
Guide to the Alfred Austin Papers , 1869-1902

Collection number: M0402

Department of Special Collections and University Archives
Stanford University Libraries
Stanford, California

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Descriptive Summary

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Biographical Note

Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil, 3rd Marquis of Salisbury, was born on 3 February 1830. Educated first at Eton and then at Christ Church, Oxford, he apparently found his subsequent voyage around the world (1851-1853) far more intellectually stimulating. Following his

return to England, he was elected an MP for Stamford, but he began to make a real impact on the political scene only in April 1860, when he published in the *Quarterly Review* an article critical of popular democracy; subsequent articles, published throughout the 1860s, continued to deal with this issue as well as with questions of diplomacy and history. In July 1866, as Lord Cranborne, he entered Lord Derby's cabinet as Secretary of State for India; but seven months later, unhappy about the government's proposal to extend the franchise, he resigned. In the spring of 1868, the second Marquis having died, Cranborne became Lord Salisbury and master of the Cecil ancestral home, Hatfield House, in which simple capacity he spent the next six years, studying farming techniques, improving his estates, and criticizing Gladstonian liberalism. This period of relative inactivity ended in 1874 with the Tories' electoral victory and Salisbury's acceptance of the post of Secretary of State for India under Disraeli. As Secretary, Salisbury concerned himself not only with the Asian subcontinent but with eastern affairs in general, being sent in November 1876, for example, as the British delegate to an international conference in Constantinople on the need for governmental reform in Turkey. Some months after being promoted to the post of Foreign Secretary in the spring of 1878, Salisbury attended a second and far more important conference: the Berlin Congress, in the course of which he skillfully defended Britain's interests and emerged as a likely successor to Disraeli as leader of the Conservative Party.

Salisbury left the Foreign Office following his party's defeat in the general election of February 1880; fourteen months later, he succeeded the deceased Disraeli as leader of the Conservatives in the House of Lords. In February 1885 he became Prime Minister in a minority government which lasted only seven months before being ousted by Gladstone and the Liberals. In the general election of July 1886, however, the Conservatives won convincingly, enabling Salisbury to form a second -- and more secure -- ministry, which lasted until 1892 and in which he doubled as Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister until July 1902. He died on 22 August 1903.

Buried beneath the myriad of diplomatic, colonial, and political issues which Salisbury had to confront at the start of his third premiership was that of choosing a new poet laureate. The previous poet laureate, Tennyson, had died in 1892, and neither Gladstone nor Rosebery (Prime Ministers, 1892-94 and 1894-85, respectively) had found time to appoint a successor. Evidently unversed -- and uninterested -- in contemporary poetry, Salisbury, with the approval of Queen Victoria, appointed to the laureateship a man noted less for literary prowess than for steadfast support of the Conservative Party and its policies. Born on 30 May 1835 in a parish near Leeds, Alfred Austin, son of a devout Catholic father, spent the first years of his life at several Roman Catholic educational institutions in the north of England, finally taking a degree at the University of London. In 1854 he entered the Inner Temple to commence study for the Bar, which he joined in 1857. An inheritance left by the death of his uncle the following year, however, enabled him to abandon a career in the law and concentrate on his real love, poetry. His first poem of any note -- *The Season, A Satire* -- was published in 1861, and other verses followed frequently in the years ahead.

