anthony: Could you describe which they are?

Oliver Cooper: I'm an administrator for the Conservative Humanists Association's Facebook group, which is the group for trying to promote secularism within the Conservative Party and the Conservative Party to Atheists, because I'm, in the real world, I'm one of the executive members of the Conservative Humanists. I am an administrator and we use that very regularly to get out the news, because, again, it builds a sense of community amongst people that wouldn't necessarily know each other, or share this philosophy or political opinion without having seen it expressly on Facebook.

It's not something that comes up in discussion, but it's something that is on the back of a lot of people's minds when religious groups can affiliate through these real world connections, humanists, kind of, have to resort to Facebook. I'm also an administrator for Facebook pages that promote Capitalism, Daniel Hannan, the non-religious Right, the Progressive Conservatives, which is a classical liberal group despite the name, and I think that's just about it. And I was administrator in a couple of Conservative Future Facebook groups, but I'm not any more.

Anthony: Can you recall a time in the 2010 General Election when you were an administrator for a campaign group?

Oliver Cooper: Yes, during the 2010 election I was involved in the Hampton and Kilburn campaign group. It wasn't during the election itself, but leading up to it, in trying to get people involved.

And, we're fortunate in being located very close to a number of universities, the ones that I mentioned earlier, and they are a bedrock of, obviously, not just Facebook – people that use Facebook, but people that use Facebook every single day, and a lot – they're people that we were capable of getting out and getting involved and connected to Hampton and Kilburn and feel like that's the place they should campaign, instead of in Cities of London and Westminster or Holborn and St Pancras, neither of which the Conservative Party's activists can change the result of.

Anthony: What's the range, in terms of numbers of members, of these groups?

Oliver Cooper: I mean, it ranges dramatically. The smallest Facebook group of which I'm an administrator has about 120 members, but I've run groups before for Conservative Future that have – obviously I've started them and they've started from nothing, and the largest has about 95,000 members.

Anthony: And if one of these groups was used in campaigning, for instance, how many, in terms of percentage of those people signed up to that group would come out and campaign on the ground?

- Oliver Cooper: Well, it depends – again, you can say a percentage, because 10% of 95,000 is considerably larger than 10% of 100. But, if you were to have a Conservative Future group, their make-up is roughly consistent, they're all going to be Conservative Future members in the wider local area, London and the South-East perhaps for Cities of London & Westminster or Hampstead & Kilburn, and if you do have a campaign group that has – that invites everyone from the UCL Conservative Society to a campaign day in Hampstead & Kilburn, you'll probably have a turnout of something like 5%, but 5% of 300 members is still a very good turnout.
- Anthony: Would you consider the association between people on Facebook as a strong or weak association?
- Oliver Cooper: Between people that know each other only through Facebook?
- Anthony: In offline groups and societies there's face-to-face interaction, and oral communication, which would be considered a strong link and a strong association, in terms of transplanting that onto Facebook, for instance, would you consider that a strong or weak association?
- Oliver Cooper: It depends. Lots of people on Facebook use it in different ways. As I said, I've been added by hundreds of people that I've never met and some of whom I've accepted because of who they were or because they have – I've some reason to meet them in the future, other than them simply being a Conservative.
- And, through that, we've developed very close friendships online from continents away from each other, where we will comment on each other's statuses and give each other a like thumbs up when we each promote classical liberal or libertarian links on our walls or statuses and so on, and it does give a sense of actual community and cohesion, a bit of a pat on the back and assurance, and that's very – that happens quite a lot and is very useful.
- Anthony: But, in comparison to the people with whom you interact in the offline world, would you consider those acquaintances on Facebook as strong as the acquaintances you have in the offline world?
- Oliver Cooper: No, I don't think anyone can suggest that those pixels that you habitually click on someone's profile are as close as you can have in the real world. But, at the same time, when you have the whole range of humanity at your fingertips on Facebook, you can, to an extent, pick and choose with whom you correspond and connect and try to persuade to join your causes or campaign for you or be friends with you.
- You can actually actively choose them in a far more selective way in politics than you would be able to offline in politics if you just worked through your local association and met people through that. As a result, there is a potential to form close relationships, but I don't think anyone actually does form particularly close relationships through Facebook.
- Anthony: So that would be considered a weaker relationship?
- Oliver Cooper: Yes, I think so.

Anthony: With that in mind, does the Conservative Party do anything to encourage those weaker relationships to become stronger relationships?

Oliver Cooper: I don't think the Conservative Party does too much to do that on Facebook. There have been some initiatives on Twitter to try to improve the cohesion and sense of community among Conservative-leaning tweets, I suppose, through regular Tweet-ups – meetings – with other like-minded people on Twitter, at party conference and Spring Forum and all sorts of other events, and between events, so that people can get to know the person behind those pixels, or behind that @ sign, and that does enable people to know with whom they're communicating, with whom they're cooperating on getting people to go to campaign days or getting people to promote a certain issue.

And that does help, but I can't think of anything that's as – that's organised by either the Conservative Party, or any other organisation for that matter, on Facebook.

Anthony: How is Twitter used for campaigning?

Oliver Cooper: Twitter is used very extensively to get information out, rather than to mobilise activists in the way that Facebook is. Twitter is probably the fastest way that an aspirant, maybe council rather than a parliamentary, candidate can get information out to the rest of the world. Parliamentary candidates and MPs and established pressure groups and so on are plugged into the traditional media.

You can bypass that if you have a strong enough message on Twitter, if you say the council is cutting this when they could be cutting that, and it gets re-Tweeted 30 times. By the end of the day you're going to have all the traditional media and the local press knocking down your door to get that story. So, it's a good way that you can become better established, if you have a good message. It's not good to organise campaign days quite as successfully, although there have been exceptions to that.

Anthony: Are there any downsides to using social media?

Oliver Cooper: There are a few downsides. The first is that, obviously, it's time-consuming to do anything and if you are too reliant on social media, then you're going to perhaps put everything else on a backburner to your disadvantage. There have been cases where associations have almost completely ignored their traditional membership base because they go, "Oh don't worry, we'll get activists out because of Facebook." And, as a result, have lost campaigns in that way. And there are disadvantages in terms of using Twitter because, of course, it's not private, it's very, very public, and people have been caught out, there have been candidates that put up in-advised comments on Twitter, or on Facebook for that matter, and have had to be deselected as a result of that.

People have to be advised that, if you're going to use these things for politics, you should treat them as though they're politics, rather than thinking that they're banter with your friends, I suppose.

- Anthony: In political terms, what is the difference between Facebook and Twitter?
- Oliver Cooper: Do you mean in how we use them?
- Anthony: In the contribution it makes to the Conservative Party.
- Oliver Cooper: Right. I think Facebook is far more useful in being able to get the message out and also to get campaigners in, because its organisational mechanisms is better at campaigning, and it also means that you can target people that aren't particularly interested in what you say. There are people on Facebook, I have 1,350 friends of whom probably 700, 600 are Conservative or libertarian or leaning that way, which means that I've got 600 or 700 people on my Facebook that do not have opinions – political opinions that are similar to mine, even within the remit of the entire political spectrum that are near mine.
- And, you can put out – you can post a link on Facebook to a newspaper article or whatever and spin it in a way that appeals to people that aren't necessarily of your point of view, you can't do that on Twitter, because if you try to do that on Twitter, the only people following you are people who have the same opinions as you already. No-one adds people or follows people on Twitter just because you actually are friends in real life.
- So you can win people over on Facebook, and you can get people – get activists out. Twitter is more a way for a more select few people to pass messages around and communicate about politics between themselves, and then maybe use other mechanisms to get that message that they've crafted between themselves out.
- Anthony: Does social media help win votes?
- Oliver Cooper: I don't think it does help win votes particularly. I would find it – I would think it would be very difficult for a candidate to try to use Facebook or Twitter to organise his or her campaign. There are exceptions to that. There's very good usage on a ward by ward basis that I'm familiar with in Coventry – we haven't used it. I feel uncomfortable about using it – that would enable residents to join your Facebook page and then it would be non-partisan.
- And then, towards the election, they'd start posting from that Facebook page different links that are more and more and more politicised, until it gets to the stage where you're almost saying, "Vote for this candidate." That's a way you could do it, but I don't see any other way that you could win votes explicitly as a campaign. It is a good way to get campaigners out, and they win votes, and it's a good way that individuals can win over their friends, that's votes. But, it's probably very difficult for a politician him or herself to try to win over floating voters using Facebook or Twitter.
- Anthony: What is the role of blogging in the Conservative Party?
- Oliver Cooper: The Conservatives have a very strong blogging fraternity, far stronger than the corresponding Labour or Lib Dem or, for that matter, the United States Republican Party communities in terms of blogging. It's

slightly towards the classical libertarian side of the party, but we have a very strong community of people that just don't repost old links from traditional media outlets, but actually put original content up. That acts as a forum, a think tank for, I think, the entire party in that respect.

Anthony: Again, let's come back to this issue to talk about what the Conservative Party is perhaps doing differently than other parties that it encourages more blogging.

Oliver Cooper: Well, I think the reason the Conservative Party is better placed on the blogosphere right now is because blogs emerged in the UK when the Conservative Party was in opposition. And blogs are a good way for individuals to vent their spleen and to complain about the way the government is working, and then people, from that sort of blog, from the angry blogger blog, can move onto more articulate or more thought-out blogs.

And you can see Labour coming back in the blogosphere, becoming better connected in the blogosphere, as a result of their now being in opposition, because people can now complain about the government and put forward their own policies, without seeming like they're criticising their own party, because Ed Miliband's a blank slate in the same way as David Cameron was in 2006, and it's a chance for everyone to feel as though they're interacting. That's why the Conservative Party's stronger but it's also why Labour's probably going to get to the same sort of strength we are now in the next few years.

Anthony: Is this use of internet in terms of social media, email and blogging the same throughout the different geographical areas of the Conservative Party? For instance, comparing a rural seat with a metropolitan seat.

Oliver Cooper: Not at all. Obviously, if you are a candidate in – for Penrith and the Borders, or somewhere very geographically isolated from large population areas, it's difficult to use Facebook to get those few people out. We, as Conservative Future, successfully used Facebook to corral people to the big by-election victories that we scored in the last parliament, in Norwich North and Crewe and Nantwich particularly, to get people to move very large distances geographically to move to completely different cities to campaign, but that wouldn't be the case in General Election campaigns.

So, we, in London, have been blessed in that respect in being able to call upon eight million people within an easy commute from each other, but I suppose people from outside that geographic area could probably get the word out, could probably make everyone aware that they're doing great things and can probably share best practice and benefit from best practice using the internet. But they wouldn't be able to recruit campaigners from a wider areas, which is the main advantage we have in London, in that respect.

Anthony: Which, in your opinion, is the main Conservative blog?

Oliver Cooper: In terms of how much information it has on it and how useful it is for a Conservative, it's ConservativeHome, by quite a long distance, because it does have, not just a synopsis of the traditional news media's most

important articles at the beginning of the day, but it has political commentary from people that are established activists, candidates, members of parliament and members of the cabinet and so on. And it's by far the best digest of Conservative Party opinion broadly. But, at the same time, from an ideological perspective, it's always better to go to Guido's blog and read about things from a world view that I guess, I suppose, I share more than I do with Tim Montgomerie.

Anthony: Is, at least, part of the party organised in a different manner since ConservativeHome has been live?

Oliver Cooper: ConservativeHome was set up explicitly to campaign on the issue of selection, because they were outraged at the fact that the Conservative party membership did not really have that much of a choice over who the leader of the Conservative Party was and, as a result, they have always had this campaigning streak – in trying to reform the party and keep the party to a form of Conservatism that the editors and, therefore by extension, the readers share.

Anthony: What kind of values sum up ConservativeHome readers and editors?

Oliver Cooper: Well, the readers do cut across the political spectrum, or the Conservative spectrum, but with an emphasis on, I suppose, traditional right wing, as opposed to the so-called libertarian Right, simply because that's Tim Montgomerie's own political opinion, and because the libertarian Right has a far more developed blogosphere of its own.

The libertarians are far disproportionately better represented on the blogosphere and on Twitter and on Facebook than any other political group and, as a result, people that are interested in the libertarian side of things will go to libertarian blogs and follow libertarian people on Twitter, but ConservativeHome has a political opinion that's not libertarian, it's explicitly not libertarian, but allows libertarians to read it and access it and post on it, because they're an integral part of the Conservative coalition that ConservativeHome tries to represent in its entirety.

Anthony: What benefits to the Conservative Party is the ConservativeHome blog?

Oliver Cooper: I mean, at times, I'm sure Conservative headquarters thinks it's one of the biggest thorns in its side. But, at the same time, it is an invaluable way of Conservative Party members, as long as they approach it with the understanding they won't agree with everything that's being put forward, to read about the platforms that other people have. So, if you're a middle of the road Conservative Party member, you'll have libertarians and social conservatives and Tory Reform Group, moderate centrists and progressive conservatives, and everyone else, trying to pull you in different directions.

And it's the way that you can facilitate internal debate without having to put the official Conservative Party trees stamp on it and a way of getting out lots of ideas, without having to expend too much time, or money, on the party's part or the activist's part, in trying to do so. So, it's a good central scratching post for the cats of liberty.

- Anthony: How did – sorry, I’ll rephrase that – did the central party communicate with you directly using the internet during the 2010 General Election?
- Oliver Cooper: I received a lot of emails from the central party, and I am on Facebook a fan of the Conservative Party and David Cameron and Conservative Future and all the other officially run Conservative pages and organisations, but there’s not so much formal communication through those means.
- The Conservative Party has a very good digital engagement team, and they put out several websites – topical websites that campaigned on particular issues that went viral, or videos that went viral, WebCameron being an invaluable resource to show people what David Cameron thought, if they weren’t Conservatives before. So, they’re good mechanisms, but there wasn’t too much direct engagement with Conservative Party activists, because the informal channels are just as, if not even more, successful.
- Anthony: You mentioned WebCameron. Some academics believe that to have been the beginning of the real use of the internet in British politics and David Cameron was the first person who did that. On the other side of the coin, he also said, “Too many Tweets make a twat.” Do you think there is some conflict in those two issues?
- Oliver Cooper: I think what David Cameron was saying with, “Too many Tweets make a twat,” is his comment that, of course, you have to, I suppose, keep on your toes all the time on Twitter, too many people do use it as a way to communicate on an informal and laid back and, therefore, as a result, off-guard way. Several politicians have been caught out on this. Labour have been, to an extent, too reliant on people that are Twitter personalities, rather than people with real substance.
- The difference is that the WebCameron was obviously a way for David Cameron to choose the moments that he wanted to share with the rest of the world. Just as sincere but slightly more selective in what he wants to share than most people on Twitter that say – that even if they’re on Twitter because they’re Conservative activists, they’re saying, “I’m getting up in the morning and having a piece of toast with some marmalade on it,” well, I’m not interested in that and I’m not interested in your arguments that you have that might include the F word or the C word with a Labour activist, just because you disagree with them. And neither of those is going to help you campaign, whereas I think WebCameron does.
- Anthony: Do party web pages play the same role in campaigns as social media and blogging?
- Oliver Cooper: No, I don’t think they do, and I think – I’m not entirely sure about the numbers, but I would suspect that the YouTube videos were either WebCameron ones or ones that were put together by organisations like the Taxpayers’ Alliance, were viewed by far more people than the apps on Conservatives.com. Conservatives.com has to be, by its nature, more staid than the in your face libertarian bloggers or the multitude of people that put on videos on YouTube.

And so, as a result, things are less likely to go viral. If they're less likely to go viral, they're less likely to be picked up that people that aren't already engaged in politics. And so it's an integral part and an invaluable part of the online presence, but it's not the game changer.

Anthony: Think back to the run-up to the 2010 General Election and other high profile campaigns that you were involved in at that time. If the internet had not existed, would your role have been different?

Oliver Cooper: Absolutely. There are a whole range of opportunities I wouldn't have had through the internet, and therefore ways that I've become involved with different groups through the internet. I'm including the Conservative Humanists and the Progressive Conservatives, I probably wouldn't have known about them if it hadn't been for the internet. But, at the same time, in the 2010 General Election, I campaigned in my local area, it's still an option that a lot of activists choose, particularly if they live in areas that are very marginal seats, and I did that in the same way as I would have done if there were no internet. It just so happens that I was able to also use the internet in the run-up to the election to get campaigners out.

Anthony: How could the party have improved its approach in terms of communicating with candidates, associations and the wider membership?

Oliver Cooper: I think, actually, the Conservative Party is relatively good in doing that. Maybe not the official party itself, but the different mechanisms in informal party groups and blogs at getting messages out and getting unified messages, particularly, I don't know, the ConservativeHome and the Taxpayers' Alliance and so on, using different linguistic means that they can get their members to use, and their supports to use, the readers to use that then, sort of, infiltrate the rest of society. I don't think the Conservative Party itself, CCHQ, is particularly good at doing that, but they're very good at using traditional media for the same reason, and they probably know their place in that respect.

Anthony: Thinking about the parliamentary cycle from one parliament to the next, and thinking about the role of general internet media in the run-up to the 2010 General Election, has there been any difference, in your opinion, since before the 2010 General Election and afterwards?

