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Sir Austen Chamberlain, the Marquess of Crewe and Anglo-French Relations, 1924-1928.

Gaynor Johnson.

Sir Austen Chamberlain's term of office as British Foreign Secretary between 1924 and 1929 was one of the longest and most important of the interwar period. By the time of his departure, many were convinced that he had been instrumental in brokering one of the most important western European security agreements since the First World War, the Treaty of Locarno, in October 1925. A treaty that was regarded at the time as being such a significant diplomatic breakthrough that it was viewed as the 'real' peace settlement at the end of the First World War between Germany and the Allies. Until his death in 1937, Chamberlain continued to regard his role in the negotiation of the Treaty of Locarno as the high point of his career: an opinion with which historians have concurred, despite the fact that many of the same scholars have subsequently questioned the long-term diplomatic significance of that agreement.<sup>1</sup> Most assessments of Chamberlain's role in concluding the Treaty of Locarno and indeed of his period as Foreign Secretary as a whole have focussed on the impact of his very personal pro-French sympathies on the strategies he pursued. This aspect of Chamberlain's mind map between 1924 and 1929 was first highlighted by Douglas Johnson in the early 1960s in an article that shaped Chamberlain historical reputation in foreign affairs for more than a generation.<sup>2</sup> Chamberlain's most recent biographer, David Dutton, writing in the mid 1980s, offered a more restrained view of his subject's career at the Foreign Office.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Dutton did much to dispel the

view that Chamberlain was something of a 'lone wolf' in the Foreign Office and within the Cabinet, arguing that he enjoyed an often excellent relationship with his officials. Dutton's picture of Chamberlain as the more moderate francophile has largely remained unchallenged, although Richard Grayson's study of Chamberlain's Foreign Secretaryship implores its reader to move away from an Anglo-French focus when analysing his subject's contribution to the debate about western European security in the mid 1920s.<sup>4</sup> At Locarno, Grayson argues, Chamberlain was sympathetic to the security agendas of all of the powers in attendance, especially Germany, and he was thus *the* quintessential European statesman of the period, devoted to peace and European reconciliation. Earlier work on Chamberlain's Locarno diplomacy by the present author has taken issue with some of Grayson's points, especially with his claims concerning the Foreign Secretary's views on the German agenda.<sup>5</sup> This work also analysed the way in which Chamberlain's actions were seen by others, especially the view from Berlin as revealed by the British ambassador at the time, Lord D'Abernon. If this perspective is examined, a completely different view of Chamberlain's diplomatic strategy emerges, with very few of the nuances he believed to be self-evident in his thinking and in his choice of words being understood by those with whom he sought to communicate. This article continues the exploration of this important question of how successful Chamberlain was in communicating his diplomatic thinking to others by returning once again to the French dimension. It examines two principal questions. The first is relationship Chamberlain enjoyed with the longest-serving British ambassadors to Paris of the interwar period, the Marquess of Crewe (1922-1928), a diplomat about whom a surprisingly small amount has been written.<sup>6</sup> Yet Sir Charles Petrie, Chamberlain's first biographer, claimed that it was Crewe who was one of the ambassadors that

brought Chamberlain into the 'closest touch' with foreign affairs.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, many believed that there was such congruity between their thinking on Anglo-French relations that when Crewe contemplated retirement in November 1927, rumours circulated that Chamberlain would replace him as ambassador.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, this article will examine the way in which Crewe's understanding of Anglo-French relations impacted on Chamberlain's thinking on European security debate and its wider context. From this it will be deduced that Crewe played an invaluable role in the development of Chamberlain's strategic thinking.<sup>9</sup> Although not a career diplomatist, Crewe's interactions with Chamberlain over the European security debate and its consequences also demonstrate that the Marquess possessed important, mature insights into the complex relationship with Britain's most important European ally.

Socially and politically Chamberlain and Crewe were from very different backgrounds. Chamberlain, the upper middle class Conservative Midlands parvenu son of 'Radical Joe', was expected to live up to his father's expectations of him and assume the premiership. In contrast, Crewe, born in London but of Yorkshire stock, was from an aristocratic family with strong links to the nineteenth century seats of Liberal power, especially the Gladstone and Rosebery sets. But despite these considerations, the careers of these almost exact contemporaries mirrored each other on a number of levels.<sup>10</sup> By the 1920s, both had held high political office but were widely regarded as having failed to realise their ambition and potential. Chamberlain, as leader of the Conservative party had apparently thrown away his chance of the premiership by resigning over the outcome of the Carlton Club meeting in 1922. Although many would argue that achieving the rank of Foreign Secretary was hardly an indication of a failed political career, and, indeed, Chamberlain remained proud of his achievements when holding this office for the remainder of his life, the questions

about the soundness of his judgement that surrounded his decision to resign the party leadership were never fully dispelled, despite the success of Locarno. Yet Chamberlain's brilliant diplomatic achievements in 1925 did not secure a lasting role at the heart of European security diplomacy for him, with both his French and German opposite numbers, Briand and Stresemann, preferring to negotiate supplementary agreements with each other and with the Americans rather than with Britain. Chamberlain's periods of public and private mental turmoil that resulted from these frustrations were clearly chronicled in his correspondence with his maiden sisters, Ida and Hilda.<sup>11</sup>

