


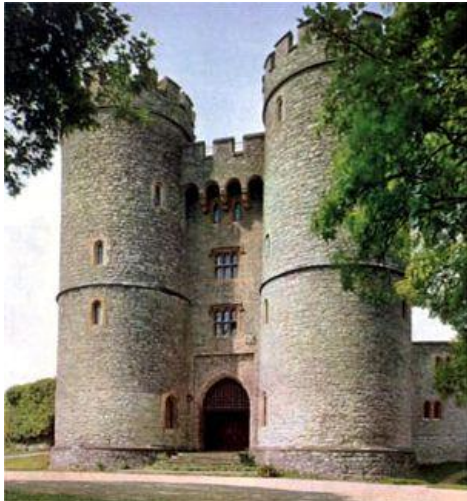
Peter O'Connor	ENGLISH PLUS: BIOGRAPHICAL WRITING		
Week 3	A Rake's Diaries: Alan Clark M.P.	+FILM	



Alan Clark was everything instinct dictates we should hate: An unapologetic toff who inherited his wealth, a self-centred egomaniac, a lecherous womaniser, and worst of all, a Thatcherite politician. The operative word here, more than in any other context I can think of, is “unapologetic” When all the ministers around him were resigning after trying to cover up their sleaze, the reason Alan Clark survived, and indeed flourished, in many people’s estimation was that he hardly ever tried to conceal anything, except perhaps from his beloved wife. Right from his references to “Bongo-Bongo land” to his description of the Conservative party as “an old whore that’s

been around for 400 years” Alan Clark is utterly controversial, hilariously witty, occasionally very perceptive, and, surprisingly, very touching indeed. Clark made his name as a historian and his literary skills are very much on display, but two things about him are extremely surprising - firstly, despite his infidelities, his total devotion to his wife, and secondly his passionate views about the evils of animal cruelty.

But the aspect of the man that really comes through is that he is absolutely aware of his own character. He knows he has flaws, he knows he is arrogant about his strengths, he knows he causes his wife a lot of heartache, but he is at all times utterly his own man. His life revolves around money, power, fast cars, and beautiful young women, but while we really ought to hate him, all we are left with is a grudging admiration for a man with the cheek to try and pull it off and succeeds.



Alan Kenneth Mackenzie Clark was born in 1928, the eldest child of the art historian Kenneth Clark, author of the bestselling *Civilisation*. Alan went to Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, where he made a name for himself as a Jaguar-driving pleasure-seeker.

‘Girls have to be succulent, and that means under 25,’ Clark later confided to his diary. This preference was never more apparent than when he met his future wife, who would stand by him through four decades of ‘girls’. Caroline Beuttler was 13 when Clark first met her. They married in 1958; he was 30, she was 16. At Clark’s insistence, she used her middle name of Jane – which was also his mother’s name.

Historian

Overshadowed by his father, Alan Clark determined to make a name for himself as a military historian. His first book, *The Donkeys* (1961) – a meticulous critique of the British conduct of the early years of the First World War – was his most controversial, helping to shape the public perception of the First World War, from *Oh! What a Lovely War* to *Blackadder Goes Forth*. His other books, *The Fall of Crete* (1963) and *Barbarossa* (1965), examined the Nazi war machine.

Politician

In 1969, as Clark senior basked in the spotlight of the BBC television version of *Civilisation*, and a life peerage, Alan turned to politics. Self-assured and extremely rich, he became a Conservative candidate, and, at a by-election in 1972, was elected MP for Plymouth (Sutton). With this success, he was free to reinvent himself as a 'toff' whose aristocratic charm and self-assurance allowed him to say – or do – what he liked.

Despite living in a stately home, Clark's nobility was skin-deep: the family had made its money in the 19th century, and Sir Kenneth had bought the Norman castle of Saltwood in 1955. On the other hand, Alan's political extremism – often dismissed as a pose – was genuine. Even in his teens, says his brother Colin, 'Alan had never hidden his admiration for Adolf Hitler'. When he wrote an introduction to a new edition of *Barbarossa*, Clark's only regret was that his portrayal of Nazism had been too negative. Pressed to condemn the National Front in the 1970s, Clark accused his critics of ignoring anti-white racism, and, in his diary, he mused, 'How brave is the minority, in a once great country, who still keep alive the tribal essence.' But he found John Tyndall, leader of the British National Party, 'a bit of a blockhead'.

Of one meeting with Margaret Thatcher he wrote, 'I got a full dose of personality compulsion, something of the Fuehrer Kontakt'; elsewhere he likened the Brighton bomb and Michael Heseltine's leadership challenge to plots against Hitler. 'The Lady' herself may not have shared this valuation, but she certainly saw Clark as a loyal courtier.

Clark was appointed junior minister in the Department of Employment in 1983, promoted to Minister of Trade in 1986, then appointed Minister for Defence Procurement in 1989. Hopes of promotion to Minister of Defence were dashed when John Major replaced Thatcher in 1990. Clark stood down at the 1992 election, and was replaced as Minister for Defence Procurement by his friend Jonathan Aitken.