Oliver Cooper: Very much so, simply because the Conservative Party, now being in government, changes – moves the goalposts to the other side of the pitch. I mean, it's – and this was without 15 minutes in halftime with people really ascertaining that the goalposts have moved. So, some of the blogs that were built up on being angry blogs, on being attack blogs, have suddenly had to realise that attacking someone with whom you agree, even 30%, 40%, 50% of the time is much more difficult than attacking someone that you disagree with all the time, and can afford to be seen to disagree with all the time.

So, with the blogs, it's very difficult, and a number of blogs have disappeared as a result of that. A number of blogs have had to choose whether they want to be pro-government blogs or Conservative blogs, or which ones want to be explicitly libertarian, I suppose, anti-government blogs. But, the way that Facebook is used is probably just

about the same. Its activists use it to organise in the same way and we post links that promote our party in the same way, and I don't think that's going to change, no matter who's in government.

Anthony: Since the outcome of the 2010 General Election, a number of high profile Conservative bloggers have disappeared, including Shane Greer, Tory Bear and Iain Dale. Why do you think that would be the case?

Oliver Cooper: Well those specific cases I can't talk about. Shane and Iain are very successful and have published their – they're very successful, I don't really need to go into that. And other people like, I suppose, people that were specifically connected to the Conservative Party by their name, Tory Bear, have to, as a result, sort of, choose a lane, pick a lane between being Conservative Party people or libertarian people. And he's successfully navigated that and a lot of people have failed to do so, which is why a lot of the minor blogs, and I ran a Conservative – a libertarian Conservative blog myself, have decided that it's not easy to sit on those two stools when they gradually move further and further away from each other.

Anthony: Thank you very much for your contribution.

Oliver Cooper: You're welcome.

END AUDIO

7. René Kinzett

Role in 2010: Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Swansea West
Other Roles: Former leader of the Conservative group on Swansea Council

Interview Date: 12 March 2011

Duration: 1:46:10

START AUDIO

Interviewer: Thank you very much. So just to start off with then how did you first become involved with the Conservative Party?

René Kinzett: I first became involved with the Conservative Party in 2006. This was after having a period of membership and activity with the Liberal Democrats. And I joined the Conservative Party soon after David Cameron became leader that was in the tail end of 2005.

So by 2006 I was convinced that the Conservative Party's position, narrative and its general outlook had sufficiently been modernised and altered by David Cameron's election and I then was persuaded and felt able to join the party in 2006.

Interviewer: And how did you find initially that the Conservative Party differed from the Liberal Democrats?

René Kinzett: Well it's a hell of a lot bigger. And there is a more diverse range of opinions within the party than perhaps in the Liberal Democrats. I'm not saying that the Liberal Democrats is totally homogenous in its views. There are red or orange book Liberal Democrats and more kind of Social Democrats and leftist elements in the Liberal Democrat Party. But the Conservative Party certainly is a party with a large, with a wide breadth of opinion and very historically held opinions and viewpoints.

Interviewer: And in your opinion how does the Liberal Democrat Party compare to the Conservative Party in terms of general organisation?

René Kinzett: The Conservative Party on one level has got a slicker national campaign office. It's got much more of an eye on media and that both in terms of traditional media where I think it's always been strong and also in new media where it's developed really quickly to get up to speed. I think maybe smaller organisations and the Liberal Democrats may have had more on the Conservatives earlier on in the race in new media but the Conservative Party has certainly trail blazed lots of initiatives in that area.

But I would also caveat that by saying that the local networks of constituency associations are not as centrally controlled as the Liberal Democrats. And that may appear on one level to be rather topsy-turvy being that the Liberal Democrat Party policies favour decentralisation and subsidiary and so on and so forth. Whereas the Conservative Party may be in one level seen as a more traditional centrist policy area in terms of the nation's state and a unitary state approach to politics, to state politics.

But conversely for some reason or another the Conservative Party its network of constituency associations seems looser and less organised than the Liberal Democrats.

Interviewer: There are two points I'd like to pick up on. You mentioned the Association levels of the two parties and I'm interesting in how from the grass roots up to the Association level to the centrally controlled offices, what is the relationship between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Parties on those three tiers?

René Kinzett: Well the Liberal Democrats seemed to have a more centralised approach to membership for a start. And I think that goes back to Gladstone almost with his you know the founder of what we know as the Liberal Party in the 1850s. And the way that he wanted very much to have a centralised party structure in terms of membership. Whereas the Conservative Party with its more traditional, it's almost an association of Conservative and Unionist Associations across the United Kingdom.

So I think that there is that historical dynamic of how the two parties grew. One being almost a centralised creation and the other being a group of people who came together to form a national association of Conservative and Unionist Associations and I think that psychology still pervades both parties. Certainly the Conservative Party, where independence of associations is seen as a sacrosanct issue, or principle of the party organisation.

And I mean recently there was some mystery shopping carried out by Central Office who were posing as normal punters asking you know which constituency and where's that south, whether they could join. And they were getting various responses like you know the book's full or we don't need anybody at the moment or well if you can answer a questionnaire and come and present yourself you know we might approve your membership.

So very odd way of organising membership whereas with the Liberal Democrats you just fill something in online and you're a member or as soon as you've given your debit card details. So yes there does seem to be a very different approach.

Interviewer: And the second thing is you mentioned that the Conservative Party appeared to have taken over the Liberal Democrats in terms of use of perhaps the internet or social media. Could you expand on that a little?

René Kinzett: Well I think that the personnel of the Liberal Democrat Party in my experience is younger, more progressive and certainly perhaps more open minded and flexible to the use of new technologies.

So I think early on in the political parties waking up to the existence of you know back to the basic web shop front to more interactive Web 2 Technologies and social media. I think the Liberal Democrats were quicker off the mark and the Conservative Party perhaps because of things like Constituency Associations being a looser confederation. And perhaps with the Membership being less open minded, less

progressive, less modernist than the Liberal Democrats perhaps lag behind.

But the Conservative Party with its purchasing power, its economies of scale and its strong central organisation as opposed to the confederation of the Associations, the strong centre was able to press ahead and create a much better, much slicker online presence than the Liberal Democrats with their less money, less economies of scale problems.

So the Conservative Party was then able to launch impressive website, use David Cameron as a brand to press that newness. They won't go so far as new conservatives a la Blair and New Labour. But certainly liberal conservatism, David Cameron's personal brand and his election in 2005 enabled the party to make a new start on its 'e'-output. And if you take things like Twitter for example where the party seems to really dominate the discussion. It's got some brilliant coordination I mean before the general election the Chairman of the Party, Eric Pickles, was meeting with Bloggers and Tweeters, not giving a line. Being very careful not to say "This is what we want you to say." But nevertheless being very encouraging and providing material for party political bloggers and tweeters. And also interact with general public and general opinion formers, non partisan opinion formers on Twitter.

Interviewer: And, in terms of the process by which the Conservative Party used social media and the internet in its campaigning and communication with party members, where do you believe the leadership for that came? Was it at the top of the party? Was it within the professionalised area of the party? Was it at the grassroots? Was it somewhere else or was it a combination?

René Kinzett: Well I think that with the election of the new leader, David Cameron, I think he brought with him a very clear focus on delivery of party message, which was not just going to be through the traditional media. I mean much was made of the catchphrase, there was a rather neat catchphrase in one of the party conferences leading up to the general election of Gordon Brown being an analogue leader in a digital age. And I think that rather kind of neatly encapsulated David Cameron's approach to being a new leader in a digital age, you know a modern looking, forward looking, progressive, embracing of new technologies.

I mean it was kind of redolent of Harold Wilson and Wyatt Heaton of technology and so forth. So David Cameron explicitly linked himself to digital Britain and I think that gave the context in which the party could then refocus its marketing, its communications with members, its outreach to other groups in society. So I think the leadership came from the top but the e-team, the web team at Central Office is fantastic at ensuring that every constituency association if it avails themselves of this service is able to have a slick, good looking website. It enables constituency associations to cooperate on things like signing up of new members online. And they're very good at just making sure that you know even if a conservative association has nobody with any experience of building a website or managing content has got a quick and simple, easy route to do that.

Interviewer: So, from your response, I'm summarising that you suggest the party's movement towards the use of the internet was led by the centre?

René Kinzett: Hmm.

Interviewer: Would you therefore consider that that would've had any influence on the use, throughout the wider party, of things like Facebook and Twitter, other social media in terms of organising campaigns?

René Kinzett: Well absolutely the candidates who were then selected between Cameron becoming leader and the 2010 General Election of course bearing in mind we didn't know if there was going to be an election in 2007 when Blair stepped down and Brown first became Prime Minister. Whether there'd be a honeymoon election or whether there'd even be an election in 2008 or even 9. It was all a rather guessing game.

But all of those candidates who were selected in that period: One of the first things they did almost straight after they put out the press release or even before they put out the press release was that they set up a Facebook group. You wanted to make sure that you had enough people to join it straight away. You monitored what other political parties were doing in your area on Facebook and you used it as a way of not just signing up existing members. The age profile of constituency association members/officers means that perhaps they were not the most switched on in terms of e-access, and certainly the use of social media. It was a good way of reaching out to new members or just new supporters.

People who had never got involved in the political process before and certainly in my experience of running in a Constituency where (1) I knew that the probability of victory was fairly low but that we needed to increase our votes. We hadn't had an increase in our vote in the General Election since 1983 in that Constituency to gain 250 upwards followers, supporters on a Facebook site was a great way of me communicating with more people than we'd ever communicated before directly not through a leaflet, not through a third party like a newspaper or radio or television but directly with them.

Interviewer: Is there anything unique and different about social media that would allow you to do that?

René Kinzett: There's no filtration, there's no editorial line except the one that you want to give. So using although in my professional life I work in media and communications, we all know that getting your message across in the local newspaper is a tricky affair because whilst they're not bounded by rules on balance and impartiality they often have to make sure that if you're saying "I don't think this should happen." They've got to give space a lot of the time for somebody else to say well I think it should and he's an idiot for saying it shouldn't. Or you might get very small piece in an article.

So I think that in terms of Facebook certainly was a way of making sure that the message of our campaign could get across to people in an unadulterated fashion, in a message and a way and a distribution list that we could control. And without, as I said without that filtration of editorial bias.

Interviewer: Is there an element of age in this?

René Kinzett: Oh absolutely I mean in terms of that 250 odd people I had on my Facebook group, most were under 21, the vast majority.

Interviewer: And what role then does other types of communication within the party organisation have to play in terms of mobilising other party members that don't fit that age bracket?

René Kinzett: Well I mean the, in my Constituency we had an email list of our party members and actually email is now something that most people seem to have who are certainly what you might call politically or socially engaged. So for example if you are a member of a Rotary Club, involved in the Masons or any other social group you tend now to – or a Golf Society – you tend now to almost need an email address to keep in touch with your fellow members and officers.

So I found that regardless of age, most people had the email address. So email contact databases are still very important for getting messages out, of even down to silly little details like this is where we're meeting for a leafleting session. So you then try to kind of marry that old campaigning method of leafleting with a new method, new communications tools of email and Facebook. So on Facebook we would create an event that people could sign up to come to a campaign day. But at the same time emailing party members as well to have that dual process to catch people who weren't on the Facebook dataset.

However I would say that things like newsletters now have totally gone by the wayside. I mean it wasn't so long ago that constituency associations that I'd been involved with would send out monthly newsletters. I know that for example at slightly higher levels of political representation, at the MEP level, the MEP for Wales, the Tory MEP is juggling with this issue of considering whether or not to put money into a quarterly or biannual newsletter to members. I mean it costs money. I mean it costs nothing to press a button and send a communiqué via Facebook or email but you're racking up hundreds of pounds of expenditure if you're sending a snail mail newsletter across the whole of the Welsh party membership.

Interviewer: You also mentioned Twitter. How does Twitter differ to Facebook in terms of its use within Conservative Party organisation and its use in the run up to a campaign?

René Kinzett: Yes. Well Twitter in terms of constituency associations is probably still to be developed it's still in the process of people know it's there, they're not really sure what to do with it, they're a bit scared of it because of its rapidly changing nature, because of its instant conversational style, it's instant you've said it's out there. There's no, you know you can't withdraw it very easily or without problem.

It's less – I mean like almost like Facebook has become, looks by now comparison more formal, more stayed. More conservative, more old media than even something like Twitter now which is so immediate and so conversational in style.

So I think constituency associations are still grappling with how they go about using it. I know for example I mentioned before the Web

Team at Central Office who will help you set up a rather good looking website. What they would also do is put the Twitter feed of the Conservative Party on it, to show what the Conservative Party officially is saying.

But you know to be honest I find the official Tweets from political parties rather stayed, rather boring, rather predictable, rather well you would say that wouldn't you. People do follow those tweets of the official party account but it's more of a kind of a rolling notice board. The real conversation is going on between political party candidates. And I think during the run up to the General Election it was very interesting to see a range of different types of Conservative candidates using Twitter from what you might call the more libertarian, freedom association, taxpayers' alliance types right through to the centre ground. And through to what I would describe as kind of myself as more kind of Tory Reform Group, Liberal Conservatives, socially liberal, economically centrist.

And so you get that conversation not just between the candidate and electorate but between candidates intraparty and interparty as well. And Twitter's one of those great tools for not just highlighting divisions between parties or even indeed internally within parties but also to show actually that there's a great deal of common ground between candidates on different issues.

And I think that's the kind of politics that people who get their news content through social media are less concerned about what the official line is as actually what's the underlying conversation.

Interviewer: And in terms of practicalities, in terms of organising and mobilising campaigns does Facebook have a particular application that is different to Twitter or vice versa?

René Kinzett: Yes I mean Facebook is much better for creating and developing an audience. So you, people would tend I think to use Facebook now as a channel of communication. To say right "This is my channel." Like YouTube as well is a really good example, another example of that kind of social media where you totally control the outputs. And you have some degree of control over developing the audience to whom this is broadcast either by making it attractive to a certain group or by actively going out to find people through marketing, through I mean on Facebook you can put adverts up can't you to drive traffic to your site. And all of those what you might now call traditional e-marketing tools that you would talk to Google about getting your search hits high up on their results pages. If people Google certain words or phrases.

Whereas Twitter is a way, I found it first of all a way to drive traffic to what you're broadcasting in other medium like blogs and Facebook. So you would use it to link, to drive traffic to what you're saying on your blog or Facebook group. But then that's just one narrow aspect of it. Another aspect of Twitter I found is to build a wider audience for yourself to create a public profile that is quite honest, quite immediate. That is conversational, that enables you to partake in wider campaigns. I mean if you live in Swansea 200 miles from London and you want to get involved in the ongoing debate on Electoral Reform for example the alternative vote referendum in May, it's very difficult to do that

physically. It is a hell of a lot easier and very effective to do it via a medium like Twitter.

Interviewer: Are there any downsides to using social media in terms of political engagement?

René Kinzett: Well absolutely. There is a risk of, as I said the immediacy of the output with Facebook, blogs to a certain extent. But definitely with media releases and so forth there is a degree of stages of editorial process, of who, what, why, where. What do you want to say? Who are you saying it to? What are you trying to get? And that may take you anything from half an hour to a day to sort that out before you press the button to make something live or send a communication to another broadcaster or print journalist.

With Twitter there is the risk of saying something you will regret. There is the risk of posting in haste, repenting at leisure. We know there are examples of not just Conservatives but other candidates who have lost their positions, lost their candidacies due to ill conceived remarks on Twitter or Facebook.

So you've always got to bear that in mind that...

Interviewer: Was there, is there any example during your campaign in the run up to 2010 that you would say "The social media that you were using had a negative impact on your campaign?"

René Kinzett: No I don't think there was. Because whilst I am happy to say things that are not on the party line 100% I'm not so foolish as to say something that's going to either get me in trouble with the party in a big way. I mean for example I did a blog on the suspension of the MEP who stood in the way of our party's favoured candidate for Vice President of the European Parliament from being elected and I can't remember his name off hand. But anyway the MEP.

And I supported him. I said actually I don't want this chap, this from the polish, one of the polish political parties being elected to the European parliamentary position of Vice President not least because I find his views not in line with what I call Conservative mainstream views on issues of immigration, race and sexual orientation and so forth.

I got a phone call from the Chairman's office just saying you know "You ought not to have done that and we don't appreciate it." But as slaps on the wrist go that was fairly minor as opposed to... And I think it's when somebody says something not pol-... I mean my position on that was I thought worked out, understandable... Was in opposition to what the party's position was but was nevertheless a considered and intellectually honest argument.

The things people get in trouble for are what I call the puerile childish scatter logical commentary. I mean you know is it acceptable for somebody in a pub to joke about the disappearance of Madeline McCann but in a tweet and on a Facebook comment actually making that same joke? Well you know the life isn't fair and those people

making those kinds of comments will be in trouble because they're just socially unacceptable.

And they're less socially acceptable – this is weird isn't it? It's less socially acceptable to say something in words that you could read on a social network site than it is to say the words out loud in a pub or a club or whatever. And people have just got to get used to that, that is just how it is. People are held to words that are written whether it's electronically or on paper.

Interviewer: Presumably there are many members of political parties who practice the writing of nuggets of information and comments on sites like Facebook and Twitter. What would make it in your opinion interesting to someone in the public sphere like a journalist to report perhaps what they would consider a negative comment?

René Kinzett: Yes they would look at ways of causing a divide so the press like stories about parties who were divided. It's just a, isn't it that that narrative is interesting to the press party split on x or senior party member or parliamentary candidate slams party leader for x, y or z. I mean one of the live issues I have at the moment is that I support the yes to AV campaign in the referendum forthcoming.