Crewe's association with the Gladstonian Liberal party had secured his rapid rise in the party in the late 1880s and early 1890s. And in the decade leading up to the outbreak of the First World War, he was appointed Leader of the Liberals in the House of Lords in 1911 and Lord Privy Seal on two occasions, 1908-11 and 1912-15. Yet Crewe failed to convey the impression that he was a potential future leader of the party.<sup>12</sup> This was partly due to the fact that, like Chamberlain, Crewe had a natural rigidity of manner and personal diffidence that conveyed an unfortunate impression of aloofness and dryness.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in an era when Liberal politics was dominated by the oratorical brilliance of Lloyd George, a stammer rendered Crewe painfully uncomfortable when speaking in public, his speeches containing 'prolonged moments—almost minutes—of hesitation while he fastidiously chose the correct word'.<sup>14</sup> Despite these drawbacks, Crewe nevertheless obtained and sustained a reputation for sound judgement, solidity and trustworthiness. 'He knows his own mind' noted Charles Hobhouse, and 'is generally practical and progressive'.<sup>15</sup> But he was also modest about the importance that should be accorded to his advice. When presenting an analysis of the way in which Poincaré viewed the European security

question in the mid 1920s, Crewe told Chamberlain: 'You must take these different observations for what they are worth, which may not be a great deal.'<sup>16</sup> Crewe's lack of personal ambition and relaxed approach meant that he did not tend to be viewed as a professional threat by his contemporaries. Consequently, he was almost universally liked, his principal allies being the Conservative peer and former Viceroy of India, George Curzon<sup>17</sup> and the Liberal leader between 1908-1916, Herbert Asquith, who described Crewe as someone 'whose judgement I rate highest of any of my colleagues'.<sup>18</sup> His reluctance to speak in public meant that he chose the occasions when he did so with care, which earned him the reputation for 'never interven[ing] without effect or 'speak[ing] at unnecessary length.'<sup>19</sup>

Crewe's natural terseness is also evident in his use of the written word. Like Chamberlain and most of their generation, Crewe wrote a voluminous amount of private and official letters. But while Chamberlain's private correspondence offers an invaluable insight into the workings of the inner man, Crewe's letters, in contrast, seldom reveal anything other than bare factual details or present more than a superficial impression of the political and social milieu in which he operated. During his Paris embassy, this overwhelming shyness was reflected in Crewe's willingness to leave most of the day-to-day communication with the French government to his able, francophile Minister, Sir Eric Phipps, busying himself instead with the composition of his numerous official dispatches.<sup>20</sup> The latter provided a full account of the foreign policy priorities of all of the French governments that took office during Crewe's embassy, and their quality appears to have been appreciated by their recipients. Consequently, Ian Packer's assessment of Crewe's role in Paris as being 'largely ornamental' is, as this article aims to show, somewhat harsh.<sup>21</sup>

There were further dynamics at work in the relationship between Chamberlain and Crewe that had a bearing on how they viewed Anglo-French relations. When Crewe assumed the mantle of ambassador to Paris in 1922, he was sixty-four years old. Chamberlain, likewise was sixty-one in the year in which he became Foreign Secretary. Both men had good reason to believe that the best years of their careers were behind them. However, what has been overlooked in all previous assessments of Chamberlain's career at the Foreign Office is that he had managed to reach this age and this position without any practical experience of the conduct of foreign policy. Indeed, Crewe was the more experienced of the two. Appointed assistant private secretary to Lord Granville, Foreign Secretary in Gladstone's second ministry in 1883 on his arrival at Westminster, Crewe rose to the rank of Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1908 in the first Asquith government, a post he held for two years. Although it can hardly be said that he demonstrated a particular aptitude for foreign affairs, having acquired the reputation for being a 'sound administrator with few original ideas.'<sup>22</sup> When Chamberlain arrived at the Foreign Office in 1924, Crewe had also been in post for two years and had proved himself a steady influence on Anglo-French relations during the tensions surrounding the Ruhr crisis that began in January 1923.

The circumstances surrounding Crewe's appointment to the Paris embassy also have a bearing on how his contribution to the conduct of Anglo-French relations should be assessed. It was Crewe's political loyalties that indirectly shaped the appointment of his two immediate predecessors: the seventeenth Earl of Derby (1918-1920) and Lord Hardinge of Penshurst (1920-1922).<sup>23</sup> As early as 1917, Crewe's solid reliability had led him to be tipped as the successor to the influential francophile, Sir Francis Bertie, who had occupied the post of ambassador to Paris 1905-1918.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, Bertie hoped that Crewe would succeed him, describing him as ‘a great noble yet democratic in his views’ with a natural sympathy for the French that ‘would render him irresistible to them.’<sup>25</sup> However, Crewe’s friendship with Asquith precluded him from accepting the post as long as Lloyd George remained Prime Minister.<sup>26</sup> According to Harold Nicolson, the Foreign Office official and historian, it was Crewe, along with Curzon, who most accurately predicted the ‘disasters which would result were Mr Lloyd George to obtain an absolutely autocratic control of foreign policy.’<sup>27</sup> Derby’s embassy is important because he set the precedent that Crewe was destined to follow of appointing a man outside the Diplomatic Service to the Paris embassy.<sup>28</sup> Although Derby’s biographer was to describe his period as ambassador to Paris as marking the pinnacle of his career in public life, Derby himself was initially anxious to ensure that his embassy was as short as possible.<sup>29</sup> While he later warmed to the task, he remained in post only as a favour to Lloyd George and was often at odds with Curzon.<sup>30</sup> But it was the characteristics that Derby shared with Crewe that rendered his embassy an ultimate success, especially his ‘mental sanity, his physical solidity, his wealth and ancient lineage...’.<sup>31</sup> Hardinge, Derby’s successor, was, like Crewe, naturally reticent, but was not surrounded by officials with Phipps’ ability, francophile sympathies and gregarious nature. When Derby’s recall to London was announced, British and French officials wanted to ensure that his successor would offer a more optimistic view of the potential for collaboration between the two countries. Significantly, it was Hardinge who suggested Crewe’s appointment as his successor, although he was later to claim that he did so because ‘nobody else suitable could be found.’<sup>32</sup> But this was advice that Curzon was happy to receive, because by the time of the fall of the Lloyd George government in the autumn of 1922, Crewe had become one of the Foreign Secretary’s ‘most trusted



