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PAPERS OF JOSEPH CHAMBERLAIN



Winston Churchill once wrote that Joseph Chamberlain "made the weather" in British politics. Through his radical ideals he split both the main British parties, the Liberals by opposing Home Rule for Ireland, and the Conservatives over tariff reform. *The Papers of Joseph Chamberlain* highlight his political career as Mayor of Birmingham to Secretary of State for the Colonies and the fight over tariff reforms with which he ended his career. This collection demonstrates the rapid change in politics, particularly the constant change in allegiances between politicians and Chamberlain's own development as a politician. Newspaper clippings of his early speeches, the only record still existing of them, can also be found in this collection, recording his political career from start to finish.

Date Range: 1836-1914

Content: 141,316 images

Source Library: University of Birmingham Library

Detailed Description:

Joseph Chamberlain established a model that politicians and pundits still use to classify and judge the performance of Britain's political leaders. He commonly heads the list for most outstanding statesman who never became Prime Minister. By the time he took charge of the British empire at its height at the turn of the century, he had already distinguished himself as a civic reformer. He set about posing the most serious challenge to the free-trading economic orthodoxy that had been dominant in Britain since the mid-nineteenth century.

His first step into politics was as the Mayor of Birmingham, where he had built a company that manufactured screws. In his early adulthood he was a radical Liberal Party member and a campaigner for educational reform, standing up to Gladstone over elementary education. He entered the House of Commons aged nearly forty, relatively late in life for a front-rank politician. He served as President of the Board of Trade in Gladstone's second government and was notable for his attacks on the Conservative government leader, Lord Salisbury. He resigned from Gladstone's third government in 1886 in opposition to Irish Home Rule, splitting the Liberal Party and becoming a Liberal Unionist. Under his former opponent,

Lord Salisbury, he accepted the post of Secretary of State for the Colonies and, in this job, he presided over the Second Boer War and was the dominant figure in the Unionist Government's re-election at the "Khaki Election" in 1900. Three years later Chamberlain resigned from the Cabinet to campaign for tariff reforms, obtaining support from most of the Unionist MPs, but creating a split that contributed to the landslide Unionist defeat in the 1906 general election.

His papers are among the most important collections on British domestic and international politics from 1870 to the outbreak of the First World War. They are also revealing for business history, as he first made his name as a metal manufacturer. They provide insight into urban history, as he turned Birmingham into one of the best-governed cities in the industrial world. They are also highly informative about women's history and family matters, as the papers contain many letters from his parents, wives and children.

Key documents found in this collection:

- Personal Letters and diaries
- Accounts books and records kept as Financial and Marketing Manager at Nettlefold and Chamberlain and notes for a lawsuit over his later investment in a sisal plantation in the Bahamas
- Papers from his term at the Board of Trade, containing much on his attempt to curb the loss of life at sea in the British merchant shipping fleet
- Newspaper clippings of his speeches collected by his second wife (many of which did not survive in any other form) reviews of his career and his funeral
- Politically important letters between Chamberlain and John Morley, Sir Charles Dilke, Sir William Harcourt, A.J. Balfour, among others
- Political papers on domestic politics, focussing on the work of party organisation, fighting of elections and the formation of national policy
- Correspondence on the proposal to provide the Jewish people with a homeland in east Africa, on the fight against tropical disease which crippled the imperial enterprise in west Africa and with Lord Milner, the British High Commissioner in South Africa
- Letters regarding the campaign for imperial preference and tariff reform
- Irish correspondence regarding the issue of Home Rule in the 1880s
- Minutes, notebooks and semi-official diaries on his career as Colonial Secretary
- Family scrap albums, photographs and cartoons