And I have now had a couple of requests from journalists who read my Tweet, Twitter feed to want me to come on and expand my comments. Now I'm not so daft as to think that they just want to speak to me because I'm well known, I'm not. They want to speak to me because they feel there's a story here that they could say the official party line from the leadership is that the Conservative Party is against AV. But look here here's a former parliamentary candidate and current sitting councillor who is disagreeing with his party's leadership.

So yes there obviously is that trap there that people will want you to expand on any issues, any views, any opinions that you have shared electronically which may with further tweaking enhancements and the following wind be turned into a party splits story.

Interviewer: I think the focus of my question really is to get to the heart of which members of the party are most interesting to, for people to follow? Is that just anybody in the party? Is that someone within a particular activist's role? Is it candidates? Is it the leadership? Is it potential Ministers and front benchers? Is it all of those or is it very specific?

René Kinzett: No I think all of those play a key role. As I said the official party tweets are like the notice boards you know this is what the party, these are the orders of the day, this is what the party's thinking, this is what the party is wanting the public to take on board and the particular story.

It's then interesting to follow the official Tweets of cabinet ministers although there is obviously some speculation as to which cabinet ministers actually do their own Tweets and which are done by underlings. And actually to the, you know not so trained eye it becomes quite obvious which ones are honest themselves and which ones are done by underlings.

So there are cabinet ministers. In the run up to the general elections

candidates were a great draw to follow and the people who run one of the Tweet accounts, Tweet Minster did a fantastic analysis of party political candidates in the run up to the General Election of 2010. They did a great analysis afterwards about who was followed the most, who was re-tweeted the most, who was mentioned the most?

And yes that was you know political, party political candidates who were not shadows, who were not, who hadn't held political office were the most followed and the most interactive. Because they're the ones who say the most and interact the most themselves. So you've got a cabinet minister who might only tweet a couple of times a day not least because their diaries are rather fully but also because them saying something wrong or out of turn has a huge risk. And really they're using their Twitter account to push their departmental line, push their own agenda. And then don't get really that much involved in the conversation.

Interviewer: How then in your opinion and experience of the run up to 2010 General Election being a candidate did and does the party manage these many channels of communications, many individuals using their Twitter page or their Facebook page. How does the party control that and manage it if they do at all.

René Kinzett: Well they can't, I mean that's the issue. They just can't do it in the same way that they can manage their web output, their own Twitter output and their own output to traditional media. It's a huge risk and that's why the party now does put effort into what I would call the kind of soft soaping of Tweeters, bloggers who are either Conservative Party members or are wider centre, centre right commentators, non party political.

So Eric Pickles hosted an event in the run up to the General Election party and food and so on. And then you've got this other phenomenon of Tweet ups at party conferences where people who are both members, activists and those who are observers and commentators and so forth can meet up to exchange ideas and views about what they're saying on Twitter. But the party can only suggest and give a certain amount of affection and hospitality to these people they can't and I mean Eric Pickles at one of the events I went to before the General Election actually said "We're not going to tell you what to write because that almost... That would defeat the whole purpose of something like Twitter."

So I think on one hand the party can't do something about it and may see a risk in that. But on the other hand it's sufficiently clever enough to recognise that even the act of trying to manipulate the conversation on Twitter would negate the very purpose of it.

Interviewer: So then does the central party, CCHQ London give free rein to candidates and leading activists in terms of their expression on social media?

René Kinzett: I wouldn't go that far because as I said my example of the, of defending the MEP who was in trouble with the party did get me a, you know a minor slap on the wrist from the Chairman's office. And we've seen haven't we with candidates in the run up to the Welsh Assembly

elections in, this year who have been asked to stand down by their constituency associations because of some offensive or inappropriate remark on Twitter or Facebook.

So no there isn't a, you know, go forth and do what you want. I think they've, certainly in terms of leafleting. So if you were writing a leaflet for a run up to a general election or Welsh Assembly election that leaflet will need to be seen by the appropriate persons both locally, nationally, regionally whatever to approve that. So there's a much stronger editorial line on things like Twitter and Facebook because it's not practical to do that. The party tends to have a more laissez-faire approach of trust but if you do something completely unacceptable or inappropriate you will pay the price for that.

Interviewer: How does the party monitor the text of leaflets? Do they do that in traditional methods, by post or would that be done in more modern ways using new technology?

René Kinzett: Well yes it's now done in more modern ways. I mean in the run up to the Welsh Assembly elections in the one before in 2007 there was an online template. So you got the, you knew what your leaflet was going to look like and then there were text boxes to fill in to say "This is what I want. Here's what I want there, photo capped boxes, captions." So it was all very much something you could do online. That then got submitted to the printers via an electronic signoff by the agent or one of the agent's representatives at the national party level, Welsh party or CCHQ London.

In the General Election run up to 2010 again there were templates that you had to fill in and then send off by email back to the appropriate authorising officer for signoff before it went to the printers.

Interviewer: And did that method do anything to make the process more efficient or less efficient?

René Kinzett: It certainly made it more efficient as far as I was concerned in terms of using – because I was using the party's preferred printers for the election addresses. I put out three different election addresses during my, two election addresses during my general election campaign both of which were done via the party's template. And their preferred supplier and I then didn't see it until it came through the door from the Royal Mail. I thought that was very efficient.

I think it was less efficient if you weren't going to use the party's preferred suppliers and you needed to get approval to different timescales than the party was running. But certainly even the few leaflets I printed outside of the party's preferred suppliers using local suppliers for my introductory leaflet and my final week leaflet that was delivered by hand by volunteers, it was a quick turnaround.

Interviewer: In terms of the more traditional types of communication that you've just described did your local party, your association organisation play any role in the production of that? And then communicating that with the central party at CCHQ?

René Kinzett: No I mean running the campaign in Swansea West as I did was like a bit of a cottage industry you know it was in my house. I saw everything through from start to finish.

In other political, in other areas of the country where I've worked both for the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats in the past, I have seen other examples of where the candidate rarely writes a leaflet and is done by other volunteers within the party. And then approved and goes through the process as described whereas in a party the size of Swansea West and with a lack of appropriately experienced or qualified members of the voluntary party who could in my standards write a good leaflet, I had to do it myself.

But the agent has to see everything legally but didn't really interfere in the content.

Interviewer: Are you saying then in terms of the experience within the Conservative Party as a candidate there is no set format to how a campaign is run and constructed?

René Kinzett: Well they do try to en- again they give you a book, the handbook the campaign handbook for that forthcoming General Election. And they will give you a calendar of key dates. They will tell you when you ought to have got your letter to postal voters. When you ought to have contacted your pledge base and so on and so forth.

So they will give you pointers and give you direction. But unless you're a target seat candidate then no you won't be given much instruction. You'll be given lots of suggestions.

Interviewer: And you've got talked about the candidate handbook was there any relationship with that handbook and perhaps information coming over the internet in terms of email or other methods?

René Kinzett: Oh absolutely. We got daily emails about what was in the news that day, what particular spokespeople, shadow ministers had said on certain issues. There were sections in the email on what the other parties had said and what the line was and what they had said – lines to take on attacking other parties or promoting their own policies.

And that came through everyday yes there was that kind of level of email communication.

Interviewer: So you've described two very distinct forms of communicating with candidates in terms of the relationship between CCHQ London and its candidates around the country. One a traditional method on paper, a candidate handbook and the other email. How effective in your opinion were those two methods and are there any other ways that the party could have improved its communication?

René Kinzett: Well the party handbook was very good. The campaign handbook was very good and it also came on a disk version as well and on the disk version were templates, stories, articles, photographs, library photographs of the Prime Minister of the, no not – of the then Leader of the Opposition and key spokespeople which you could use in your leaflets. So that was very practical and very useful.

The email communications were good in the sense that on each day you knew what the party was going to talk about, what was going to be in the national news. And whether or not you could find an example locally to perhaps release to your local media. So for example when we knew that it was going to be the day that the party were going to be discussing transport and public transport issues, we were able to go into Swansea City Centre and do something about bus transport in Swansea. And highlight our policies and proposals and what we thought were the problems locally.

So in that sense that email communication allowed us to tie our local campaign in with what was going on nationally.

Interviewer: You previously mentioned the difference between a non-target seat, a target seat and presumably there is within the party the designation of a safe seat. Could you explain the role and organisational differences within the party in terms of communication and the use of the internet between those different designations?

René Kinzett: Well a target seat, well a non-target seat which is what I thought was expected to be pretty much self sufficient, run a campaign to maximise new voters to vote for our party, to attract new party voters. To attract new candidates and perhaps to make a start on key council target wards. So in the local authority area that you think you can win votes in, to concentrate your efforts there.

Now the party didn't provide me with huge amounts of support to do that. And indeed expected the campaign to evidence where it'd actually helped in some way a neighbouring or nearby seat that may have been a target seat.

Now if you're a target seat you will be expected to perform against certain criteria. So the party will be more prescriptive in what it wants you to achieve and how it wants you to achieve it. And there's also that issue that if you're a target seat you can apply to the Lord Ashcroft money which is a separate pot of funding, under the control of staff who are responsible to him and not Central Office. And if you apply for that funding and get it, you are then expected again to perform to certain criteria and performance indicators or the money will be taken back or you won't get another chance at it.

Now in terms of social media and networking and so forth, it was quite different to see that it probably wasn't so much target seat candidates getting involved in lots of Twitter conversations and lots of Facebook output. They I think were much more directed towards that local level, traditional campaign output of leafleting, door knocking, local press and media management. And the national campaign of what it could do to help win that seat.

Interviewer: Is there a reason for that?

René Kinzett: The reason for that I suppose is that Twitter and Facebook are not geographically discriminating. I mean I may have had 250 people on my Facebook group but how many of them actually had a vote in

Swansea West either because of geographic issues or because of age of not being eligible to vote.

So you could put lots of effort in to helping the party get a better image and gaining votes across the piste. But if you're a target seat candidate you've just got to ensure that you get more votes, one more vote than the nearest person to you, the next person down to win that seat. You're going all out to win that one seat.

Interviewer: In the 2010 General Election did all the candidates to your knowledge manage their own social media sites or were they given help to manage those?

René Kinzett: It would depend on the size of the party association in question. I mean as I said mine was a pretty much a cottage industry and I managed my tweets, my Twitter account, my Facebook group. My own blog and other social media output as well as the writing the traditional leaflets, press releases and so on.

In larger associations with more experienced members or more qualified members, places that could afford an agent or campaign organiser then that may be done by other people. There may be more of a division of labour.

Interviewer: And we haven't yet mentioned in detail safe seats. And those individuals that were standing for re-election that had no real risk of losing their seat. What is the incentive for them to use social media within the Conservative Party?

René Kinzett: Yes. Well there's always, nobody wants to turn or they shouldn't want to turn down new support. No matter if you're in a safe seat or a marginal.

There are examples of where Tory MPs in safe seats totally turn their back on social media. For example one of the members of Parliament in the New Forest who was actually from Swansea, Dr Julian Lewis doesn't have an email contact on his website because you know he says you know you need to write to me, I deal with so much correspondence that if I opened up to email then I'd be totally deluged. And on that traditional method that only an MP's constituent, somebody living in that constituency ought to be writing to that member about an issue in any case. Then you should just be sending me a letter to my Constituency Office or my Parliamentary Office in Westminster.

So there are examples of where members of Parliament in safe seats don't engage at all in electronic media let alone social media. But there are others who do better Peter Bottomley in Worthing; one of the Worthing seats has a great website showing his speeches, his diary, his... What he's doing that day, what the issues are. So I think it will just go from MP to MP about how open they are to social media and electronic media.

There may also be an age thing I mean this is just anecdotal but I wonder if many of the MPs in safe seats are perhaps older members of Parliament and perhaps aren't as open to electronic media and social networking as younger members of Parliament.

Interviewer: You did mention David Cameron's role as Leader of the Party earlier. Now you mentioned that he did play a role in leading the party in terms of social media and certainly his team at CCHQ London did that.

However he also made a comment too many tweets make a twat. Do you therefore see any conflict in those two statements?

René Kinzett: No I think he was making the point in a humorous way that you've got to watch what you say. If you're sitting there endlessly tweeting about what you're having for breakfast and other mundanities is one thing. You just carry on doing that.

If you want to be more serious, have a political discussion that's another way of using Twitter. And then there's another way, as I said that you know people who get in trouble for saying stupid things for saying insulting, insensitive, inappropriate things on Twitter. Then you are going to find yourself in that category that David Cameron described of making a fool of yourself, of your colleagues, of your party for which you will pay the price.

Interviewer: When then do candidates use Twitter?

René Kinzett: I think there's a certain amount of self aggrandisement in it. I think there is a certain amount of vanity in that if I Tweet something I will have 11, 1200 people potentially reading it. That's quite good you know for somebody who isn't currently a political party candidate and isn't particularly well known outside of the party.

So candidates tend to use Twitter I think to find that wider audience, to give vent to what they want to say. And it'll be interesting actually to see over the next few years those candidates that have used Twitter in regard to the 2010 election. Now we're obviously going to be considering candidates for the 2015 elect in the not too distant future. Whether or not a high profile on things like Twitter and Facebook will be a help or a hindrance to getting selected in a better seat.

Now on one level you might say it's a help because you're going to have a name, I mean you got to party conference now and go to an event and you say "Oh I'm René Kinzett." And they say "Well my goodness good to meet you in the flesh at last because I've read everything that you've said on Twitter and your blog and Facebook." I'm a member of your Group blah blah blah.

So if you then go to a constituency association seeking nomination for a better seat then maybe they'll say "Well we know him, we know his views. We think he sounds okay. We'll have him." Obviously conversely those people who've been saying things like me might then find themselves "Well we don't really want that kind of chap because we know his views on Saatchi and Saatchi. Got in a bit of trouble about what he said on Facebook. You know we think that he spends too much time writing about these things and actually we want a different kind of member of Parliament."

And that's going to be critical because as we've said earlier the types of members, membership of the Conservative Party that make up the bulk

of the Members maybe less happy to consider people who are very active on social network. Given their own degree of conservatism, cynicism or just general lack of knowledge about what social media's all about.

Interviewer: You've talked about how people have followed your social media communications. Those presumably are weak relationships if you have not met that person in the flesh. Do you or have you or do you intend to in the future use any innovative ways, experimental ways to adapt those weak connections into stronger links?

René Kinzett: Absolutely and we did try that. In the General Election 2010 in the run up we used Facebook and Twitter as a way of trying to attract people to come and do some physical work of actually getting leaflets out through doors.

And we did have some success in that in that people would turn up with promise of refreshment and so forth. As I said creating a Facebook event, getting people to consider coming along and helping. So yes there are ways of doing that and they do work to a certain extent. And also to come to social events and networking events and so on.

So yes we have made some effort and I think party candidates using Twitter and Facebook do have an eye on well it's all very good knowing this person virtually but leaflets don't get delivered by virtual persons. They get delivered by physical work. So yes I think candidates have that in mind.

Interviewer: In terms of usage, is there a greater intensity at any particular point in the parliamentary cycle? We're talking and focussing on the run-up to the general election we're now post general election have you noticed any differences?

René Kinzett: In the run-up to the general election I think tweeters became very much more partisan as we got nearer to the election date. Either because they didn't want to cause risk to their party in saying something that could be construed as against the party line in the run up to an election – being a very sensitive time. Or because you get whipped up in the hype of the election and you want your side to do well so you keep to the line.

But now in the post election period I suppose soon after May 2010 sorry you may have thought that the traffic would die down. But of course we're in this wholly new situation of coalition government, peacetime coalition government for the first time in 80 years. So we're in that odd position now where the coalition itself the very existence of a coalition, the way that the anti Liberal Democrat tweeters can twist Liberal Democrat messages and say "Well you didn't say this before the election. Now you're pushing through tuition fees and you're at a different policy."

So the very existence and the modus operandi of this coalition is itself a huge issue on Twitter it's massive. So that's now driving conversation and of course we've got referendum on the alternative vote that's causing a lot of political traffic. And so yes it hasn't died down and I now just think that each time there is a significant event, an election, a

referendum, a policy issue, a policy change like tuition fees, demonstration, cuts to local services. The spending review that soon, the budget that's coming up soon. All of these issues create another fresh wave of tweeting and blogging.

Interviewer: You've just spoke greatly about Twitter. But you also briefly mentioned Facebook events has the intensity, the use of Facebook events to organise campaigning and general party events changed since the general election?

René Kinzett: Oh yes it's fewer of them. And I think if we're not careful we'll just sink back into our own networks again, our own actual physical party networks rather than... The trick won't it, the trick will be who can harness and keep harvesting those new supporters who aren't party members, who haven't been party political, who joined up because electronic media is how they join things, is how they get involved in clubs and societies. It's how they organise their social lives and their calendars professionally and socially. How do we keep those people on board now? Or are they just going to dissipate? Are we just going to allow those people just to shuffle off again and then have to start the process all over again at the next election?

Interviewer: Well that leads me on to the next question because we've talked about the use of Facebook Groups and events for supporters. And there maybe a couple of hundred supporters on that. And we've also talked about weak, strong and weak relationships – those people that are registered on the Facebook events, how strong or how weak are those relationships in terms of using the leverage to get those individuals out to campaign? Out of 200 people on your Facebook group how many of those would've come out in the 2010 General Election to help deliver leaflets?