friends.’<sup>33</sup> As far as Curzon was concerned, Crewe’s brief as incoming ambassador was two-fold. First, he should endeavour to persuade the French that continuing to view Germany with hostility and suspicion was likely to have a self-defeating effect on European security negotiations. Second, that he be aware that the maintenance of a strong entente between Britain and France was a *sine qua non* for a workable agreement to be reached on this issue.<sup>34</sup>

Significantly, both Chamberlain and Crewe were committed francophiles. Chamberlain spoke French fluently having completed part of his education at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques in Paris.<sup>35</sup> Crewe ‘spoke French better than any Englishman’, and unlike the Foreign Secretary, retained an academic interest in the study of French history, politics and culture throughout his period in public life, adding substantially to his library at Crewe Hall during his Paris embassy.<sup>36</sup> When Chamberlain arrived at the Foreign Office in the autumn of 1924, Crewe was already accustomed to working with two foreign secretaries, Curzon and Ramsay MacDonald, who placed a great deal of store on conducting diplomacy through personal communication, either by private letter or through face-to-face conversation.<sup>37</sup> The effectiveness of Chamberlain’s relationship with Crewe thus can partly be attributed to the similarities of their preferred working styles, with the Foreign Secretary placing a great deal of emphasis on his personal rapport with his French opposite number, Aristide Briand.

However, it was a different dynamic that partly governed their general perception of the Anglo-French relationship between 1924 and 1928. Although it has been suggested that Chamberlain was not blind to the diplomatic problems created by the French government’s often-obsessive concern with security, it is nevertheless true that the Foreign Secretary frequently relied on his own personal instincts when

dealing with this matter.<sup>38</sup> In a speech in the House of Commons in March 1925, Chamberlain stated that 'No nation can live, as we live, within twenty miles of the shores of the Continent of Europe and remain indifferent to the peace and security of the Continent.'<sup>39</sup> Inheriting the post of Foreign Secretary at a time when the ongoing crisis concerning the occupation of the Ruhr had left Anglo-French relations at their lowest ebb for more than a decade, Chamberlain believed that his personal affinity with France and with the French world view would be instrumental in rebuilding that relationship. Crewe's general view of the significance of the Entente Cordiale was, in contrast, much less sentimental and reveals a natural disinclination towards a collectivist approach towards diplomatic problem solving. In March 1925, he advised that: 'The day we show that we intend to "plough our lonely furrow" and to evade any kind of continental commitments, that fear will assume panic proportions, and, coupled with the military preponderance above referred to, together with the realisation that that preponderance is necessarily and steadily dwindling, may well, indeed is bound, I fear, to lead to some supreme act of folly which may have disastrous consequences for the peace and for the economic stability of Europe.'<sup>40</sup>

Two years later, in a rare comment on the protracted disarmament negotiations at Geneva, Crewe argued that the French harboured some important misconceptions about British policy towards Europe that had existed since the outbreak of the First World War. Britain did not go to war in 1914 simply to defend Belgian neutrality or to 'rescue' France. Nor was it true that without British assistance, France would have 'lost the war'. Instead, Britain took up arms because 'if we had stood aside in 1914, and the Germans had become the undoubted masters of Europe, our turn would have come next, even to the point of our probably losing command of the sea.'<sup>41</sup> While he agreed that European security and disarmament were of central importance to the

British government, such matters should be primarily discussed to protect British interests against a potentially resurgent Germany. Bolstering the entente with France should not necessarily be the first priority. Furthermore, France's blossoming relationship with the successor states in Eastern Europe, especially Hungary and Poland, should be encouraged by the British government and viewed as a way of moving away from 'our being represented as simply the saviours of France'.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the negotiations of the Treaty of Locarno in 1925 also provides other important means of assessing the Crewe and Chamberlain's view of the wider context of the Anglo-French relationship. Both men's instinct was that the British government should begin the process of creating western European security through bilateral negotiations, although, as this article will reveal, that was only occasionally evident in their correspondence with each other. Where they differed was over with which country that should be. Although Chamberlain later embraced the idea of a tripartite agreement with Germany, his preferred course of action had been to conclude a treaty of mutual guarantee with France that would later be extended to include Germany. Crewe, on the other hand, believed that the British government should be willing to give greater acknowledgement to the fact that the most recent impetus for a multilateral security pact had come from Berlin, not from Paris.<sup>43</sup> It was thus important that the British government focus on German suggestions and requirements and weave those of France into the process of negotiation only as and when they fitted the Anglo-German agenda. In his thinking, Crewe seems to have been influenced more by the thinking of his opposite number in Berlin, Lord D'Abernon, who was an early advocate of a policy of reconciliation with Germany, than by the priorities of the Foreign Secretary.<sup>44</sup> In March 1925, Crewe reminded Chamberlain that: 'It must be borne in mind that France is now, and will be for the

next few years at any rate, in a position, both on land and in the air, of overwhelming military preponderance over Germany.’<sup>45</sup> Crewe’s opinions thus provide further indication of the extent to which Chamberlain’s Anglo-French-centric approach to the security question did set him apart from his ambassadorial advisers and from the majority of the Cabinet.<sup>46</sup> It was also an ironic situation. For it was Chamberlain who began the process of passing D’Abernon’s dispatches to Crewe during the early weeks of the security pact negotiations in exasperated response to the German government’s insistence that there should be no discussion between London and Paris of the content of the note until the British response had been made.<sup>47</sup>

