



Thatcher's Pension Reforms

Project Briefing no. 4, Jan 2017

Looking back at 2016

During 2016 we continued to undertake archival research in the National Archive, the Conservative Party Archive, the archives of the Centre for Policy Studies and the papers of Alfred Sherman and of Chancellors Howe and Lawson, amongst others. This is, not least, because we are taking advantage of a rapidly moving document release horizon as a consequence of the National Archive's phased transition from a 30-year to a 20-year rule. We began to conduct our first oral history interviews, and we have started to present initial results of our research and analysis at a number of conferences. We are now beginning to write up our findings for publication.

Conference activities

We organised the following conference panels in 2016

- 'Neoliberalism and the Thatcher revolution'. Economic History Society's annual conference, Robinson College, Cambridge, 1-3 Apr. Panel participants: Drs Aled Davies, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Ben Jackson.
- 'Evaluating the "neoliberal revolution"'. The annual conference of the North Atlantic Conference on British Studies, Washington DC, 11-13 Nov. Panel participants: Drs Ben Jackson, Aled Davies, and Andrew Seaton.

The project's team members presented the following papers at these and other conferences

- 'The Political Economy of British Pension Funds: Neoliberalism versus Social Democracy, c.1970-1986' presented by Dr Aled Davies to Cambridge University's Modern Economic and Social History Seminar, 3 Mar 2016.
- 'Historical institutionalism and the making of UK pensions policy', presented by Dr Hugh Pemberton at the annual conference of the

Political Studies Association, Brighton, 21-23 Mar 2016.

- 'Thatcherism and the Neoliberal Critique of Pension Funds, 1970-86' presented by Dr Aled Davies to the annual conference of the Economic History Society, Robinson College, Cambridge, 1-3 Apr 2016.
- 'The United Kingdom', presented by Dr Hugh Pemberton at 'The Welfare State at the End of the Long Boom, 1965-1980', University College Dublin, 14-15 Apr 2016.
- 'Personalising pensions', presented by Dr Aled Davies to the annual meeting of the North Atlantic Conference on British Studies, Washington D.C., 11-13 Nov 2016

Published outputs

In terms of published outputs, the second half of 2016 saw the submission of an article to the *Historical Journal* exploring Thatcherite ideas about 'the individual'; finalisation of a proposal for the project monograph; and the writing of its first two chapters.

History and Politics

In addition, building on the project's interest in linking the history of 1980s pension reforms to present issues confronting pension policy makers, Drs Pemberton and Freeman were amongst the founder members of the Political Studies Association's specialist group on [Politics & History](#), which was launched at the Association's conference in Brighton in March 2016. They both took part in a roundtable discussion at the conference, alongside Prof. Nick Pearce (former head of the No. 10 Policy Unit, director of the think tank IPPR, and now head of Bath University's Institute of Policy Research), Dr Catherine Haddon (historian in residence at the Institute for Government) and Dr Ben Wellings (Monash University). Dr Pemberton also gave the plenary address at the 'Breaking boundaries' conference at the University of Birmingham on 29 June, in which he again called for a greater engagement between con-

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This 4-year AHRC-funded project began work in September 2015. It is exploring reforms to Britain's pension system implemented by the Conservatives in the 1980s and assessing their longer-term consequences.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Details of the project team, the project blog and publications can be found online at www.thatchers-pension-reforms.uk

The project's Principal Investigator, Dr [Hugh Pemberton](#), can provide further information. Email: h.pemberton@bristol.ac.uk

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temporary historians and scholars working in Political Science.

Looking ahead to 2017

In 2017, our activity will turn decisively from documentary research to oral history, and to publications. We will also continue to consult documents recently released at the leading-edge of the 20-year rule transition.

Oral history interviews

We will conduct a number of oral history interviews with key actors from the 1980s in government, the financial service sector, the actuarial profession, and in other institutions involved in pension reform during the decade.

Witness seminar

On the evening of 7 June, in association with the Institute and Faculty of Actuaries, we will hold a 'witness seminar' on the Inquiry into Provision for Retirement which Norman Fowler set up in November 1983 and which proved to be a key episode in the formulation of reform proposals.

Lord Fowler will be present at the witness seminar along with Sir Nicholas Montagu (secretary to the Inquiry), Chris Daykin (the former Government Actuary), John Redwood MP (then at the No.10 Policy Unit), Sir Adam Ridley (special advisor to the then Chancellor of the Exchequer),

and (we hope) Lord Vinson (Centre for Policy Studies and co-architect of the original personal pensions proposal). The event will be held at Staple Inn, High Holborn. We hope that it will be live-streamed as well as recorded. A transcription will be published for the use of future scholars.

Further details of the witness seminar will appear on the project website in due course.

Publications

We hope that our recently submitted article will be published by a scholarly journal ("Everyman a capitalist?" or 'Free to Choose'? Exploring the tensions within Thatcherite individualism").

A book chapter on the UK by Hugh Pemberton will also appear in E. Eklund, M. Oppenheimer, & J. Scott (eds.) *The welfare state at the end of the long boom* (Oxford: Peter Lang).

The project's principal investigator, Hugh Pemberton, has also used the research conducted as part of the project to provide an historical perspective on the present 'WASPI' campaign to compensate '1950s women' for the rise in their retirement age from 60 to 66. This should appear shortly in the *Political Quarterly*.

We will, of course, continue to write our monograph and academic journal articles.

Project conference

During 2017 we start to organise a project conference, provisionally scheduled to be held in Jan 2018, with contributors' papers then published in an edited volume. Our current plan is that the conference will consider pensions privatisation in comparative historical perspective.

Impact

We believe that our research has considerable potential to interest and influence policy making today – not least because the landscape of pensions today owes so much to the reforms of the Thatcher era.

During 2017 we will begin to undertake more 'impact' related activity by engaging with government, with MPs, and with other non-academic participants in the broadly defined 'policy universe'. In that endeavour we hope to make good use of a new institutional partnership forged by the University of Bristol with [History & Policy](#) – the discipline's pre-eminent body promoting links between History and policy-makers, journalists and other policy actors. The partnership was inaugurated in January 2017.