René Kinzett: About ten. Yes absolutely and again because Facebook and Twitter are not geographically discriminating so out of the 250 on Facebook maybe only 50 or less were actually based in Swansea. And of them only about 5 or 6 were willing to come out and deliver leaflets added to the existing number of activists. We already had amongst things like our student group and other members.

So yes it's very difficult to get people to come out and do something. I think it was a lot easier, well not a lot easier but in America when Obama's team credit so much of their success to online recruitment and online organisation of activists, when you're organising a nationwide campaign for a single elected, a post for a single person – the President of the United States of America you could coerce less people around that.

When you're fighting 650 parliamentary seats and you're trying to get people to come out for you to deliver leaflets I think that's a lot harder. I think what we've got to do in future is perhaps use social networking like Facebook to really draw people around the party nationally and the figure of the party leader.

And perhaps there needs to be ways of then making sure that people who sign up nationally are told what's going on in their area. I mean the way that Facebook works, the way that other social networks work

I'm not sure if it would stand this level of interrogation of data. But you know if you've got a national party campaign you know re-elect David Cameron as Prime Minister whether or not those people who then signed up in Luton, Leeds, Swansea will be, will be then their details will then be sent to the local association as somebody to go out and fire up for the campaign. To do some physical work.

Interviewer: You're talking here about geography is there anything different about social media that allows a different approach to the geographical location of an activist or a party member?

René Kinzett: Well yes I mean a party member or an activist or just a general supporter may want to sign up to their hometown. They may want, they're living in London but they sign up to their hometown, a candidate in their hometown.

Now what do you with those people? Do some of those people want to do anything geographically? Do they want to actually come out and do something or are they happy just to sit as a, you know as a mark of support to that candidate? Now the party has got to really kind of work out how it wants to engage those people to do things like telephone canvassing or electronic canvassing. I mean I had an email the other day from the Liberal Democrat candidate for Swansea West. Totally unsolicited email – I think they put on the bottom some small print about we sent you this email because once you provided us with your email address. Now in my case I may have done when I was a Liberal Democrat but I know that everybody I know with an email address in Swansea had that e-communication from that candidate.

Now somebody's got to have organised that. Somebody's got to do that. So could we not use the people that sign up on our Facebook groups and our Twitter who are you might think electronically savvy technically aware, should they not be engaged to do more aggressive E marketing and e-campaigning for the candidate that they support. Whether it's through telephone canvassing, mass texts because you know the party uses text messages as well to get its messages across or emails or whatever it is.

Interviewer: Is there then competition between candidates for the use of social media to attract potential activists and supporters who are not local to them?

René Kinzett: Yes no absolutely. If you're fighting a target seat and all around you are non target seats then clearly it's in your interests as the candidate in the target seat to attract more people on the social network than your rivals in your own party. Locally you want to get people to come and sign up to you.

And then within a constituency, there is a huge amount of activity absolutely to sign people up on Facebook. I now use, on my leaflets I put out in the general election I had my Facebook page and my Twitter feed written on the leaflet for people to sign up to. And whilst nobody would be so crass at this stage to say "Oh I've got 250 but he's got 500 therefore he's winning an Election." Nobody would say that that it correlates to how you're going to do in the general election, it certainly

is good for morale not just of the candidate but of the candidate's team to know that you've got more people signed up than your rivals.

Interviewer: So then is their direct competition in practical terms between candidates...

René Kinzett: Yes I mean...

Interviewer: ...who have a presence on these sites?

René Kinzett: No absolutely. It's a mark of popularity, it's seen as a... Again going back to the ego thing that yes people do want to have more followers, people do want to have more people signed up to their Facebook page. People will do that in a variety of manners of if you've got a thousand Facebook friends but only 90 people signed up to your page then you'll be constantly harassing people to sign up to that. You'll be hoping to gain as many recommendations for follow Friday on Twitter as you can.

So yes there is, there is healthy competition.

Interviewer: And specific to your campaign, you for a non target seat achieved an award for your Twitter activity. You were also known for mobilising a strong campaign in terms of gaining support from local supporters. How is that viewed in terms of the central party and do they use any methods to take those resources to other seats like the target seats for example?

René Kinzett: Yes. Absolutely good question. I don't know that they've got the tradition yet and the ability to monitor such activity so whereas an independent organisation like TweetMinster will actually publish their findings. They did a report that put me something like third out of all of the candidates across all the political parties in the UK – the third most mentioned... So the third most engaged with candidate, the fourth most re-tweeted of all the candidates across the UK.

Now I'm not, the party itself hasn't captured that data or analysed it I don't think to say okay there is a correlation between like there was in my campaign between getting a large number of followers on Twitter and on Facebook. And engaging those people to come out and help. But I don't know if they would see that as a skill set that they would want to then export to another constituency using me or using the case study to try to put it on to another seat.

I think you get more, you still get more recognition from Central Office for membership recruitment to the party membership or fundraising and so forth.

Interviewer: In terms of your campaign were there any tangible benefits to the energies that you put into the social media activity in terms of the electoral result?

René Kinzett: I don't know if there was. I mean we went up by nearly 5% and about 2,000 more voters voted for us than in 2005. And it was the first increase in the vote that we'd had since 1983. How much of that you can have a direct correlation to my social networking is probably a

moot point. But I would say that things like getting media coverage was not easier but certainly was more interactive whereas traditionally I would have to send out media releases to broadcast and print journalists. With Twitter and Facebook being almost, being that constant source of my thoughts, ideas, views and opinions I found it refreshing that media output, managers, journalists and editors would actually come to me and say “Oh you’ve said this on Facebook or Twitter. We’re really interested in this can we expand on it in an article?”

Interviewer: Is what you’re saying then that rather than communicating directly with constituents over social media the benefits of the social media sites are to raise candidate profile in order to have a stronger relationship with the wider media?

René Kinzett: Oh absolutely. That is one aspect of it absolutely. That using new media, social media can actually enhance your profile and therefore enhance the likelihood of you receiving coverage in traditional media which let’s face it in many parts of the country and many constituencies, traditional media will still be by far the most popular form of news consumption.

Interviewer: Therefore let’s take a scenario that in the 2010 General Election you were still the candidate for Swansea West. However you did not have any access to internet technologies. Do you believe that you would have had the same voice as a candidate?

René Kinzett: No I would. But I wouldn’t say that’d be the same thing as saying I wouldn’t have got as many votes. I can’t because I say because I can’t directly correlate that. But what I can say is it would’ve been a less enjoyable campaign which is important when you’re trying to mobilise supporters and keep morale high. I think we would’ve had fewer younger people helping us get leaflets out. We had you know that. It’s very easy to dismiss half a dozen more supporters as being not very much but when you’ve only got, you’re only starting with half a dozen or 12, half a dozen or a dozen that extra is a big increase.

And as I said yes the media, and the wider media not just local but national, regional, sub regional media as well helps to I suppose what I’m looking for is to saying it makes it look as though you’ve got a more serious campaign. It’s a bit like an army tactic of if you’ve only got a dozen people defending an installation keep them moving about to different positions because it makes it look as though there’s more of you.

So I suppose with social media and networking is it’s a great way of, for little physical effort, for ensuring that your campaign is seen to a wider audience. That it’s picked up on by those so those other traditional media networks and outputs that can get you wider coverage. And it adds credibility to your campaign.

Interviewer: Can key activists beside from candidates also be given this voice that you experienced in an election campaign?

René Kinzett: Oh absolutely and there are key activists who are associated with different groups within the party. So for example one of the groups I’m

involved in heavily is the Tory Reform Group. They have a Twitter feed which is run by the officers of that group. They are voluntary members of the party, they're not party candidates yet they have a, a good voice on Twitter and the blogosphere.

There are other groups likewise who do that. So yes I think that party activists, key activists, key members of the voluntary party have a big role to play in developing the Conservative voice on Twitter.

Interviewer: And how do key activists candidates and those at the top of the party communicate using internet technologies?

René Kinzett: I think, well certainly when you've got things like elections to the national conservative convention and so forth. And you've got internal party elections to different groups you get people setting up Facebook groups to support their candidacies. You get Twitter feeds and so forth.

So yes and just generally party members who hold office within the party but are not candidates in terms of public elections, they do use Twitter to communicate what they're doing, what's going on in the party. The candidates department for example, the candidate assessors there are quite a few people who are on Twitter from that department.

Interviewer: In your experience of the 2010 General Election were there any opportunities for key activists or candidates to express their views through social media to key figures at the top of the party?

René Kinzett: Yes absolutely. And some of that would be accidental in the sense that you've said something that wasn't well received and therefore you'll get a communication back. Other times it's more pleasant that you might say something on Twitter that's agreed with and you'll get a response back from a shadow minister.

More recently I did a blog on trade union funding in local government and how much public money is being spent employing trade union officials. Now I got a rather nice direct message then from the shadow minister for local government in the Conservative team at the National Assembly for Wales who wrote to me asking me for more opinions. And helping him to think about those issues.

Interviewer: How did, I'll start again. Did the party use any other ways that we haven't discussed to communicate with its candidates using the internet and give candidates access to party information?

René Kinzett: Yes the intranet on the Conservative Party website. There was an intranet there for key activists and candidates to use. It had briefing notes, policy papers, images, logos, suggested stories – that kind of stuff. There was also the other, there was also another website again that was aimed at candidates to again give them certain bits of information which was a log on, a password access.

Interviewer: And how actively did you use the intranet?

René Kinzett: Yes quite a lot to pull off press releases, draft press releases, logos, photographs, captions, suggested stories for leaflets and so forth.

- Interviewer: Is there any benefit to using something like the intranet and email that is different to using traditional post and the traditional books like the notes for candidates for instance?
- René Kinzett: It's cheaper for a start. And it's – and when you've got now a group of candidates that perhaps are from a socio demographic that just wants its information electronically. I mean I don't particular like getting huge amounts of paper post because it, you know recycling issues and waste of resources and clutter. I prefer my news and information now electronically.
- I mean you know people who work, people who are in professional jobs rarely get memorandum or paper based documents now it's all electronic distribution.
- Interviewer: It's very easy for electronic information to be passed on to a third party or someone outside the political sphere. Is there then a risk of security in using certain types of electronic media?
- René Kinzett: No absolutely. I mean there's... But there is risk in, there's risk in paper based documentation as well. I mean I always say that if you're, if you're going to put something on paper or write it on electronic format and send it to somebody you've already lost security control anyway unless you are going to do what government does. And set up a secure intranet the GSI system and password protect every single piece of communication you sent if it's above a certain level of security requirement.
- Now there has been, I mean I have had stuff from the party where you do need a password to access the document. Now I could just then print that document off and give it to somebody hardcopy but I can't forward it to somebody without it being, without them having the password to open it.
- Interviewer: Were there any times during the run up to the 2010 Election campaign when the party that you were interacting with be that the local organisation or the national party, when they... Did they express any concerns about security levels?
- René Kinzett: No I never heard anything about security levels except you know when we had the daily briefing email it would always just carry a Rider on it and saying "This is not for forward distribution this is for your own use, you know this is not for publication."
- Interviewer: So then would you say that there has to be a level of trust within the party that the members that the national party is dealing with and the candidates are not passing this information on?
- René Kinzett: Yes absolutely I think that just has to be taken on trust but it also has to be expected that the information will probably get into the public domain or to other people. I mean but the press and media are normally mature enough I mean something like the daily press briefing and the lines to take where it says "Not for publication." If you were just going to send that to a media outlet they'd just probably put it in the bin or just have a read of it and then you know it doesn't contain anything sensitive.

Interviewer: I now have some very quick fire questions for you which are fine with very succinct answers. How did you communicate with party members on the whole?

René Kinzett: Mainly through email.

Interviewer: And how often would you do this?

René Kinzett: Daily during the general election campaign itself.

Interviewer: What technologies would you use?

René Kinzett: Email and Facebook.

Interviewer: What applications of these technologies would you use?

René Kinzett: Facebook email and Twitter direct messaging. And just general Twitter tweets.

Interviewer: How effective were those methods for you?

René Kinzett: Email very effective in that we had the full party membership on the email and then Twitter, Twitter and Facebook were kind of secondary backups.

Interviewer: Why did you prefer that over traditional methods?

René Kinzett: Quick, easy, cheap.

Interviewer: What was the use of language in terms of the way you were communicating? Was it, for example formal sophisticated language or was it text speak like young people would use on a mobile phone or was it somewhere in between?

René Kinzett: Somewhere in between informal conversational you know be here at the pub at eleven o'clock we'll have a beer and sandwich afterwards.

Interviewer: And was there much back and forth between you and the people you were communicating with or was it a case of you sending out a message and people would arrive wherever it was?

René Kinzett: Twitter and Facebook lots of interaction, email usually one way.

Interviewer: How was the style of communication on the internet different to other forms of communication?

René Kinzett: So the internet was much more imparting of information almost like a shop front this is who I am, this is what we're doing, this is why we're here.

Interviewer: How did CCHQ London communicate with party members?

René Kinzett: CCHQ London communicated with party members that they had on a database through emails. So they would be sending out daily email updates on what the campaign was doing but they were specifically

aimed at party members. They would've been aimed at anybody that they had on their list as a potential Tory supporter.

Interviewer: And you were a candidate in Wales, Wales is a Regional Office. So what role did the regional office play in Cardiff?

René Kinzett: Not much on electronic media mainly on approving drafts of election addresses.

Interviewer: Were the communications that you were getting from CCHQ London and the communications that you were getting from CCHQ Wales synchronised in some way?

René Kinzett: They were in some respects, in some respects not. I mean we were getting communications on lines to take on certain policy issues but of course certain policy issues in a Westminster direction have no bearing on Wales because Wales has got so many devolved areas of responsibility. So I think that they needed in some respects to be a clearer demarcation between what's a Wales issue and what's a Westminster issue.

Interviewer: What methods did the Regional Office use to organise the 2010 campaign?

René Kinzett: The regional office used email and telephone calls.

Interviewer: And what were the benefits and negatives of these?

René Kinzett: I mean the regional office were only dealing with 40 parliamentary constituencies in – parliamentary candidates across Wales. So I think that in that sense the email and telephone calls were probably the best way of doing it. Because you didn't really need to achieve too many economies of scale just trying to communicate with 40 candidates.

Interviewer: What role do you think blogging played in the 2010 General Election campaign?

René Kinzett: A lot to the people that it matters to but I don't think much to the people who don't read blogs. I mean there were a certain amount of overspill stories from the blogosphere into the traditional media. And certainly traditional media, broadcasters and print journalists do have an eye on what's going on in the blogosphere. But certainly I don't think the blogosphere has an overbearing effect on how people vote.

Interviewer: In terms of gaining votes do you think it is an effective use of time for a candidate in an election campaign to blog?

René Kinzett: No.

Interviewer: What is then the purpose of blogging for candidates?

René Kinzett: Purpose of blogging for candidates is to develop their own narrative – who they are, what they are, what they believe in, what they think. What type of party they want their party to be. What type of candidate will they be. What kind of policies really get them going? What interests them? It's their shop front, it's themselves their shop front on

to the world.

But during a campaign I would say that it's one of the least effective tools.

Interviewer: In terms of a crude percentage, what would you estimate was the percentage of time that you used on social media during your campaign as opposed to the amount of time that you used in traditional forms of campaigning?

René Kinzett: Well leafleting and canvassing were by far the most amount of activity. So I would say that it's going to be somewhere like an 80:20 split between traditional campaign methods and new media.

Interviewer: And in terms of a differentiation between social media and email which in percentage terms took up the most time?

René Kinzett: Again I would say that email probably took up the most time because you're responding to more complex policy issues like constituents and people would say "Oh I've heard the Conservative Party have got this view on tuition fees, can you give me more information?"

So I would say there it's probably a closer 60:40 split between email and new media.

Interviewer: And what types of emails were you dealing with on a daily basis?

René Kinzett: Public enquiries about policy issues whether it's just from a simple "Oh can you send me a copy of your party's manifesto." Or "I've read your party's manifesto, your policy on environment, health, social security whatever is this. Can you give me more information?" And journalists' enquiries and then party communications like the deadline for leaflet number two is approaching can you make sure we have your photographs, your textbox. Can you go and fill in the stuff online etc.

So a bit of interaction, a bit of response and a bit of taking instruction.

Interviewer: Did you feel compelled that you had to respond to all emails and if you'd chose not as a candidate would that of significantly impacted on your campaign?

René Kinzett: I chose to respond to every email even if it was a polite refusal - you know somebody was trying to get me to commit to taking a position on something like abortion or on equality issues which I didn't agree with. So I would just write a polite response back.

I don't think not responding to an email in of itself would cause you a problem but I think that in terms of the etiquette now that if somebody does write you an email you do feel that you need to respond within a day or so.

Interviewer: At the time you were also leader of the Conservative group on Swansea Council. You also held a professional role in terms of employment – in terms of time management what was the trade-off and how did you organise and manage your time?

René Kinzett: Well I had to take four weeks unpaid leave from work. And during that four weeks of the campaign so early April to early May was just fulltime on the campaign.

Interviewer: And how soon were you selected by the party. And by which methods did the party select you as the candidate?

René Kinzett: I was selected in late 2007 - October/November. So it was a good two and a bit years until the General Election for me to, before the election came up. And they used a usual turn up, party members turn up and vote at a general meeting of the party.

There were no postal votes, there were no primaries and it was only party members of more than three months standing who could vote.