In his correspondence with D’Abernon, Chamberlain was much less confident that a multilateral security pact that included Germany as a signatory power from the outset would yield results than he was in his communications with Crewe. As early as February 1925, when the French government were considering the first German note, Chamberlain told the Marquess that ‘in the circumstances of to-day a guarantee of the Eastern frontiers of France and Belgium by Great Britain would be rendered a much more practical policy if Germany was associated with it.’<sup>48</sup> It is important to consider that Chamberlain’s confidence also partly stemmed from dispatches from Crewe the month before that had emphasised the French government’s desire to become part of the security negotiations as soon as possible, the ambassador having reported that the French Chamber had listened to Herriot ‘in almost religious silence’ when he had ‘addressed himself with great emotion to his British friends across the Channel about security...’.<sup>49</sup> And mindful of his ability to influence the Foreign Secretary’s spirits, as the security negotiations progressed, Crewe endeavoured to broaden Chamberlain’s vision. To persuade him to move away from the idea that a

security guarantee that also embraced France's Eastern European allies 'was not worth the bones of a British Grenadier.'<sup>50</sup>

Crewe's desire to maintain pressure on Chamberlain to embrace a multilateral approach to the question of a western European security pact also stemmed from his knowledge that the Foreign Secretary was in close communication with his opposite number in London, Aimé de Fleuriau.<sup>51</sup> The French ambassador was initially sceptical about the advisability of including Germany from the outset of the negotiations and was not averse to making this point bluntly to Chamberlain during their sometimes daily conversations, arguing that the security pact should be used to 'take a part or parts of the Treaty of Versailles and to complete and confirm and explain them' in 'the spirit of 1919'.<sup>52</sup> To persuade the French government to encourage Fleuriau and Chamberlain to adopt a more progressive view of the potential of the pact, Crewe set out his own views on the optimum way to conduct the negotiations in a long memorandum that he sent to the Foreign Secretary in March 1925.<sup>53</sup> A document which he also used as ammunition to lobby Blum and Herriot, but whose effectiveness was diminished by the popular reception accorded to statements by Poincaré that if Germany signed a security pact it would 'add nothing' to her signature of the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>54</sup>

The Treaty of Locarno also made provision for the admission of Germany into the League of Nations, and it was this issue that dominated the correspondence between Chamberlain and Crewe after the signature of the treaty in October 1925 until September 1926, when Germany entered the League and, more significantly, joined the permanent membership of the League Council. The intervening months saw Chamberlain at the centre of an international crisis that had at its heart his desire to use the League to promote French security interests. Specifically, the Foreign

Secretary believed that one other power, preferably a Great Power, that was not unsympathetic to French security needs should also be admitted to permanent membership of the League Council at the same time as Germany.<sup>55</sup> As he had done during the security pact negotiations, Crewe outlined his views in a lengthy memorandum, which he sent to Chamberlain in April 1926.<sup>56</sup> Again, Crewe took a wider view of the situation than the Foreign Secretary, who ploughed forward by responding to the individual objections of the non-permanent members to his preferred strategy as they arose. Much better, Crewe argued, for the British government to 'take a prompt and bold step' and set out a comprehensive plan for the complete reform of the structure of the League Council. Before this could happen, the question of Great Power status, so central to Chamberlain's diplomatic thinking, needed to be re-examined.<sup>57</sup> This nebulous concept had hitherto been synonymous with 'mere force', a concept that was out of keeping with the entire ethos of the League. Furthermore, if that was an accurate definition, was it appropriate to regard Germany as a Great Power? After all, the aspects of the Treaty of Versailles that restricted the size of the German military remained in force, untouched by the Locarno treaty. This apparently anti-German statement by Crewe was, however, part of a wider point that he was making about the way in which the League Council operated and should not necessarily be seen as being inconsistent with his other views on the European security question. Crewe believed that the cause of the League Council crisis lay in the insistence of all of the powers concerned on basing their claim to permanent membership on their historic but not necessarily their current status in world affairs. On that basis, the British and French claim to permanent League Council membership remained sound because both powers continued to enjoy significant global influence through their empires. In this respect, it is notable that

Crewe, like most of his generation, viewed Britain significantly more as an imperial power than as a European power. That said, somewhat paradoxically, Crewe then argued that it was important for the British government to realise that even since the end of the First World War, the premises that underpinned international diplomacy had evolved, that ‘the restriction of permanent membership, present or future, to the countries formerly composing the Concert of Europe, with the special addition of Japan and the United States, is not treated as axiomatic by the world at large.’<sup>58</sup>