Nor did Austin limit his writing to poetry. In 1864 he offered his services -- which were accepted -- to the *Standard*, a Tory mouthpiece. In the numerous articles he wrote for this paper, as well as in his poetry and in the *National Review* (which he co-founded with W.J. Courthope in 1883), Austin gave fervent vent to his militant Toryism. Loathing all innovation, fearing popular rule, believing implicitly in tradition and the aristocracy, Austin glorified in verse and prose many of the same values held dear by other Tories. He also made a point of cultivating the friendship of the leading figures of the Conservative party, including Lord Salisbury. Remarkd Gwendolyn Cecil in her biography of her father (IV: 55): Austin was a wholehearted supporter of Lord Salisbury's policy both at home and abroad, was personally attached to him, and a frequent visitor at Hatfield. Their intercourse enabled him to forward the Minister's policy by calling anonymous attention to aspects of it upon which Lord Salisbury could not himself dwell publicly, and this assistance was certainly welcomed, though there is no record of its ever having been directly invited. Salisbury generously acknowledged both Austin's personal friendship and his contributions to the Conservative cause when he selected him to be the new poet laureate. Though not unexpected, this selection, made public on 1 January 1896, aroused catcalls of derision and contempt on the part of many journalists and literati, and Austin's subsequent poetic output as laureate did nothing to lessen the hostility of his critics. Possessed of an invincible egotism and a uniquely high estimation of his own talents, however, Austin ignored his detractors and set about earnestly fulfilling the task of laureate, churning out partiotic verses which celebrated imperialism, royalty, and other staples of the Tory canon. He died on 2 June 1913.

Publications about Lord Salisbury

Cecil, Lady Gwendolyn. *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury*. 4 vols. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922-1932.

Grenville, J.A.S. *Lord Salisbury and Foreign Policy: The Close of the Nineteenth Century*. London: University of London Press, 1964.

Kennedy, Aubrey L. *Salisbury, 1830-1903: Portrait of a Statesman*. London: John Murray, 1953.

Marsh, Peter. *The Discipline of Popular Government: Lord Salisbury's Domestic Statecraft, 1881-1902*. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978.

Taylor, Robert. *Lord Salisbury*. London: Allen Lane, 1975.

Scope and Content

The collection consists primarily of letters from the 3rd Marquis of Salisbury to Alfred Austin written between 1887 and 1902, the bulk having been generated in the period 1887-1896. While some of the letters are merely invitations to visits or expressions of gratitude for a copy of Austin's latest work, others provide valuable insight into Salisbury's thinking on several of the key diplomatic and political questions which

confronted him during these years. Russian influence in the Balkans, Bismark's intentions, the crumbling Ottoman empire, Joseph Chamberlain's machinations, the dwindling power of the House of lords, Home Rule -- all receive mention in this correspondence. Some three or four of these letters have already appeared in print, in the works on Salisbury listed earlier, but of the others there appears to be no previously published record. Also contained in this correspondence are five letters from Lady Salisbury and one each from George Curzon and W.H. Smith.

Bearing no relation to the Salisbury-Austin correspondence save for the identity of the recipient are the four letters in this collection from the Marquise de Boissy, one of Byron's lovers, praising Austin's pamphlet *A Vindication of Lord Byron*. All four letters are printed in their original French, as well as translated into English, in Austin's autobiography.

For additional information about Alfred Austin, see

Austin, Alfred. *The Autobiography of Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate*. 2 vols. London: Macmillan and Company, 1911.

Crowell, Norton B. *Alfred Austin: Victorian*. Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1953.

Hopkins, Kenneth. *The Poets Laureate*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Russel, Nick. *Poets by Appointment: Britain's Laureates*. Dorset: Blandford Press, 1981.

Sherman, Stuart P. *On Contemporary Literature*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917.

CORRESPONDENCE

Box 1, Folder 1	Salisbury to Austin, 1887
Box 1, Folder 2	Salisbury to Austin
Box 1, Folder 3	Salisbury to Austin, 1888
Box 1, Folder 4	Salisbury to Austin
Box 1, Folder 5	Salisbury to Austin, 1889
Box 1, Folder 6	Salisbury to Austin, 1890-1892
Box 1, Folder 7	Salisbury to Austin, 1893-1894
Box 1, Folder 8	Salisbury to Austin, 1894-1895
Box 1, Folder 9	Salisbury to Austin, 1895
Box 1, Folder 10	Salisbury to Austin, 1896-1898
Box 1, Folder 11	Salisbury to Austin, 1899-1902
Box 1, Folder 12	Boissy to Austin, 1869