Interviewer: In terms of the candidates selection process at any stage of that process was electronic communication used?

René Kinzett: No we weren't allowed to. We could only, oh only the party the association sent out to party members the notice of the selection and the candidate profiles that we were able to submit to the local party.

Interviewer: And in terms of communication between you and the candidates' department in terms of application for various seats, what methods did the party use to administer that?

René Kinzett: Emails telling you which seats were coming up, when and giving you a form to fill in that you then had to print outside and send back along with a passport photograph and so on. But they used emails to tell you when seats were coming up for grabs.

Interviewer: Would you then respond by email or were you expected to respond in a traditional manner?

René Kinzett: You were able to respond by email but you had to follow it up with a traditional paper based application form by post.

Interviewer: What role did the local association play in your campaign?

René Kinzett: The local association is the base at which you get your agent, the chairman of the constituency, the treasurer and so forth. So they played a role in setting the budget, agreeing well how much I could spend. And they also provided the legal agent for all the paperwork that comes with standing for an election.

But in terms of campaign strategy and execution I had carte blanche.

Interviewer: Did the internet and electronic communication methods play any role in that part of your campaign?

René Kinzett: No.

Interviewer: What methods did you employ to mobilise your supporters?

René Kinzett: Facebook messages, putting out Twitter feeds, Twitter tweets that we were going to be meeting in certain places. Asking people to come along and email.

Interviewer: In your campaign which were the most effective methods to reach your objectives?

René Kinzett: In terms of objectives getting people to come out and help I'd say the most successful were Facebook and email. In terms of gaining media coverage I'd say it'd be Twitter and Facebook. And in terms of getting people out to vote I'd say it was legwork.

Interviewer: Why would you consider that to be the case for all three of those examples?

René Kinzett: Well with getting people to come and help get the vote out, to get people to come and help the campaign I needed to really focus my efforts on the younger members of the party who were most likely to come out on a day to day basis for a good few hours. Rather than you know come out every other day for half an hour before their knees gave up.

So I needed to communicate to them in a certain form so that was Facebook group messages, Facebook events and email. To get to the media I needed a way that I didn't have to just send out reams and reams and reams of paper or send lots and lots of addresses in an email that can be time consuming putting an email together. So for getting press coverage it was really good just to put something out there on Twitter that I'd written on my blog or was on Facebook that they could come back to me on.

And then in terms of getting people actually to get out and vote, especially in the last week of the campaign, you've got to be on the doors. You've got to be putting bits of paper through people's letterboxes. They've got to have something immediate in their hand that they can respond to.

Interviewer: Focussing on the social media and electronic methods that you've just described, would other candidates in the general election have been at a disadvantage if they hadn't employed those methods to mobilise the types of supporters that you had?

René Kinzett: Yes I would say so especially in a seat that's a non target seat and where you don't have a large membership.

Interviewer: On the whole how did you communicate with constituents?

René Kinzett: Leaflets.

Interviewer: Did you attend hustings?

René Kinzett: Yes.

Interviewer: And were the hustings, were there any electronic methods used to organise the hustings?

René Kinzett: Not from the org... Well the organisers would coordinate with the candidates through email. And I'm sure the organisers also sent out emails to their members.

So for example we had a hustings organised by a church group and I'm sure the church group would've told their members it was happening electronically.

But I would also back that up with Tweets and Facebook messages of my own telling people who you know who supported me or followed me that I would be at such and such a hall at a hustings.

Interviewer: Did you have a campaign website?

René Kinzett: Yes.

Interviewer: And how was that used?

René Kinzett: That was used by me to put out press releases, events, news about what I was up to, photographs and so on.

Interviewer: How would your site have compared to a target seat?

René Kinzett: Not very different really. They would've had more visits from important people I suppose to have shouted about. But in terms of what it looked like and what it was saying generally then no.

Interviewer: And what is the central purpose to having a website in a campaign?

René Kinzett: Is to be your shop front. Is for people locally if they Google your name or the party constituency or whatever it is that they find you. It drives, it provides a contact point. It helps you to identify, you know you'll want to have a fill in a form to support our campaign.

Its primary purpose is to raise awareness; secondary issues are to again be a recruitment tool to get people to contact you on certain issues. And to be, yes just to be visible.

Interviewer: Was there any kind of continuity between your site at a local level and the national campaign sites?

René Kinzett: Yes because as I said I bought in to the CCHQ's design and build website plan. So yes it... And there was Twitter feeds, newsfeeds, RSS feeds from the national site onto my site.

Interviewer: And did you have any technical support from the party?

René Kinzett: Yes.

Interviewer: And what would you consider to be the most typical for a candidate? Would they have used that type of system or would they have used their own site?

René Kinzett: I think typically they would've used the Central Office's site.

Interviewer: How did local members in your campaign communicate amongst themselves?

René Kinzett: The younger members would be using Twitter and Facebook. And the older members would be using email.

Interviewer: Now that's a generalisation.

René Kinzett: Yes.

Interviewer: Would there be examples of individuals within those two groups that you've identified that perhaps an older member used Facebook and a younger member used email?

René Kinzett: Oh absolutely yes.

Interviewer: Yes. And what benefits to the party organisation in your mind is the role of the internet?

René Kinzett: Increasingly in, increasingly because party members have got less time on their hands to attend meetings. They've got less time on their hands to be officers of the party. So I think that yes electronic media, social media is a great way of keeping what would otherwise be a looser network of people in an area into a tighter and more frequent communications.

Interviewer: Does it have any downsides?

René Kinzett: No I don't think it does no. Exclusion maybe, exclusion of those people who aren't comfortable with social media.

Interviewer: And would you consider those people that aren't, are they feeling left out?

René Kinzett: No because I don't think that it has completely replaced things like emails to those people as I said lots of people are on email now. I don't think it's replaced that and indeed local Associations still do send out some paper based notifications of meetings and minutes and so forth.

Interviewer: Do you think that that will continue to be the case that the party's organisation will be run with both traditional methods and new methods? Or do you think there will come a time when the electronic methods will completely...?

René Kinzett: Oh yes, yes the traditional methods will wither on the vine over time.

Interviewer: And what is, thinking outside the box, the potential for the use of the internet in terms of electioneering?

René Kinzett: I think much more capturing of information. If we can capture everybody's email address. If email address became as available as telephone numbers. If email addresses we could really harness, harvest the information and then harness that power to communicate on a daily basis or a weekly basis with constituents. I think that's a really big move forward for my thinking.

Interviewer: Presumably then an email address for a constituent or a member of the party or a supporter is a valuable, tangible piece of information. What methods did you invest in to get access to that type of information?

René Kinzett: Contact filling where you're asking people to send back comments about things. You're asking people if they've got a problem about something you always have now a line asking for email address. In fact I rarely ask for postal address now it's kind of just postcode, house number, email address, telephone number.

Interviewer: We're coming to the end now and I just wondered if there were any further comments that you have or something that sprung to mind while you were speaking that we haven't addressed. That you think would be pertinent or relevant to the topic?

René Kinzett: No I think we've covered everything.

Interviewer: Okay thank you very much for your time.

René Kinzett: Thank you.

END AUDIO

8. Robin Walker

Role in 2010: Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Worcester (target seat)

Other Roles: Elected Conservative Member of Parliament for Worcester

Interview Date: 28 March 2011

Duration: 0:37:02

START AUDIO

- Anthony: Anthony Ridge-Newman interviewing Robin Walker MP.
- So, Robin. How did you first become involved with the Conservative Party?
- Robin: Well I have been involved one way or another all my life because my father was in politics before me and so I first volunteered and helped out in an election campaign in 1997 off my own bat and worked for Stephen Dorrell as his driver during that election campaign.
- Anthony: Did the internet play a role in the campaign at that time?
- Robin: Not for me, no. And I don't think it was playing an important role for the party. The closest we got was using some very early versions of the type of software that gets you from place to place which were incredibly inaccurate and not very useful.
- Anthony: So what was the kind of campaigning that you employed in that campaign?
- Robin: Very much face to face physical campaigning. I was driving him around the country as a cabinet minister to go to as many target seats as possible. Of course the idea of a target seat in 1997 was a bit ridiculous but we visited about one hundred of them and I think we lost every single one.
- Anthony: And what was your role in the 2010 General Election?
- Robin: In the 2010 Election I was the candidate for Worcester and I am very pleased to say that I won.
- Anthony: Congratulations. How did you communicate with your campaign team during that time?
- Robin: In a number of different ways. I mean, personal contact still remains hugely important but certainly email and mobile phones have transformed the ease of getting hold of people and so it was very useful in terms of coordinating the campaign, both being able to email people directly myself and ring people up directly myself, but also in the office being able to do so.
- Anthony: And how did the party communicate with you during that process?
- Robin: Again, through a combination of different ways. There were events that we were brought to be briefed so we got that face to face contact. There were regular emails from the party and there were also letters

through the post which were probably less useful because they tended to arrive rather late.

Anthony: In your campaigning and your accessing background information did the internet play a particularly important role in your campaign?

Robin: In terms of accessing information, certainly it is always there and it makes it a lot easier, for instance to search what has been in the local newspaper. You can go online and looking at the online media is a good way of keeping up with the letters being sent in and the comments being made by the public. But it was by no means the only means of campaigning and a large part of my campaign was old-fashioned door knocking and delivering of paper leaflets.

Anthony: Did the party in any way give you information on a day-to-day basis using the internet?

Robin: They did send information on a day-to-day basis but actually a lot of the time the information that you digested and used was the information that you had first hand from briefings with the party leader or with the higher echelons of the party. And so I think a combination of the two is important and sending things by email in isolation would never have worked and we would never have got our messages across.

Anthony: In terms of your campaign in the run up to the 2010 Election, how actively did you use the internet?

Robin: I had a website and I tried to update that website regularly but I would say it was probably a first generation internet website which was largely about providing straightforward information rather than being heavily interactive. I never use Twitter. I did use Facebook but not so much as an active campaigning tool or as an organisation tool to organise my own supporters. And I think the internet was definitely part of the campaign. It was part of the campaign from an early stage bearing in mind that I was campaigning for four years before I got elected. But it was not at the heart of it. The heart of it was really an effort to meet people face to face to get around Worcester and to see the public.

Anthony: Did you use the internet in any capacity outside your political life?

Robin: Yes. I had in my City life, in my work, used the internet. Again, as a tool for research more than anything else but also with companies I used to advise I occasionally had to advise them on their website. So it was something that I was very aware of and it was definitely a tool there that I was used to using.

Anthony: Did the internet play any role in the candidate selection process?

Robin: Not to my knowledge although there was a work organisation sort of task during the candidate selection process in which you had to prioritise responding to emails or letters or things that you had seen on the internet. So I suppose that was probably the only place in which it actually raised its head.

Anthony: And did the Candidates' Department communicate with you by email?

- Robin: Yes they did. And they also did provide some information online and certainly the party provided some information online. The extent to which you can actually use that during the busy period of an election campaign is limited because it does take time to go through these things and check them and one of the things I rapidly discovered once the election campaign properly kicked off was that I didn't have a lot of time to sit in my office and look at the information that was being provided on the internet.
- Anthony: And how did you campaign and correspond with constituents?
- Robin: I tried to respond to emails within a reasonable time all the way up until the election. I have to say in the last few weeks of the election I had to stop and I had to put an "Out of Office" response on my email which said that I wouldn't be able to get back to them before the election itself because I was just too busy getting round, pressing the flesh, doing the hustings. And I think in that moment that was the right approach to take. I don't think it would have been right to sit inside and respond to all my emails at the expense of getting out and meeting the public.
- Anthony: So in an election campaign does a candidate have to employ their judgement at specific times to decide when and when not to use the internet?
- Robin: Yes. I think that's absolutely right and I think also they have got to look at their constituency, they have got to look at their constituents and how many of those people they are likely to reach through the internet. I was always very clear that the internet was an important tool but it was not going to reach the whole of my constituency. There were a lot of people who didn't necessarily have a computer in their home in Worcester and getting the message across to those people was just as important as reaching those who could communicate online.
- Anthony: In your experience, how did CCHQ London communicate with party members during the election campaign?
- Robin: Again, a combination of the internet, email and snail mail post. As I say, I think we were seeing during this election campaign a period in which the old-fashioned paper approach was becoming less and less effective. So I think it was good that they did organise themselves to communicate electronically as well. But as ever, the party will reach out to all its members and try and communicate but it won't necessarily reach all of them.
- Anthony: How effective, in your opinion, was the party's communication methods?
- Robin: Fairly. I wouldn't say amazingly. But I think they did manage to get their points across and certainly we were given regular updates. As I say, as a candidate you have to divide your time very carefully and you can't always spend your time reading those updates. Sometimes you need to be out there responding to the public and so it is up to the individual whether it is a candidate or a member how much time they are going to spend listening to what the party has to say as opposed to getting on with the campaigning.

Anthony: In your opinion, does the internet have some further opportunity for the party to communicate with its members in election campaigns?

Robin: Yes, absolutely. I am sure technologies will continue to develop and certainly things like the move from Blue Chip to Merlin which is more internet enabled and the promised golden land in which we can all have hand-held PDA's which give us the latest figures on Merlin all sounds brilliant. We really haven't seen it work in practice yet and so getting that kind of system to deliver securely is very important. Obviously there would be concerns about putting a system like that somewhere where the public or indeed your political opponents could get their hands on it and that is where we have to be very careful in developing these things, that we develop them effectively and securely.

Anthony: Did you use Merlin in your campaign?

Robin: Massively, yes. We had used Blue Chip for most of the run up to the campaign but we did manage to transfer across and thanks to my very good agent we did manage to get Merlin up and running and use it effectively in the last few months of the campaign.

Anthony: What are the main differences between Blue Chip and Merlin?

Robin: I wasn't really at the sharp end of this, but from what I saw it is largely a question of interface. Merlin is a much friendlier interface, it is much easier to use and it can provide you with much more relevant and targeted information than the Blue Chip system. The Blue Chip system was getting on for twenty years old and it was beginning to show. I think with Merlin it was a step forward, but it is still a pretty clunky piece of software and you could see the real difference between the business world in which you have a huge market, and therefore the software gets developed very quickly, and very effectively, and the political world in which the market is actually a lot smaller. Therefore the software is rather slower, more out of date and clunkier. And I suspect that is not going to change any time soon.

Anthony: Does the internet play a potential role in the future of Merlin?

Robin: Yes, I'm sure it does. And I'm sure in allowing that communication but the key there has to be security and if you put something like that through the internet and if you use cloud based approaches and that sort of thing you have to be very clear that you have got a responsibility to guard people's private information and keep it to yourselves, both a responsibility and an interest.

Anthony: Did your regional office employ methods to help organise your campaign?

Robin: They tried.

Anthony: What were the pros and cons of those methods?

Robin: The regional organisation was there to support us and the most effective method was when they actually sent someone along to attend meetings and to actually talk to us face to face. I'm afraid, along with all the

other information that we got sent, the things that they sent electronically or by post didn't necessarily get paid a huge amount of attention.

Anthony: And what role did the local association play in the 2010 General Election?

Robin: An enormous role and there was no doubt we needed the local association in order to run the campaign. They were a key part of it. It is, as is usual with these things, the same small band of people who contribute a huge amount and there was no way I could have done it without them.

Anthony: And what role did the internet play in the organisation of the local party?

Robin: Very little because the local party, a large number of the people involved would not be regular users of the internet or even if they were they would prefer to come along to meetings and get involved face to face. And so actually the internet was not something we used particularly to organise local party, except for our younger members and in terms of organising events and getting people along from CF, that was done through things like Facebook and certainly through email.

Anthony: Is there a digital divide between the demographic of the members?

Robin: Yes, I think it is fair to say there is a bit of digital divide generationally although there are always exceptions to that rule. Some of our oldest councillors are actually the most proficient users of email. But overall, it is fair to say that younger people are more comfortable using the internet and more comfortable using email and that the older members tend to be a little bit more wary of it or treat it more like old media and so use email but use it like a letter and that means it is less effective as a tool for instant communication.

Anthony: Did you engage with Facebook?

Robin: Yes I have my own profile on Facebook which I think I am right in saying I had before I was a candidate. But certainly I have been on Facebook for a long time and I decided about halfway through my campaign that I ought to politicise that a little bit and started using the limited profile status for people who are political friends but also started to put a little bit more political information on there.

Towards the end of the campaign we discovered ways of directly linking Facebook with my website so when I put a new press release on my website it would go on a fan page on Facebook and that was a much more effective way of using it. Because one of my concerns, and perhaps the reason why I never blogged or used Twitter, was that to use a tool like that and then not update it regularly could imply that you weren't keeping busy and you weren't doing a lot. I was very concerned about that and so I wanted to find a way that when I did put something on my website proactively that would be reflected on Facebook and show that I was doing something. But also not to have to spend hours of my time updating Facebook to show that I was busy.

Anthony: Did you use a website during your campaign?

Robin: Yes. www.walker4worchester.com.

Anthony: And how did you use it?

Robin: I used it to put my press releases out on, speeches up on and campaigns. To put photographs of my campaign up on so people could see what was going on. When I launched it first we actually put a discussion forum on there but we found that it got overwhelmed with spam and very little of any use was contributed to it. I think that rather than having an open blog in which all my opponents could have come and attacked me, I decided at the end of the day it was better just to stick out my public statements and to get involved in the debate, whether it is debate to be had through other means, through live debate and through the media.