Recommending that a copy of his paper be sent to Cecil, Crewe outlined a number of possible scenarios for reform but the idea that appealed to him most – that the League Council would only be constituted when it needed to take action and would be made up only of powers that had an interest in the resolution of the dispute in question that would be appointed by the League Assembly – also suggests that his thinking was significantly influenced by nineteenth century ideas about balance of power diplomacy. This was because ‘there are not many conceivable disputes arising in any part of the world in which such Powers as Great Britain or France would admit themselves to be altogether uninterested.’<sup>59</sup> Chamberlain was not unreceptive to Crewe’s ideas, but anticipated that any attempt to reform away permanent membership of the League Council was likely to be vetoed by the Italians and by the Japanese.<sup>60</sup>

The delicate nature of the relations between Britain, France and Italy, an improvement in which was so vital to the continued success of the Locarno treaty, formed the basis of an important strand of Chamberlain’s correspondence with Crewe throughout 1926 and early 1927. Since the Paris Peace Conference, there had been diplomatic tension between France and Italy concerning naval parity in the Mediterranean, colonial expansion and French support for Yugoslavian territorial

ambitions in the Balkans.<sup>61</sup> While Briand and Stresemann were meeting in Thoiry to broker a further Franco-German entente, Chamberlain met Mussolini at Livorno in the autumn of 1926 for general talks about foreign and strategic policy.<sup>62</sup> Chamberlain was anxious to convey to the Italian dictator that Britain and France spoke with one voice on issues concerning Italo-French relations and that discussing matters with him was tantamount to negotiating with Briand. However, what is significant is that in persuading the French of the merits of this argument, Chamberlain entrusted the task to Phipps and not to Crewe. Indeed, the latter appears to have acted as little more than a conduit between Phipps and Chamberlain. Specifically, Phipps was to convince the able, influential but consistently anti-Italian head of the Quai d'Orsay, Philippe Berthelot, that it was important to the maintenance of the 'spirit of Locarno' that the French government acknowledge Italy's status as a Great Power.<sup>63</sup> On this matter, Phipps made slow progress, but was eventually able to report in December 1927 that the French government would consider signing a non-aggression and arbitration pact with Italy.<sup>64</sup> But despite his rhetoric about the importance of the four principal Locarno powers working in tandem in a partnership of equals, the fact that Chamberlain entrusted these difficult and sensitive negotiations to the second in command at the British embassy in Paris and not to the ambassador reveals something of the importance the Foreign Secretary accorded to the state of diplomatic relations between Italy and France.

To Crewe, Chamberlain was much more inclined to express his private views about the progress of the negotiations than to ask him to become involved in them himself. In November 1926, for example, he told Crewe that he thought that Briand was as much to blame for the poor state of Italo-French relations as Mussolini. As a result, continuing in the spirit of the 'honest broker' of European security,



Chamberlain said that ‘...I shall keep a watchful eye on the course of events and, if I think that any words from me would be useful, they will not be lacking...’.<sup>65</sup> Yet despite Chamberlain’s statements about playing a useful role in improving Italo-French relations, it is clear from his conversations with Fleuriau that he had no concrete ideas of his own on how to resolve the tensions. Indeed, the Cabinet had made it clear that the British government did not wish to offer a further agreement to France and Italy that could involve a commitment of military or economic resources.<sup>66</sup> Thus in this example of post-Locarno diplomacy, we have a further example of the treaty failing to bring about a fundamental long-term change in the spirit in which diplomacy was conducted between the four powers that had been and were to prove to be so central to the maintenance of peace in Europe during the interwar period, Britain, France, Germany and Italy. But even as Crewe prepared for retirement in the summer of 1928, however, Chamberlain continued to send him official dispatches that promoted what George Grün later termed the ‘myth of Locarno.’<sup>67</sup>

The correspondence between Crewe and Chamberlain is also notable for what they did not discuss. There is a general absence of debate about the disarmament negotiations at Geneva or, indeed, general policy on this subject. Several explanations can be offered for this. The first is that the Foreign Secretary knew that the French government did not take Crewe into its confidence when discussing policy on this matter. Furthermore, Chamberlain knew that the Marquess did not share his view that it was Germany from which the most likely challenge to European peace was most likely to come. Instead, Chamberlain preferred to take Fleuriau into his confidence, telling him, for example, that ‘a war between France and England was at present time improbable to the extent of being impossible’. At the same time, he was

nevertheless aware that ‘the French had an immense superiority over us in the air arm, and however friendly our relations were with a neighbour, one could not wholly ignore their armament when considering one’s own’.<sup>68</sup> Reports of the majority of Chamberlain’s conversations with Fleuriau were relayed to Crewe for information as a matter of routine, but seldom contained any additional comment from the Foreign Secretary. Nor did Crewe ever feel compelled to comment on their content. On the occasions when Chamberlain was unable to see Fleuriau, the Foreign Office Permanent Under Secretary and future ambassador to Paris, Sir William Tyrrell, deputised. Indeed, if all of the sources of information concerning Chamberlain’s thoughts and attitudes towards Anglo-French relations are examined, especially in the post-Locarno era, it is his reports of his conversations with Fleuriau and his letters to Tyrrell that reveal more about his personal opinions. But Crewe was important to Chamberlain’s thinking because they shared a similar understanding and appreciation of the dynamics of French politics and foreign policy which helped facilitate some of the Foreign Secretary’s most significant dialogues about diplomatic strategy. A debate that frequently extended beyond conventional discussions of the foreign policies of Britain and France, as their correspondence concerning the League Council Crisis, discussed above, reveals.

Chamberlain’s willingness to concentrate on American disarmament requirements during the Geneva Disarmament Conference demonstrated in part how the emphasis had shifted by the end of Crewe’s embassy away from an Anglo-French focus on the interpretation and implementation of the wider implications of the Treaty of Versailles towards one that embraced a greater role for the United States in European affairs. This was something that Briand, in fact, grasped quicker than Chamberlain, who, despite his involvement in the Geneva Disarmament Conference,

found it difficult to accept that in the post-Locarno era, the French government placed as much store on closer relations with the United States as it did with Britain.

Chamberlain was frequently left behind in this process. This was partly because of his inability to see the need to contextualize the success of Locarno within a wider debate that reviewed the remainder of the Treaty of Versailles. Again illustrating the importance of Chamberlain's relationship with Crewe to the Foreign Secretary's strategic thinking, it was from Crewe, and not from Briand, that the latter's plan to work with his American opposite number, Frank Kellogg, on a pact to outlaw war in January 1928 were revealed.<sup>69</sup>

Some may argue that engaging in a detailed analysis of the relationship between a Foreign Secretary and one of his ambassadors creates so narrow a focus that it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions that extend beyond an analysis of their personal rapport. However, it is entirely appropriate when writing about the career of Austen Chamberlain. More than any other occupant of the Foreign Office during the interwar period, Chamberlain did more to revive what pre-war diplomatists termed the 'old diplomacy', with its emphasis on personal knowledge and private negotiation. But for Chamberlain, this personal approach to the conduct of diplomacy was not a crude instrument but was carefully managed, creating a multi-layered approach that matched individuals to tasks. Mention has been made, although space had precluded detailed discussion of the roles played by Fleuriau, Berthelot and Phipps in shaping the way in which the British and French governments viewed each other's foreign policy strategy between 1924 and 1928. From this, is it possible to say that Crewe influenced Chamberlain's thinking about European security? There is no evidence either contained in their private or in their official correspondence that it was the Marquess and the Marquess alone who changed Chamberlain's mind on any

specific issue. But Crewe's ability to bring influence to bear was more subtle and reflected the assessments of him by Curzon and Asquith before the First World War. Unlike Chamberlain, who frequently spoke and wrote with great passion about foreign affairs, Crewe's strength was that he displayed none of these traits. Instead, he presented an unruffled, reliable consistency of approach and argument that Chamberlain frequently eventually came to accept. This set Crewe apart from D'Abernon, although this article had demonstrated that the Marquess held the views of the British ambassador to Berlin in high regard. D'Abernon was much more like Chamberlain both in personality and in his approach to presenting a diplomatic case. That, combined with Chamberlain's personal scepticism about the long-term German motives for involvement in the security negotiations, resulted in a much more volatile relationship, which, in turn, had a more negative impact on Anglo-German relations.<sup>70</sup>

It is also evident that Chamberlain appreciated Crewe's quieter qualities. Writing on the ambassador's final departure from Paris, he commended Crewe for being 'an able and willing helper' who had 'enhanced the dignity of a great post'. That Crewe's greatest strength was his 'judgement and courage' but that more than anything, he had succeeded in keeping the discussion of Britain's relations with France 'within bounds.'<sup>71</sup> But in making this assessment, Chamberlain was perhaps once again guilty of placing too much emphasis on his personal rapport with an ambassador when making an assessment of their importance. While Crewe was undoubtedly a steadying influence on the way in which the British and French governments viewed each other during the mid 1920s, when his embassy began, relations between Britain and France were at their lowest ebb since the end of the First World War. When his embassy came to an end, the negotiation of the Locarno treaty had done much to repair that damage, but did not result in the entente between Britain and France

emerging as the driving force behind further attempts to prevent a second European war. The dynamics of the relationship between Stresemann and Briand and the latter's own visions of how to bring long-term security to France suggest that it would be unreasonable to hold Crewe or, indeed, Chamberlain, entirely responsible for this change in the nature of the Entente Cordiale. But the question remains: how effectively did they respond to this? Chamberlain was, of course, subject to the constraints of the Cabinet and the House of Commons in his actions and these factors have to remain paramount when engaging in a counterfactual debate about the strategies he adopted. But Crewe was a more original thinker about diplomacy than Chamberlain.<sup>72</sup> He was part of a generation of aristocratic politicians with liberal sympathies who realised that the First World War had brought about a change in the way in which international diplomacy needed to be conducted but who found it difficult to accept that that same conflict had also altered Britain's position as a world power. His enthusiasm for the League and for giving that organisation a more democratic role in international affairs in the years immediately after the signature of the Treaty of Locarno, reveals that Crewe had much in common with men such as Lord Robert Cecil, President of the League of Nations Union and the leading promoter of the work of the League in Britain. Indeed it was Cecil's brother, the Fourth Marquess of Salisbury, who described Crewe as 'the last of the Whig statesmen.'<sup>73</sup> Less given to flourishes of rhapsodic prose than Chamberlain, Crewe nevertheless was as aware as the Foreign Secretary of the size of the stakes during the security negotiations. Reflecting on them in 1940, after the Fall of France, Crewe wrote that he continued to view his work in Paris a decade and a half earlier as important because 'war smothers all the aspirations of Liberalism'.<sup>74</sup>

Notes.