Anthony: Was there any link between your website and social media?

Robin: As I say, late in the campaign we worked out how to link it into Facebook and we started to use it so every time a press release went up there was an update on Facebook and that was really the only direct link with social media.

Anthony: Do you think that was effective in getting your message across to your constituents?

Robin: I think it was effective in getting my message across to my younger members of the association and the organisation. I think because I am probably only in the hundreds rather than the thousands of friends on Facebook. I don't think it is necessarily an effective campaigning technique and I would rely on other methods of campaigning.

Anthony: Do you have any thoughts on Twitter and the use of it in political engagement?

Robin: I think it can be very effective, but I do have the concern that you can become a bit of a slave to it on occasion and that you can tweet for the sake of tweeting rather than because you have something important to say and I think that is a risk of Twitter or indeed the over use of any social media. But clearly in terms of engaging political journalists and that side of things it can be a useful way of getting a message across and certainly I do keep an eye on the Twitter page of my local political journalist.

Anthony: David Cameron appeared at least to lead the way in terms of the use of the internet in the party with WebCameron. He then went on to say later that "too many tweets make a twat". Is there any contradiction in that statement?

Robin: No, I don't think there is actually because I think WebCameron was a way of getting a message across in a different way, communicating with a lot of people more effectively. I think his point about Twitter was exactly the point that I just made, that sometimes it becomes self-serving in a sense in that you are out there trying to say something in

order to be funny, in order to be listened to rather than in order to get a genuine point across. WebCameron was, if you like, the second generation web media and Twitter is the third generation. I think it is legitimate to draw a distinction between the two. I have no doubt Twitter can be used as an effective campaign tool but I think it takes a certain type of politician to do it and we shouldn't all pretend to be that type of politician.

Anthony: How many people in your local party joined Facebook groups to do specifically with your campaign?

Robin: I would say probably about 10% of the local party would have been involved in joining Facebook groups and following them. But certainly predominantly the younger members and in terms of the local CF group, the vast majority of them.

Anthony: And out of that 10% what percentage would you say actually came out to actively campaign in a pragmatic way?

Robin: Those 10% by nature were among the more active by the very fact that they had got involved with the group, but it is still a relatively small percentage. At the end of the day with any election campaign you find there is a hard core of people who do a huge amount of the work and whilst other people will come along from time to time and get involved from time to time it is that hard core that you keep returning to. And so it would be probably less than half of that 10% for certain who would be the people who actively came out time and time again. That is not to say that all of them didn't get involved at some point or another.

Anthony: Did you employ any use of Facebook in order to encourage people out on the ground?

Robin: Yes we did start creating through Facebook and also through the party's own equivalent, the MyConservatives website. We did do a few updates of campaigning activity and sent those across and we found we got a reasonable response to that. It was a similar level of response to what you would expect to send an email out to a targeted group of people and so not by any means the majority, but a significant minority who would actually respond and say "Yes, I will come along". And so it is another way of getting that message across, another way of letting people know that something is happening.

Anthony: How did the MyConservatives website work?

Robin: It basically worked as a social media networking website to reach people who had clearly signed up to support the party with a message of what you were up to, what you were doing and also usefully to raise money and to get donations from people. It has been one of my complaints that I discovered very rapidly when I did a big charity walk using JustGiving about how incredibly easy it is to raise money for charity online and I was complaining to the party for years that they didn't have something similar. Actually with the MyConservatives website they got close to something which was nearly as effective, it was not quite up there with JustGiving, but certainly it was a big improvement on what there was before. And we did raise a few

hundred quid for it. We didn't raise tens of thousands, but we raised some money for the campaign which was certainly helpful.

Anthony: Do you have any recommendations on how it could be improved?

Robin: Well I think they just need to look at charity websites like JustGiving and that sector to see how these things could be done, could be made even more effective. Clearly they have challenges to overcome in terms of the Slater rules and in terms of making sure that there are people giving multiple donations which charities wouldn't have but I am sure that the technology will develop over time. And I think if anything it will be useful for the party to have a website of that sort running all year round and even in peacetime because actually one of the big challenges we have as an association is raising the money we need to keep going. It would be very useful if the party was directing people towards a website where they could support their local association and simply give small donations when they can afford to. That is certainly something that I would support.

Anthony: Do you consider the internet to be playing any role in Conservative Party organisation?

Robin: Well I don't know whether Conservative Party organisation. In this place we do largely get that organisation through the whips and through direct email contact from Central Office. But certainly the internet is playing a huge role in the party in its discussion with the grassroots and ConservativeHome has made notable strides in that area as a website that really does reach a huge number of people within the party. I can pretty much guarantee if there is a controversial article in ConservativeHome I will hear from members of my association about that issue and so that has been very effective in a way that strangely none of the other political parties have managed to match.

Anthony: Do you interact regularly with ConservativeHome?

Robin: Not over regularly. I generally consider my job is to get on with focusing on my constituency and communicating with my constituents rather than communicating with the Conservative Party at large and so that has been my priority. But if ConservativeHome ask me to write pieces I am happy to do that and where they have covered topics in Parliament they will sometimes pick up on what I am doing. I am always very happy to speak with them as I am to any journalists and I know that they will give us a fair hearing.

Anthony: Did you access ConservativeHome during your election campaign?

Robin: Yes.

Anthony: And what, for you, was the point of that?

Robin: Partly to get good ideas of what other people were up to. To get tips for campaigns and useful things that we could take on. Partly to see what the mood of the party was on some issues and keep abreast of that. And partly, as with any candidate I suspect, as a tool for self promotion and where you are involved with something positive you want to try and get it out there. And certainly we got a nice article up there two

weeks before the election about a Labour defector showing that we were making good progress in Worcester. I think that helps, not just our own egos, but also to keeps the morale of local party up when they go on there and have a look at something and see that your good works are getting reported on. And so I think it is a useful tool in that respect.

Anthony: You identified ConservativeHome as playing a role in Conservative Party organisation, especially in terms of the grassroots. What elements of ConservativeHome would you pinpoint as playing a role in that organisation?

Robin: I think the discussions that it is able to have on issues like candidate selection, on issues of policy and the fact that they are able to attract the big hitters to come and write for them makes it attractive. The fact that it really is an open forum and that there is widespread debate on there is positive. The only negative there is obviously it is a place for people to sound off and in terms of party unity it is not always helpful. There will always be negative comments which unfortunately our opponents can pick up and use in their literature and that was certainly used against me in the election, that Labour did put things on leaflets which came from comments on ConservativeHome. But on balance, I think it is a good organ of debate and it is useful for the party to be able to have those debates.

Anthony: The party has talked a lot about transparency in government and using the internet to do that. Would you see the application of ConservativeHome the equivalent for that in terms of party organisation?

Robin: I think transparency is a great thing and making information available over the internet is logical rather than storing and sending massive reams of paper here, there and everywhere but I am not sure you can necessarily draw across comparisons from the way ConservativeHome works as a discussion within a political party and the way you want the Government to work. I think inevitably even where these organisations have great reach they are always going to represent a minority of people and that if you had an online community trying to run the country you would get a slightly distorted world view. I think you need to reach more broadly than that whilst appreciating the opportunities that exist for government and for political parties in the internet.

Anthony: Do you think ConservativeHome and blogs like them should be controlled from the Centre?

Robin: No. I don't think they would have any credibility if they were and I think it is very important that they are not. Clearly the key success of ConservativeHome has been showing that it is free spoken and often outspoken but also that it is has got the best interests of the party at heart and I think where I sometimes fall out with them is where I feel that they are not doing that and that they are not serving the party's interests. It is healthy that they should be independent but that they will only continue to attract the huge following that they do as long as they show that they are supporting the party's general interest.

Anthony: And in terms of the interaction with ConservativeHome, who would you say its main audience is?

- Robin: Its main audience are broadly Conservative people who are interested in politics. And certainly people who are politicians of all sorts I suspect dip into it to see what is going on because they understand its power and its influence. As I say, a lot of members of my local party do read it and pick up on it and it is influential in that respect in the way that perhaps ten or twenty years ago you would expect *The Times*, *Telegraph* and the *Mail* to be but actually I think the newspapers are losing some of that influence.
- Anthony: Which is the most influential Conservative blog?
- Robin: From my perspective, again I come back to ConservativeHome. There are others, there are a lot of good ones out there but I don't have a great deal of time for browsing blogs and reading them all and that is the first one I will tend to go to.
- Anthony: How effective is the party using the internet in your opinion?
- Robin: More effectively than any other party, I think is the first point to make. But I think there is still undoubtedly further to go. I think over time as the technology develops there will be more opportunities to use the internet. But I think we have to be very wary and this is where WebCameron was clever. WebCameron did focus on giving people a close personal view of David Cameron. We have to be wary and I think it distances us from our public and our electorate and we need to use the internet as a tool of communication and a tool to bring people closer, not a tool to keep them at bay. And that is where we need to be careful that we don't go too far down the route of relying on a technology to get across what, at the end of the day, is a personal message and a very personal gain in politics, trying to persuade people that you are the right person to represent them.
- Anthony: If the internet had not been allowed to be used during your campaign how would your role as a candidate have been different?
- Robin: That is a very interesting question. I am not sure it would have been massively different. I think I would have perhaps had to spend a bit more time struggling to get my message in front of journalists and make sure that it came across to people. But actually, a lot of my campaign was based on leaflets which we were hand delivering, getting out to people. It was based on door knocking, it was based on seeing people face to face. And so in terms of the allocation of time on my campaign, apart from perhaps multiplying the number of emails I responded to as opposed to letters, it wouldn't have made an enormous difference if the internet hadn't been there. I think we use the internet as an effective tool to bolster all the other work that we are doing and so in that respect it wouldn't have helped me because I think we probably had a better online presence than the competition. But I don't think it would have actually transformed the way I fought the election.
- Anthony: Do you feel you have more of a voice in using the internet as a back bench MP, previously as a target seat candidate?
- Robin: Yes, I think the internet does allow you to reach a further audience. It does allow you to post up what you have said and what you feel about

things in a way that you couldn't do in the old media except by going out and speaking to public groups. And that is helpful. It is certainly helpful being able to relay that information. And for instance being able to put out a response to the budget on the day of the budget and not having to depend on the amount of space your local newspapers can give you in order to do that. It has its uses but I think it is really important that we understand that it is just one medium, it is just one tool and transformative though it can be, it doesn't replace personal communication.

Anthony: Do you think that has the potential to change over time?

Robin: It has the potential to become a more and more important medium over time. I don't think it will ever transcend that. I don't think it will ever replace human interaction. I think it would be a very sad world if it did.

Anthony: And are there any security risks to using the internet for political communication?

Robin: Undoubtedly. I think one of my colleagues here found, although he didn't use Twitter, someone was able to set up a Twitter account in his name and make unacceptable political statements in his name. That's concerning. I think, going back to the party use of the internet, the personal data is at risk once you use the internet and I think that is a serious concern. Misrepresentation of all forms is very easy and that is something we need to be wary of. But having said that, it can also be a way of getting a message across to a huge number of people, so it is something that the party I'm sure will keep a very close eye on, the legal implications of everything they are doing on the internet and be very wary of the risks. But that we should clearly, as we have with every technology, embrace the opportunities that it can give us and make the most of it to get our message across.

Anthony: You have talked about your involvement in earlier campaigns previous to your own. Has there been a different trend since then in terms of the use of the internet within the party?

Robin: It has certainly grown. It has certainly become more important. I remember in 1997 and also in 2001 there were lots of jokes about the beepers that people had and the little things that they could put onto their belt which gave them a message for the day. Those have clearly been surpassed and replaced now by the BlackBerry and by new generations. So mobile phones have made a difference. The internet has made a difference. It has all changed the way in which we communicate but it hasn't actually changed the fundamentals of the game which is getting your message across to as many people as possible and trying to get them to vote for you.

Anthony: Earlier you said that you believe the Conservative Party to be ahead of the other Parties in this trend. What, within the party or outside the party, is leading this trend?

Robin: I think the Conservative Party embraced the opportunities of the internet while we were in the process of being a very effective opposition. I think all parties go through phases and in the last years of

opposition we got very, very good at it just as Labour had done in 1996/1997. I think had Labour had the internet developed of a level at current years in that period they would probably have become the pass masters in this as well. I think we have to try to keep some of that energy and some of that urge to communicate now that we are in Government because one thing you can guarantee is that when the next election comes around it will be all the more important.

Anthony: Are you saying that technologies are exploited for the opposition party?

Robin: I think they provide an opportunity for the opposition party. How effectively the opposition party takes them is down to them and their organisation and what you will tend to see as we are seeing now is that in the early years the opposition tends to be pretty ineffective and pretty bad at getting their message across. They have to learn the art of opposition just as governments have to learn the art of government.

Anthony: Is there anything specific about the Conservative Party that you say would imagine it to be more effective in terms of using technology whilst it is in opposition?

Robin: Well, I think we encourage individualism and we thrive on debate and on being a broad church certainly in terms of developing something like ConservativeHome. That has been hugely important. You couldn't see anything as lively and vibrant as that within the Labour Party because the Labour Party was being run with top down control under Gordon Brown. And so I think actually that is something that we were politically in a much better position to make the benefits of it. But in terms of things like Merlin or Blue Chip or that kind of technology, that is absolutely down to the organisation of the party, what they are prepared to invest in it and making sure they have got as effective a tool as possible. As I say, I think actually political parties are a million miles behind the corporate business world in that respect and probably always will be.

Anthony: Does the party try to control or manage the use of social media?

Robin: No. I think the Party would be very wary of people obviously putting up anything stupid, doctored photographs and all that kind of thing. When I was working for Oliver Letwin I saw firsthand the Ed Matts disaster where he had doctored photographs and put them in a leaflet. But that just goes to show that can be done just as effectively on old media as it can on new. And I think it is right that the party should try to control that. What you won't see is the party clamping down on freedom of speech and certainly if you look at things like ConservativeHome that is why there are such lively debates on them.

Anthony: Why do candidates use Twitter?

Robin: It is another way of getting your message across. I think it is very tempting. I was certainly very tempted to go out there and use it as another method of putting my case across but I think I would have been wary of the backlash against that in terms of both when you say things unnecessarily and when you don't say things and people might think therefore that you are neglecting your campaign. I think there is a balance to be struck in how regularly you communicate and certainly

during my election campaign I was doing two or three press releases a week. I was happy with that in terms of output along with all the door knocking and all the leaflets rather than having to do something which needed quarter hourly updates.

Anthony: Why do activists use Twitter?

Robin: Again, it is a way of getting a message across. It is a way of pestering people and so in that respect it can be very, very valuable. It is a way of getting your opinions heard. But I think there are pros and cons and you can choose your tools to get your message across. It is one personally that I haven't felt the need to use.

Anthony: As either a candidate or as an activist, what is the difference between using Twitter or Facebook in political engagement?

Robin: Twitter has the potential to reach more people, it is more immediate. But I think Facebook is more targeted and certainly from my perspective one of the positive things about putting things on Facebook is that I knew those would be seen by the people I decided to include and not necessarily, say if I was going canvassing in a particular place I wasn't necessarily telegraphing it to my opposition. And so from that perspective, Facebook has its attractions over Twitter. But obviously Twitter has a wider reach and provides that more immediate update of what you are actually doing. And so both have their uses. But from my perspective, I chose to use one and not the other.

Anthony: Would you consider your association with followers on Twitter or Facebook a strong or weak association?

Robin: A weak association. But a deliberate one. And I think it is an important point that you do have to be wary of who you choose to accept as friends. You can't simply accept everyone who comes along and I took the view that I wasn't going to accept people unless I knew who they were. That meant I excluded quite a lot of people who were probably perfectly well-meaning and genuine and might have even supported my campaign but I think it was better to take that view than to include people who you would subsequently regret.

Anthony: Is there any attempt in the party to turn weaker online associations into stronger offline ones?

Robin: I think the party will use tools like this to reach people. One of the major things that the party always encouraged us to do, but actually never perhaps did much to facilitate, was email harvesting and making sure that all the people we contacted by email we kept their email addresses and got those people onto regular mailing lists. I think I was shocked to find just before the election campaign that our email list numbered in the hundreds and not the thousands. So there is probably more that could be done in that respect.

Anthony: And in terms of the parliamentary cycle, are there any changes in intensity in the use of social media, blogs and other internet type applications?

Robin: I think they are gradually becoming more prevalent and more important and I think that is to be expected. I certainly see a number of colleagues over recent months who have joined Facebook and I see them cropping up there. I have also been in a Bill Committee where the government whip was saying things on Twitter which got read out to him five minutes later by one of the opposition and so you have to be careful as you roll these things out and take them on.

Anthony: So, comparing before and after the 2010 General Election. Has the intensity and frequency of the use of Facebook and its events application declined in your use?

Robin: For me personally it has probably declined but I would say in terms of the number of invitations I get it has certainly continued to expand.

Anthony: Are there any new developments in the party's use of the internet since the 2010 General Election?

Robin: Not that I have noticed.

Anthony: Thank you very much.

Robin: Okay.

END AUDIO

9. Therese Coffey

Role in 2010: Conservative Parliamentary Candidate for Suffolk Coastal (safe seat)
Other Roles: Elected Member of Parliament for Suffolk Coastal

Interview Date: 1 April 2011
Duration: 1:00:21

START AUDIO

Anthony Newman: Anthony Ridge-Newman, interviewing Therese Coffey MP. Well thank you Therese for agreeing to do the interview. I would just like to start by asking you how you got into Conservative politics.