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- <sup>1</sup> For Chamberlain's views on his contribution to Anglo-European relations during his period as Foreign Secretary, see, for example, Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, January 22 1927, AC 5/1/46. On the importance of the Treaty of Locarno to European diplomacy, see Jacobson, *Locarno Diplomacy. Germany and the West 1925-1929*.
- <sup>2</sup> D. Johnson, 'Austen Chamberlain and the Locarno Agreements' *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, VIII (1) 1962, 62-81.
- <sup>3</sup> Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain: Gentleman in Politics*, 259-299.
- <sup>4</sup> Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain and the Commitment to Europe. British Foreign Policy 1924-1929*.
- <sup>5</sup> G. Johnson, 'Lord D' Abernon, Sir Austen Chamberlain and the Origin of the Treaty of Locarno', *Electronic Journal of International History* 1, 1, (2000); G. Johnson, *The Berlin Embassy of Lord D'Abernon, 1920-1926*. Basingstoke, 2002.
- <sup>6</sup> The only sketch is in Gladwyn, *The Paris Embassy*, 195-201. Crewe's embassy merits only very transient mention in James Pope-Hennessy's *Lord Crewe 1858-1945: The Likeness of a Liberal*. The two other principal sources of published information about Crewe, John Davis' entry in the *Oxford New Dictionary of National Biography* and Ian Packer's sketch in D. Black (ed.), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography*. London, 1998, 87-88 accord less than a sentence to the subject. The majority of the Crewe's correspondence relating to his Paris embassy is in the main collection of his papers that are held in Cambridge University Library and in the Foreign Office General Correspondence Series held in The National Archives in Kew. Also of importance is correspondence with Sir Eric Phipps, who was Minister in Paris

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for most of Crewe's embassy and which forms part of the Phipps collection held by Churchill College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

<sup>7</sup> *Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain*, Vol. II, 247.

<sup>8</sup> Crewe to Chamberlain 3 Nov. 1927, AC 54/39-64, Austen Chamberlain Papers, Birmingham University Library.

<sup>9</sup> Crewe to Chamberlain, 13 Feb. 1925, C/8, Crewe Papers, Cambridge University Library.

<sup>10</sup> Crewe was born in 1858, Chamberlain in 1863.

<sup>11</sup> Self (ed.), *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters*.

<sup>12</sup> Jenkins, *Asquith*, 341.

<sup>13</sup> When Asquith's daughter, Violet, encountered Crewe in 1907, she gave him '20 for Impossibility' as a conversationalist, having 'tried him on every subject...without success'. Diary entry, Sat. 16 Feb. 1907, M. Bonham-Carter and M. Pottle (eds), *Lantern Slides. The Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1904-1914*. London, 1996, 126.

<sup>14</sup> Pope-Hennessy, *Lord Crewe*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> David (ed.), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet*, 230.

<sup>16</sup> Crewe to Chamberlain, 3 Jan. 1927, AC 54/39-64.

<sup>17</sup> Their friendship even survived Crewe's involvement in King George V's decision to offer the premiership to Baldwin in the spring of 1923. Gladwyn, *The Paris Embassy*, 197.

<sup>18</sup> Earl of Oxford and Asquith, *Memories and Reflections 1852-1927*. London, 1928, 73.

See also R. Jenkins, *Asquith*. London, 1964, 270.

<sup>19</sup> David (ed.), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet*, 230.

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20 Phipps relished this work and recorded his impressions of Paris at this time in his unpublished memoir, written in 1928, *Diplomatic Light and Shade in Paris and Elsewhere*, while remaining fiercely loyal to his ‘chief’ within its pages. PHPP I 9/1, Phipps Papers, Churchill College Archive Centre, Cambridge. Gladwyn, *Paris Embassy*, p. 197.

21 I. Packer in D. Black (ed.), *Dictionary of Liberal Biography*, p. 88.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88

23 R.S. Churchill, *Lord Derby, ‘King of Lancashire’*. London, 1959; Gladwyn, *The Paris Embassy*, 178-187 and 188-194. See also Dutton (ed.), *Paris 1918. The War Diary of the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby*. Hardinge of Penshurst, *Old Diplomacy*. London, 1947, 251-278.

24 Willson, *The Paris Embassy. A Narrative of Franco-British Diplomatic Relations 1814-1920*, 359. See also Hamilton, *Bertie of Thame*, 1990).

25 Diary of Bertie of Thame, 1917, cited in B. Willson, *The Paris Embassy*, 359-360.

26 Pope-Hennessy, *Lord Crewe*, 150.

27 Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase 1919-1925*, 23.

28 Another significant ambassadorial appointment at this time that fell into this category was that of Lord D’Abernon to the Berlin embassy, 1920-1926. Johnson, *The Berlin Embassy of Lord D’Abernon*. See also Gladwyn, *The Paris Embassy*, 196.

29 Churchill, *Lord Derby*, 353.

30 *Ibid.*, 371.

31 Willson, *The Paris Embassy*, 353.

32 Hardinge of Penshurst, *Old Diplomacy*, 274.

33 Nicolson, *Curzon*, 349. Pope-Hennessy, *Lord Crewe*, 157-58.

34 Earl of Ronaldshay, *The Life of Lord Curzon*. Vol 3, London, 1934, 345.



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35 Dutton, *Austen Chamberlain*, 16.

36 Pope-Hennessy, *Lord Crewe*, 160.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 164. For Crewe's contribution to Anglo-French diplomacy before Chamberlain became Foreign Secretary, see O'Riordan, *Britain and the Ruhr Crisis*, 2001.