Therese Coffey: I joined the party back in 1988, partly inspired by Derek Hatton because I grew up in Liverpool and I got involved a little bit. My sister was already involved in the 1987 election and I did a little bit there up in a seat in Liverpool Wavertree or Liverpool Mossley Hill as it probably was at the time and I got more involved at university.

Anthony Newman: What was your role in the 2010 general election?

Therese Coffey: I was a candidate for the seat of Suffolk Coastal and I was selected for that on February the 6th, three months just before Election Day and I am delighted to say I won the election.

Anthony Newman: Congratulations. How did the party communicate with you at the time? When I say, "the party," I am here talking specifically about the central party, the central office.

Therese Coffey: Almost exclusively by email whether that was daily briefings, whether that was instructions to groups of candidates. I was in what was considered to be-, to be considered a safe seat and being very late selected, I didn't have much more of the informal briefings. So, in a way it felt exactly the same as being a candidate in Wrexham five years before where you were left to get on with it. So, it was really mainly email, both as I say centrally but also from say a regional agent.

Anthony Newman: You have had experiences as a candidate before standing for a safe seat.

Therese Coffey: Yes.

Anthony Newman: With the fact that you have been selected to stand for a safe seat did your approach to that campaign differ in any way to previous elections?

Therese Coffey: Yes it did, when I stood before I did do quite a lot of work in a seat but deliberately went and helped a neighbour who got in, in Clwyd West. However, this time being such a new candidate I also spent quite a lot of time in my seat but made sure that I went and helped in my two neighbouring seats. I actually funnily enough if we had better use of technology within the party I could have been far more productive for my two neighbouring seats because a lot of time was spent travelling rather than actually doing political campaigning.

So, my temp as well in the run up to being selected and similar was frustrated by MyConservatives.com or whatever it was because none of it really worked. It just ended up becoming in my view a message board rather than an action centre.

Anthony Newman: In your opinion what types of technologies could have helped you do your job better with neighbouring constituencies?

Therese Coffey: I wish that my associations were unable-, neighbouring associations and indeed my own were better enabled to make things like telephone canvassing easier, telephone knocking up easier. I would have-, I would have may not have-, I won't have delivered as many pieces of literature as I did but I would have contacted a lot more potential voters than I did.

Anthony Newman: And your constituency at the time, at the run up to the 2010 general election, how was that organised and structured?

Therese Coffey: Well, we did have a fulltime agent. Interestingly the agent wouldn't use any of the central party literature so we barely touched concept. Even though I think concept has improved over the years because five years ago if you we're prepared to buy the full literature pack you were not allowed access to any of the templates of the party. They have changed that approach which is good, so you can now go in and just get it and use your own local printer whatever.

So, that's a massive improvement but in terms of myself I started using Twitter and my own blog to give updates on where I had been, where I was going. I would email, I think I managed to answer 90% of emails that were sent. I am sure there will be some people who said that they never heard back from me. But that was something that the previous Member of Parliament had not particularly done, had not done at all, didn't have a web-, he had a website but it was very static.

I think for any candidate it is a balance of how you spend your time, how many people really look at a website. In hindsight I think-, I actually think I got the balance okay in terms of we didn't try to build a sophisticated website before the election. We just did a blog with a few photos and a little bit of twitter. So, there was enough there to keep local media aware of things and that's been driven since, so.

Anthony Newman: In terms of the comparison between your previous seat and your most recent election experience how did they-, how do they compare in terms of the type of organisation and members and association?

Therese Coffey: Well, when I was in Wrexham there was a dedicated group but they were small in number. I from memory there were about 140 members. They didn't have a lot of money to spend but we still spent quite a lot of money and when I stood in Suffolk Coastal which has something approaching I think they have got 900 paid and 200 still to renew this year for example. We didn't-, I know election limits can strain it but we didn't specifically spend a lot more money than we did in Wrexham on the actual campaign.

There was in Suffolk Coastal being much bigger geographically than Wrexham you tended to work with people in specific areas. So, they

wouldn't necessarily-, only a few people would travel say on a battle bus whereas in Wrexham people were a lot more mobile. But in Wrexham we had to really target our activity, you know we would have delivered probably 40% of the seat whereas in Suffolk Coastal it would probably be closer to 90%, not 100% but that. So, there are more established networks. Sorry, remind me again of what you were trying to-, the different organisation and membership.

Anthony Newman: Yes, yes.

Therese Coffey: I did have the benefit of having a full time agent. As I say my agent doesn't always like to follow the party line in terms of specific templates. I think in future I'll be very keen to make sure that we do because again we spent a fair amount of time being bespoke when actually in a seat like Suffolk Coastal, in any seat really you just need to get a message out. It doesn't matter if it is the latest you know award winning literature or not. But you know I was perfectly happy with my leaflets, they were nice but they took more time perhaps than they should have done.

Anthony Newman: What was the daily role of your agent?

Therese Coffey: In the actual three weeks of the campaign, we had started before then but I would go out most days in a battle bus with a group of volunteers. I would meet my agent at lunchtime and I would sign paperwork and do similar. He helped to prepare all the aspects of the photographs that were needed. I would do text for the leaflets, he would try and design it, then I would re-design it a little bit and his job was to try and make sure that we got in money for the fighting fund. That there were groups of volunteers, he did organise the battle bus as it is called and trying to get people there and dealt with the legal paperwork.

Anthony Newman: In terms of your battle bus presumably there were people on it. How did you and your agent first of all...

Therese Coffey: Sorry the other thing the agent did was he more or less defined where we would go. So, he set out the routes and made sure we got to every parish and similar. So, that was part of what he did and then during the day there were sometimes when we needed extra leaflets or whatever he would come out and get the stuff for us, sorry.

Anthony Newman: How did between the two of you or your campaign team manage to get people out to help the campaign.

Therese Coffey: Well, as I said being very new I didn't really know-, I only knew a few people and the agent and I think the Deputy Chairman of Campaigning I think had a hand in encouraging people to come out. Sometimes there were six of us in the bus; sometimes there were three of us in the bus so it varied.

In the future I am not sure I would necessarily need to have the same approach, we'll see. People quite like it, people do quite like that although in classic modern campaigning techniques using a battle bus and a speaker phone is considered not good because you will awake an opposition. But in a large rural area where it's a-, how can I put it you may not see one person from you know you may not ever see them,

meet them in your lifetime, it is at least a communication vehicle which is traditional in that area.

Anthony Newman: How did you and your agent communicate with the people on your campaign team during the election?

Therese Coffey: Well, I would end up doing quite a lot of work at night after we had done the campaigning, responding to people who had contacted me directly or preparing items. Then we would usually meet in the morning at the association office just to run through the things for the day. I essentially didn't, I won't say that I drove the campaign particularly apart from choosing which topics we would do in the leaflets. I was quite reliant on others knowing their areas and making sure I was in the right place at the right time for different things.

Again, as I build my knowledge of my own constituency I will be able to have more of an input into what we actually do during the election campaign. We didn't have any elections apart from one by-election on that day so I made sure that we went and spent quite a bit of time that needed the by-election even though it is a mixed division. So, it needed help and I made sure that went and spent some time there.

Anthony Newman: How many months or weeks previously to your-, to the election campaign on May the fifth were you selected?

Therese Coffey: Three months to the day, so thirteen weeks quite literally and I could not give up work straight away. I gave up work about-, I was able to spend long weekends in Suffolk but I wasn't able to give up until Mid March. So, then I was able to give it about seven weeks run through, right through where I was there every day.

Anthony Newman: During that period did members, conservative supporters and activists communicate with you?

Therese Coffey: During the first six weeks, well I was-, I went to a few kinds of social functions within the association and some members were very good in hosting kind of coffee mornings in their houses. Not many about four people did, kind of to introduce me to their friends; not as friends but this is the new candidate. I think some more of those would have been very helpful. You know that said I am very grateful to the people who did what they did.

I was able to move straight into Suffolk into temporary accommodation a week after being selected. I said I would move in by Valentine's Day and I did because friends of friends from where I used to live lived in the constituency and they put me up in their granny flat. Where I stayed for just over a month and then I managed to rent my own home and that was very important to me to make sure that in the campaign I was able to be on the electoral register. So, I did that from mid-march and to the surprise of other candidates and other political parties I was able to say that I lived in the constituency.

Anthony Newman: The latter stages of your campaign...

Therese Coffey: Yes.

Anthony Newman: What technologies or methods were used to communicate with your members, activists and supporters?

Therese Coffey: That was to be mainly phone. I would say that's because a lot of my members are not particularly technology literate that is not true of all of them. I shouldn't say literate, what is a better way of saying it? Not everybody is on email and not everybody who is on email checks it every day. So, there are a significant number of politically active people who are. Also councillors in my area avoid using their council email addresses for anything policy political which I didn't realise at first and then I found out. So, there were some bits of learning for me to do. So, email and phone were the main ways of communicating.

Anthony Newman: You're an experienced candidate in the sense that you have stood for other elections for instance, the 2009 European Elections.

Therese Coffey: Yes.

Anthony Newman: So, you have seen a number of different types of environments and campaigns. Does being a candidate within a rural constituency differ to the metropolitan areas?

Therese Coffey: Yes I believe it does, literally because of-, regardless of how many emails you may send to people I still believe that personal, visual contact is an important part for quite a lot of people in perhaps deciding whether or not they will vote for you. I would say that's even true of people who are inclined to vote Conservative depending on where you are to some extent.

But if they happen to say Wrexham where the seat was not particularly a likely territory for a Conservative gain and Liberal Democrats had been strong there making council gains, council seat gains and actually running the council. I think the proximity of the candidate being supported by local counsellors for the Liberals and having such a physically tight seat it helps that having been selected and having that building that presence was reinforced by individual visits or meets and greets in the high street.

I think from within a constituency that is rural where there is no one centre. There are seats actually where-, there are plenty of rural seats where there is a defined single centre for the constituency and I think that's different say to my seat where Felixstowe is the biggest town in my constituency. It is at the very bottom and it's on a peninsular. So people at the top at Halesworth never go to Felixstowe. So, you have to build your campaign around a series of market towns plus the villages. So, I effectively have five market towns to cover as well as other areas. Whereas say in the seat where I used to live in Northwest Hampshire, Sir George Young his main town is Andover plus villages but I would say that probably 60% of his electorate live in one place, at least. He has that ability to be a strong presence in one area, can actually touch a lot of the constituency.

So, I think that's where there are challenges in different kinds of rural seats and my neighbour Dan Porter is probably the same. He has got a chunk of Ipswich but then for the rest of his seat there is no one centre of gravity.

Anthony Newman: Did you do canvassing during your campaign?

Therese Coffey: Yes I did, yes we did and to the surprise of the association we made sure we recorded that. We are very religious about it and this was also true in Wrexham because they introduced me in Wrexham to a way of canvassing I had never done before. But that was fine and we made sure we recorded that information as well. When I was a European candidate a big difference to that was that it was at the same time as the County Council Elections so we never recorded our preferences specifically for Europe.

It was always focused around the County Council except for those areas like Brighton and elsewhere there didn't have County Council elections. The other thing from being a European candidate is just trying to get people to come out and campaign for the European election was virtually a waste of time even those seats like Southampton, Portsmouth, Brighton and Hove where they didn't have council elections but should have been using it as a dry run for the following year. Some of those associations were better than others.

Anthony Newman: What was the general age group, the people that actively got involved in your campaign in Suffolk Coastal?

Therese Coffey: Err; I'd say 55 plus, 55 to 85. There was a smaller number of people who-, but this reflects the age profile of Suffolk Coastal. 27% of people are over 65, something like half are over 55 of the profile of the seat reflecting it as a place where people do retire to. There are a lot of second homes people buy and when their kids have left wherever or when they have stopped work, they then sell their big house in London and come up and live properly in the constituency. So, you get a lot of that anyway.

There was a smaller group of people actively engaged probably in their late 30's, 40's my kind of age and very few young-, very few young people and there is a-. One of the reasons for that is there was a conservative future branch I think in the south of the constituency. But Ben Gummer had already been installed for some time as candidate in Ipswich and not surprisingly Ben had built a good campaign team around him and it was attractive to go and help Ben in Ipswich. Actually it was the right thing for them to do.

So, no complaints at all and yes I remember going to my first campaign to help Ben, there were about three young people from Felixstowe helping which I thought was great. So, I am not surprised that they were not helping me. If I had been in their shoes I would have done exactly the same I would have gone and helped Ben. I know if I had been at the top I would have helped Peter Aldous in Waveney.

Anthony Newman: Were there any uses of social media within your campaign team or the local area?

Therese Coffey: Well, I use Twitter and a blog. I might-, one of my candidates, one of my active candidates was proactive in using Twitter and her website. Then the Labour candidate was not particularly proactive on it mainly because he worked for the Labour candidate in Ipswich who was the

MP. So, he spent a lot of his time helping the Ipswich campaign. So, I would it was more that kind of thing rather than anything else. Interestingly enough on previous elections I had done more on that kind of side but trying to judge priorities and use of time it was fairly evident that I didn't have enough time to say do videos or similar. Because what mattered was getting around to areas and being able to say, "I have been to every parish."

They are quite powerful statements because even if the person didn't see them you know people will talk in the pub about, "Oh we met the new Tory candidate today," for example and I think it was important to do that.

Anthony Newman: In a rough sense...

Therese Coffey: In terms of I was about to, I'm sorry I forgot to ask I did use MyConservatives.com as a fund raising tool. What was useful about that I didn't raise a lot of money but we raised about £450. It was just an easy way for people to give some cash. So, a few friends gave a £10, £50, one gave £150 so, that was not wonderful to particularly do. I don't know how much the party spent on MyConservatives.com and I haven't really seen it used since, that doesn't mean to say that it can't be revitalised. But for me it was easy to give money but it failed in the bit about making campaigning easier.

Anthony Newman: We'll come back to that shortly. How much time roughly on a daily basis did you invest in using the internet compared with more traditional campaigning?

Therese Coffey: I would say I was probably on the internet about an hour and half a day but I would be out campaigning probably closer to 11 hours a day. A lot of that was spent driving but yes.

Anthony Newman: In addition to that were there other points in your day when you would be using the internet in terms of catching up or was it that specific hour and half was enough to do everything you needed?

Therese Coffey: Err, well.

Anthony Newman: You mentioned that you...

Therese Coffey: Yes, I mean I had my BlackBerry.

Anthony Newman: Spent time at night doing stuff

Therese Coffey: Yes, I mean there were some simple things you could do on BlackBerry, some quick responses. But I would tend to do it in the evening all that I needed to do more or less. I think since applications have got easier although I don't have an iPhone I can imagine that I'll become a lot more dynamic in the future. Other things like using voice Dictaphones to text I think will be also-. I can see technology already changing that will make it easier to do that kind of thing.

Now I am an established politician in my area actually things like Twitter, My Local Media will pick up on. We send out press releases

as well. I did send out press releases in the election campaign, I would say that was not particularly successful.

Anthony Newman: Why would a safe seat candidate bother using Twitter?

Therese Coffey: Great question, especially as last summer I got hacked which was very unpleasant. I got hacked on Facebook, Webmail, Twitter, oh the lot, my blog. It's a good point, why is it? For one thing it is an easy way to get out a quick message to people. There is a risk that you give away too much information perhaps on the campaign. So, that's why speaking to other colleagues since the election quite a lot of them would say what they have done rather than what they were going to do. This particularly true in tighter seats where they were concerned about disruption to their activity.

I think it's-, I very rarely use Facebook now, I find Facebook very time consuming. Twitter is, it is not a two-, it's not a one way process but you can be if you want it to be if that makes sense. You don't have to, you don't have to get involved in long streams of conversation, it is very quick. In terms of blogs, I don't blog as much as I used to again because they are time consuming so what I find is that something is on the go, that's easy gets out a quick message I think is quite useful to do that.

The other thing I use Twitter for actually is to be keep abreast of news. So, I follow all the news breaking sites, my local media sites just to have a quick, what they have got on their headlines. Instead of again having to go buy the paper or get online subscription so. It's quite interesting, some reaction, a lot of people who follow me on Twitter from the constituency are not particularly pro-me. But what I think it does I am able to at least demonstrate that I am being proactive within the constituency because one of the accusations about us being in a so called safe seat is that you've won your seat, we will never see you ever again. I think this is an easy way to track it.

On another side I actually use Twitter to help me with my expenses. So, for some reason our email system keeps deleting diaries. I don't know why, I don't know what's up with Outlook, Twitter is there and fairly permanent unless you delete it yourself and I go back and can track exactly what I have done. So, it is quite helpful as a little social mental record as well.

Anthony Newman: Do you publish your expenses on Twitter?

Therese Coffey: No I don't, no. Although the very first time they came out I put a link to it. Now people know where to go and what to do, the newspaper does it for them anyway. So, the very first one it did put all my expenses on twitter, yes.

Anthony Newman: Do you think that social media converts into votes in your constituency, the use of it sorry?

Therese Coffey: Err, possibly, possibly and that's where Facebook is more likely. But I think the risk of social media, emails or whatever it is; it is too easy to get involved if that makes sense. I think people can be concerned and doubt your genuine commitment, you know if you just join a group on

Facebook, it doesn't require any active involvement. I think -, I know there was an incident that happened, it affected more my opponent than me where a local charity got quite cross and thought the candidate was trying to hijack an event for their own gain. Because they had brought a video camera with them and they made sure they were in the front and so on.