38 Petrie, *The Life and Times*, Vol. II, 304. House of Commons Debates, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, Vol. 176, cols. 109-110. See also Self, *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters*, p. 266.

39 Speech by Chamberlain in the House of Commons, March 5 1925, cited in Petrie, *The Life and Times* Vol. II , 261-2; A. Chamberlain, *Down the Years*. London, 1935), 165-6.

40 Crewe to Chamberlain, 9 Mar. 1925, The National Archives, Kew (hereinafter referred to as TNA) FO371/10728/C3380/459/18.

41 Crewe to Chamberlain, 18 Nov. 1927, TNA/FO371/12631/W10719/1182/17.

42 *Ibid.*

43 The German origins of the security note sent to London in January 1925 are discussed in G. Johnson: "'Das Kind' Revisited: Lord D'Abernon and German Security Policy, 1922-1925', *Contemporary European History*, 9 (3) 2000, 209-24.

44 That said, Crewe never shared D'Abernon's view that it was France that presented the greatest threat to European security, not Germany. See, for example, G. Johnson, 'Lord D'Abernon, Sir Austen Chamberlain and the Origin of the Treaty of Locarno', *Electronic Journal of International History* 1, 1, (2000) and Johnson, *The Berlin Embassy of Lord D'Abernon*. But on the rapport between the occupants of the British embassies in Paris and Berlin, see Addison to Phipps, 15 Feb. 1925, PHPP I 2/19, Phipps Papers, Churchill College Archive Centre, Cambridge.

45 Crewe to Chamberlain, 9 Mar. 1925, TNA/FO371/10728/C3380/459/18.

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46 Self, *The Austen Chamberlain Diary Letters*, p. 265. Cecil to Chamberlain, 17 Nov. 1924, cited in Johnson, 'Austen Chamberlain and the Locarno Agreements', 72. Churchill to Chamberlain, 1 Dec.1924, *ibid.*, 73. Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 20 Feb.1927, AC 5/1/410.

47 There are numerous examples of Chamberlain's dismay at being sworn to secrecy at this time, but see especially Chamberlain to Crewe, 11 Feb. 1925, C/8 and same to same, 16 Feb. 1925, cited in C. Petrie, *Life and Letters*, 258.

48 Chamberlain to Crewe, 16 Feb. 1925, cited in Petrie, *Life and Letters*, 259.

49 Crewe to Chamberlain, 28 Jan. 1925, TNA/FO371/10728/C1319/459/18.

50 Chamberlain to Crewe, 16 Feb. 1925, cited in Petrie, *Life and Letters*, 259. Crewe to Chamberlain, 1 Mar. 1925, TNA/FO371/10727/C2931/459/18.

51 French ambassador to London 1924-1933.

52 Reported in Chamberlain to Crewe, 19 Mar. 1925, TNA/FO371/10729/C4007/459/18.

53 Memorandum, 15 Mar. 1925, communicated in Crewe to Chamberlain, 16 Mar. 1925, TNA/FO371/10729/C3966/459/18.

54 Crewe to Chamberlain, 29 Mar.1925, TNA/FO371/10729/C4417/459/18.

55 The complexities of this crisis are explored in detail in D. Carlton, 'Great Britain and the League Council Crisis of 1926' *Historical Journal*, vol. XI, no 2 (1968), 354-64 and in Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain*, 86-94.

56 Note on the Composition of the Council of the League of Nations, 23 Apr.1926, AC 53.

57 G. Johnson, 'Austen Chamberlain and the Negotiation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact' in G. Johnson (ed.), *Locarno Revisited. European Diplomacy 1920-1929*. London, 2004, 60.

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58 Note on the Composition of the Council of the League of Nations, 23 Apr. 1926, AC  
53.

59 *Ibid.*

60 Chamberlain to Crewe, 29 Apr. 1926, AC 53.

61 Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery*, 136.

62 Grayson, *Austen Chamberlain*, 122.

63 Chamberlain to Crewe, 15 Oct. 1926, AC 53.

64 Phipps to Chamberlain, 12 Dec. 1927, *DBFP*, Series Ia, Vol. IV, No. 90.

65 Chamberlain to Crewe, 11 Nov. 1926, AC 53. Chamberlain had used the phrase  
'honest broker' in Chamberlain to Crewe, 20 Jan. 1925 AC50/28.

66 Chamberlain to Crewe, 22 Nov. 1927, *DBFP*, Series Ia, Vol. IV, No. 51.

67 Chamberlain to Crewe, 30 May 1928, TNA/FO371/13342/C3919/193/18. See also  
Record by Sir A. Chamberlain of a Conversation with M. Berthelot, 29 Jun. 1928,  
TNA/FO371/13351/W6337/6337/17. G. Grün, 'Locarno: Idea and Reality'  
*International Affairs*, 31 (1955), 382-8.

68 Chamberlain to Crewe, 9 Feb. 1928, TNA/FO800/262.

69 Crewe to Chamberlain, 4 Jan. 1928, *DBFP*, Series Ia, Vol. IV, No. 246.

70 Johnson, 'Lord D'Abernon, Sir Austen Chamberlain and the Origin of the Treaty of  
Locarno'.

71 Pope-Hennessy, *Lord Crewe*, 172.

72 See, for example, R. O. A. Crewe-Milnes, 'The eclipse of liberalism' *The Fortnightly*,  
153 (1940).

73 *Ibid.*, 54.

74 Crewe-Milnes, 'The Eclipse of Liberalism', 481.