They got quite cross, a little bit with both of us but I went to the following two events that they held and then I was able to build my credibility through that. So, so I think social media allows people to see some of the things you're interested in. There may be a bit of cynicism but if you follow through on it that might be converted to some extent in, "Well she's alright." Interestingly although we haven't got the referendum on AV yet, I think that kind of credibility to show that you are proactively engaged and social media is a way to use that if you want to may mean that in the future, "Well I might not agree with everything the Conservative Party is doing but Therese's okay and I know she's keen on this and so on."

It can work the other way you know I do express views on particular issues and I am-, would vote for the Hunting repeal, to reveal the Hunting Act. A lot of constituents don't like that but they have to make their decision in the end what they are going to vote on. But it's the one thing any politician has to remember elected or not is once you've published it, it can never be retracted. I think that's one of the risks a little bit of social media but rarely is it life threatening if that makes sense. So, as long as you're again seen to be credible but you have got to be careful you shouldn't Tweet when you've had a few drinks.

Anthony Newman: On that note are there any security risks involving social media?

Therese Coffey: Yes, I was hacked last summer. I think it was somebody in the House of Commons, I think I made the mistake of not clearing my data when I logged off a computer, a shared computer. The person who hacked me probably in an odd way they put such unpleasant things on that it was obvious that it wasn't me. Perhaps if they had been a little bit cleverer they could have done something that could potentially have been far more damaging. So, I am not going to refer to what they said and through one- and it made me change my security procedure. I did actually have different passwords for them all but the common link was an email address, my Webmail. Once they got into that they could basically you know do the forgotten password and change it all and that's what happened and it took me a while to get control back.

I got control back of Facebook, my blog and Webmail within about two hours, three hours. I didn't manage to get control of Twitter for about four days so that was a-, that was a pain. So, that's where I think it can be-, I think when people set up fake sites I haven't done that. Sorry, people haven't yet done that to me. I have made sure that I have bought extra domains so that people can't set up as me. I have registered an extra Twitter account; I probably should register a few more.

I think Facebook, I am not aware of many fake sites on Facebook. I don't know but the other thing that is quite interesting Anthony is Wikipedia. You'll be aware that anybody can write anything on

Wikipedia and it was Tim Montgomerie who advised candidates before the last election to make sure they checked it rigorously and got stuff changed or whatever. I've taken a different view, I have never touched Wikipedia. So, I can confidently say whatever is on there I have never put on there. I feel in a way if I started changing things you can't be on top of it 24 hours a day.

So, if an entry comes up and a journalist takes it or whatever and I challenge them and I do challenge journalists on some of the things they put in my name, I can say, "Look I have never touched it, that has no credibility whatsoever," and then it is more difficult for them to use it whereas if I say, "Yes I put that on there," and then it gets like that so... So, Wikipedia is a bit of an odd one but I think a lot more people-, are a lot more people aware to it? Actually they are not, I think the majority of the population believe in Wikipedia is true but at least I can say well I have never put any information on there.

Anthony Newman: Social media, the use of the internet, things like Wikipedia are all fairly new in terms of their role in politics.

Therese Coffey: Yes.

Anthony Newman: Does the central party have a good understanding of these phenomena and does the central party advise its members, activists and candidates in general.

Therese Coffey: In my view the party I am not aware really of any advice it has ever given on any of these issues. I know some groups within the party have given advice. I am about to re-launch the parliamentary branch of the Conservative Technology Forum and we have a group on the 1922 which is looking at campaigning. One of the aspects of that is I think we need to work out how we can be a bit more-, significantly more proactive on internet based communication. I would be surprised if we even had the appropriate legal things on there or something like that. I think that's not very well understood.

What I hope to see from the party is that they will continue to put some stress on this. I believe they have just recruited somebody or in the process of recruiting people on the social media side. I think things slipped away a little bit generally in central office when we got into government because a number of people moved from central office into Number 10 and other government departments. That rebuilding work had started and I think is being accelerated of core competence within our headquarters. I haven't seen much evidence of it in the run up to the May elections of this year and the referendum; we've started to see more.

But I think that it is quite interesting and this is a personal reflection, I find that people up until the age of about 25 to 30 are more Facebook orientated. People like me 30 plus or perhaps even closer to 40 as I am and a lot of the media are Twitter orientated. So, we need to work out how we make that work. Somebody who works for me said, "Therese the problem with your generation is you are all Tweeting and we're all Facebooking," So we need to work on that.

But we should be able to cover a wide range of issues and I think what the party did do well on the general election last year was a lot of different campaign based sites which I think responded to the single issue driven interests of a lot of younger people. We need to make sure we keep on top of that.

Anthony Newman: If there is something about the nature of Facebook and the nature of Twitter that differs so that one would attract younger individuals in political engagement and one would attract people of your age.

Therese Coffey: I think Twitter is very much news and chat. Facebook has blossomed into-, and sorry and Twitter is trying to take things from Facebook and bring it into the Twitter atmosphere. So, using pictures, links to other things. Using the hash tag for trending I think is-, I don't think Facebook does that which I think is distinctive. I don't know if there is the same obsession with followers are there are with friends, there might be. There is etiquette within Twitter, I'm not conscious quite the same with Facebook. So, I think there is still something generational, the discipline of fitting something to 140 characters does seem challenging to people who are younger than me, who work for me.

The brevity of it I think is a bit more challenging but as I say I think it's, I think Twitter is just-, what I find is it's very quick whereas Facebook for me trying to do it on a BlackBerry just doesn't have the same impact because it is too big. You have actually got to spend time at a computer doing it and then you get all this rubbish about games. One of the reasons I don't like Facebook particularly is because forever people are sending you stuff that you then have to give permission and that opens up all your data. I'm very conscious about that and I wonder if that's something, I wonder if people realise on Facebook how much data they give away to other people. Sorry I have diverted there, I apologise.

Anthony Newman: I'll bring us back.

Therese Coffey: Yes, yes please do.

Anthony Newman: Is there a social difference between Twitter and Facebook?

Therese Coffey: Yes, I think there is. I think as I say brevity, a quick chat with a few links here and there, Facebook is much more comprehensive and time consuming. I don't know quite why it appeals so differently to people with different ages. Perhaps Facebook is that much more comprehensive safe area that people can do from the privacy of their own bedroom and home. Whereas Twitter I feel is much more on the move. You wouldn't sit at your desk particularly and do Twitter.

Anthony Newman: Which blog in your opinion is most central to the Conservative Party?

Therese Coffey: Without question ConservativeHome, without a question.

Anthony Newman: What role does ConservativeHome play in Conservative Party organisation?

Therese Coffey: It-, the one thing it did and perhaps I'm talking as a you know for a candidate, it opened up the whole news about candidacies, it opened up

the conversations about different selections. I think the risk of ConservativeHome is that it attracts people who are very strongly opinionated. I don't look at it as much as I used to. I look at it once a day to get a quick headline on stories and see kind of what's out there. I think it does serve a useful; it serves as a platform for people to float ideas and some policy kind of work, I think that's good. I find it mostly as a news portal. The other websites that is particularly useful is PoliticsHome, but that's not Conservative orientated.

Whereas the parties own website is-, can be quite flash but I think things like the Blue Blog, it has got the imprint of the party. So, there isn't really much free and open discussion and although as I say ConservativeHome it can get a bit fixated, some of the people who write in it serves a very useful purpose.

Anthony Newman: Have you written for ConservativeHome?

Therese Coffey: I can't remember if I have or not. I think I have done one article, I'm not even sure. I was going to do one on one. I am trying to think because I have done something for Tim Montgomerie but I can't remember if it was on ConservativeHome or for his-, or the more professional side of it. I did an article for him on big society so I can't remember. I think that's the other thing about blogging, Facebook it takes a lot more of your time and as a-, I now do a weekly column in a newspaper plus a fortnightly column in another newspaper and that takes up quite a lot of time as it is.

The house magazine is often asking you to do things and if you want to craft something very good in 400 or 500 words it actually takes quite a lot of time and effort to do that whereas twitter it is 140 characters.

Anthony Newman: Is there a type of candidate that would benefit from using ConservativeHome as a platform?

Therese Coffey: I think it's a good-, a good window a shop window for people to think through, suggest some ideas. The risk is that of course there will be a lot of people who will disagree with you. So, if you haven't got a thick skin you might not like all the criticism that comes back as a consequence of it. But I think it is a useful way if you are not well known to the party hierarchy, I think they do look at that. I think they will see things they think are interesting. It is also a way potentially to get involved with the mainstream media but again normally they only pick up stories that are particularly controversial or risky or whatever. So, I think use it with care is the best way to suggest it but I don't think people should be frightened of using it or putting their views forward. But they should always remember that it is there forever and that's an important thing about all of this media stuff.

Anthony Newman: Do you think ConservativeHome plays any role in the way CCHQ conducts its business?

Therese Coffey: I don't know I think, I think they are alert to it and it probably gives them an early warning system of issues. I think ConservativeHome played a great part, did really well in the by-elections in the previous campaign. You know they got people together and mobilised and went and helped, actually in Crewe, Nantwich. That's the one I remember

vividly and I think it can be a useful ally but it doesn't pretend to be the voice of the Conservative Party and nor should it be. I am sure at times the party finds ConservativeHome very irritating. But what I think and hope is recognised is it a free-, it is a fair mouthpiece for people and sometimes I've been surprised by what people will put on there thinking is that really what you meant to say or what impact do you think you're going to have as a result of that. Sometimes damaging, other times I'm thinking yes I have never heard of this person before and they have really something valuable to contribute.

So, I think it is in terms of defining the Conservative Party they might pick up on a few things like warning signals or, "Oh I don't know this person." So, as I was just saying a little bit earlier good shop window. But I don't think it determines conservative policy on any issue particularly it may give them as I say flash warnings about, "This is proving more difficult than we hoped," Or similar but it doesn't determine who wins the elections to the convention I don't believe that kind of thing.

Anthony Newman: In terms of the role that ConservativeHome plays in campaigns do you think it is a positive or negative force?

Therese Coffey: I'd say largely positive yes.

Anthony Newman: In terms of, I had questions coming out of my head...

Therese Coffey: One of the risks for ConservativeHome is that when people write on there.

Anthony Newman: I just have some notes on it.

Therese Coffey: Sure, when people do write on there, there was a risk and I think it can still be used as if it is an official voice of the party. So, when there are comments in there which are clearly quite outrageous or similar, I think it is a little bit of a risk. But that I think was difficult to handle at first and now it's easier to handle.

Anthony Newman: The question I was going to ask which I forgot, it shot out of my head. The Conservative Party have talked a lot about transparency and using the internet in terms of government transparency. Is ConservativeHome the equivalent for Conservative Party organisation?

Therese Coffey: Err, yes and no which is a classic answer. I think as I was suggesting earlier quite a lot of transparency opened up the news, comment, gossip about candidate selection which never used to be in the-, in the open atmosphere. I think also for potential candidates they should realise of course that associations, not all do but can go looking on the internet finding out things about people as well. ConservativeHome will be part of that so there may be negative stories put in. I think the people who run ConservativeHome are a lot more sensitive to that and will block comments which are deliberately being done to denigrate people which is good because it shouldn't be used to try and pre-emptively destroy people's careers.

In other ways is it the transparency, it's not but as I was trying to suggest before it is a way that people can have a view and articulate a

view on the party and some of what's going on. But I don't see it as the transparency vehicle, it might shed some sunlight on a few things which encourages people to be proactive in their discussions, I think is the best way of saying it.

Anthony Newman: David Cameron is for some academics hailed as the first leader of a party to really use the internet in a significant way when he launched WebCameron. He later went on to say, "Too many Tweets make a twat," Is there any conflict in those two issues?

Therese Coffey: Well, I think David Cameron you are absolutely right, WebCameron was a great thing but it was very controlled. So, there was nothing interactive about it. He then later I believe, I mean I wasn't involved in the campaign in that regard, I believe he did some online chats, things with Mumsnet and other stuff where you don't have control of the media. So, you don't have control of what people are asking you. I think the thing about Twitter with him possibly I think originally Twitter did start off and it is kind of like a bit of a, "So what thing," You know make a cup of tea or something but I think it has evolved significantly and not all but you know but not all the leading journalists on it but quite a lot are. How can I put it, Number 10 now has its own Twitter account and continues to have it.

There are many minister, William Hague has his own. I don't know that many of the cabinet who proactively use it but Grant Shapps is a veteran tweeter as is Eric Pickles. There is quite a few who are keen to use it; some will get more engaged than others. Some people use it as a one way tool but I would say I don't know how many of the new intake of conservative MPs have it. Some people avoid it because they don't want to take the risk but you know it is a bit of an element of control and you just need to be self-controlled in what you say. When you are doing it to video and webcam how can I put it you can always have a second take. But the Prime Minister is very adept to his communication strategy so he feels probably he doesn't need to have his own Twitter account.

Anthony Newman: Traditionally a party, political parties had been used to controlling the output of political communication has the internet done anything to change that. Does the Conservative Party do anything to try and control the output of the party as a whole in terms of social media and other types of internet?

Therese Coffey: I would say the one thing the party has possibly said from memory is about being careful on policy. So, one of the big changes the internet brought was the requirement to be careful in what you say and have it robust to rebuttal. The internet gives you great opportunity to do rapid rebuttal, or sorry to challenge. So, there is that back and forth. People do it in the chamber today, they will quickly look on their BlackBerry or now their iPads to say, "Yes but they said only three weeks ago this is what they said." So, it's changed the pace of communication which is understandably why governments, political parties want to be very careful in the controlling of their communication.

It only takes a couple of words to destroy. If you are in a position of authority especially to destroy the message you are trying to get out and that then becomes the story. So, I don't think it's unique, I don't think

it is a recent phenomenon. I think they have always been careful on how they control the message, it has got stronger and stronger perhaps and I think the internet has been able to give at least give a bit of a push back to say in terms of the rapid challenge. I won't say any more.

Anthony Newman: You mentioned the use of internet phones and BlackBerry's in the chamber.

Therese Coffey: Yes.

Anthony Newman: How between your colleagues has the internet changed the way you communicate?

Therese Coffey: I would, what with each other or...?

Anthony Newman: Yes, in terms of you know you said the use of BlackBerry's in the chamber and getting information that is a fairly recent thing. Has that changed the culture of being an MP and communicating with other...?

Therese Coffey: Well I can't tell if it has changed the culture because of only being here since last May. What I think it's done is, there are a few reasons why MPs will use their whatever and the BlackBerry. One is because you are sitting there for several hours and you want to get through your email or at least look at issues or something like that. There are times in speeches when people make quite strong statements and as I was just alluding to earlier getting onto the internet and checking it is a way that you can then stand up and intervene. I am not sure strictly speaking you are supposed to do that but I find that-, the point is you either you go outside of the chamber and it or you just do it where you are.

Interestingly the network signals in the chamber are very poor, in fact a lot of people can't use them at all. I don't think that's a bad thing. You don't need your little computer there all the time to say, "But on this day you said that," But it is helpful from time to time but I think the risk is you end up missing the debate. Interestingly I use the direct messages to people on my own side or on the other side to have a quiet conversation rather than just a one off really, rather than always sending notes along. Because sometimes people have the habit of not always unless you put it in an envelope which is very un-green of not-, of making sure that they might have a quick scan of the message on route so therefore texts, direct messages are quite helpful with that.

Anthony Newman: Final question, if, in a hypothetical sense, the internet had not existed in any way during your 2010 general election campaign, would your campaign have been significantly different?

Therese Coffey: Yes, I think it would have been back to more the traditional campaign of the 80's. You probably would have had more direct press conferences, more direct contact with journalists. I did speak to journalists but I was also able to email them press releases and similar. I think we possibly would-, would we have had more town meetings? Not necessarily. People get quite a lot of information from their local radio and local TV, so more activity with that possibly. I think that the advance of the internet as I tried to suggest earlier I don't think it particularly converts into votes particularly or converting people especially. But it may make people more inclined to go out and

actually vote in terms of recognising some of the work that people have been able to do or getting answers to people.

I expect more-, fewer people-, nowadays a lot of my communications are by email and it is easier for people to get in touch. I think that element of remoteness would have been reinforced in a rural seat if we didn't have the internet. So, at least people feel that they can get in touch. It's an interesting balance Anthony because I feel actually the internet, emails and others get in one way gets too much attention and can take you away from actually going and meeting people and you always have to bear that in mind.

It would be very easy to spend all day on the computer and never actually go and see anybody but I think that would be wrong. Because if all we needed to do was to employ computer people to be politicians then we would not have that expectation of going out and doing that. So, I don't regret the internet at all, I think it is an all enhancing, it makes things more immediate. It cuts down the timelines for people so it does add stress, there is an expectation of a lot more responsiveness which can be used both ways.

How can I put it one of my favourite days in the campaign was when I was in an area where there was no signal. So, we were able to go and frankly just go and have a nice old fashioned day of campaigning and pressing the flash and delivering leaflets and just having a nice time. Not necessarily being at the end of a phone or being able to see the latest headlines. So, from time to time it is nice to chill out.

Anthony Newman: And on that anecdotal moment, thank you very much Therese.

Therese Coffey: Thank you.

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