Arms trader

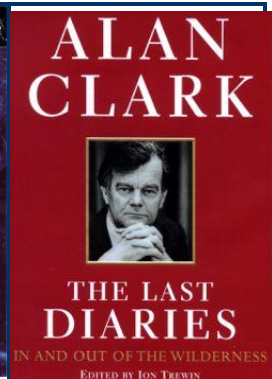
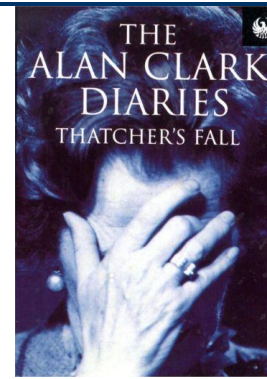
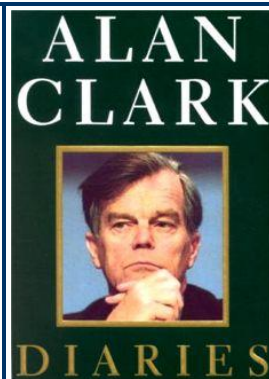
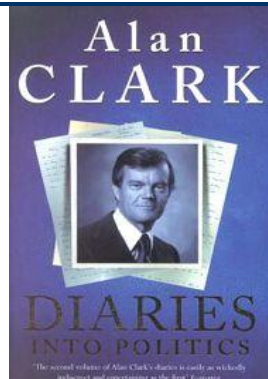
It was at the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) that Clark made his lasting impact, with a few words to a delegation from the Machine Tools Trade Association (MTTA). Although government guidelines prohibited the export of arms-related equipment to either side in the Iran-Iraq war, by 1988 several manufacturers were taking orders for machine tools from Iraq. One firm, Matrix Churchill, had been bought out by an Iraqi-controlled holding company. Clark advised the MTTA that manufacturers could breach the spirit of the guidelines without fear of repercussions.

After the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Clark's move to the Defence Procurement post meant that he still had a role in approving the trade with Iraq, and Foreign Office concerns about assisting Iraq in developing nuclear and chemical weapons were dismissed. He said later, 'I am not particularly bothered about who we are trading with, providing we get paid.'

In 1990, shortly before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the deception began to unravel. In December, a story in *The Sunday Times* alleged that Clark had given the MTTA 'a nod and a wink'. The following year, criminal charges were brought against three executives at Matrix Churchill, accused of deceiving the DTI. The trial collapsed in 1992, when Clark was asked about the 1988 meeting. On oath, he said there was 'nothing misleading or dishonest' about his advice to the MTTA, but admitted changing his story, which was enough to exonerate the Matrix Churchill executives.

An unrepentant Clark retired from politics, editing his *Diaries* (which pass over the arms for Iraq affair in silence), and writing what he hoped would be his ‘great work’, *The Tories*. Encouraged by the success of the *Diaries*, he returned to the House of Commons in 1997, as MP for Kensington and Chelsea, but soon fell ill. He died in September 1999, aged 71, and was buried at Saltwood.

The Alan Clark Diaries



Diaries by Alan Clark (Phoenix Press, 1994) Outspoken yet curiously guarded account of Clark's career from 1983 to 1991, edited by the author.

Diaries: Into Politics by Alan Clark (Weidenfeldt & Nicolson, 2000) 'Yes, I told him, I was a Nazi.' The mask slips a little in this posthumous supplementary volume, covering the years 1972–82. *Volume 3 Diaries: The Last Diaries 1993-1999* (Phoenix: 2002)

The Alan Clark Diaries: Thatcher's Fall

Into Politics Vol.1: The first volume of Alan Clark's diaries, covers two Parliaments during which he served under Margaret Thatcher - until her ousting in a coup which Clark observed closely from the inside - and then under John Major, constitute the most outspoken and revealing account of British political life ever written. Cabinet colleagues, royalty, ambassadors, civil servants and foreign dignitaries are all subjected to Clark's vivid and often wittily acerbic pen, as he candidly records the daily struggle for ascendancy within the corridors of power.

This, like the other diaries, make excellent, though disturbing, reading. There's no political thought as such here, rather the thoughts of a man who was a member of, and a junior minister in, the Conservative government which led the country for 18 years. A self-styled member of the "upper classes", we get his thoughts on the "lower classes" but not on any real issues. At one point he comments that he expected to become Prime Minister, but we don't find out why. The nearest to a political credo seems to be "the upper classes are better than the lower classes and they should run the country". Welcome to the 18th Century; presumably Thatcher's Victorian values were a bit modern for him. There are some excellent moments, including a footnote on a bizarre theory promoted by Tory toffs that Thatcher wasn't the daughter of Grocer Roberts of Grantham but was fathered by some upper-crust dilettante (the reason given for her having aristocratic "blood" is that she has small feet!!), and the account of Thatcher's fall is marvelous; but whilst Clark was highly intelligent and an excellent writer, he was ultimately a reactionary, privileged butterfly. He'd probably take that as a compliment.

The diaries follow Clark through his time as a Junior Minister and his successes, failures and plotting in his various posts, his endless trips abroad and wasted afternoons in pointless and tedious meetings and visits to his constituency. He longs to have higher office but probably knows that certain 'indiscretions' and his often radical views will rule him out of this. Clark's views are wide-ranging and radical and strong views are expressed ranging from animals to the 'lower classes'. He also expresses admiration for unlikely opponents such as Dennis Skinner MP and cries when he is forced to shoot a heron. This is what makes him so fascinating and unpredictable. The reader also sees Clark and his rich and varied private life - at points it seems the whole point of his existence is the spotting and snaring of beautiful young women. And at the same time his love for his wife, who, as he admits, he treats badly, and his love life, shines through. For all his glaring faults, Alan Clark lived well.

+FILM John Hurt stars as the controversial and irreverent Conservative Minister Alan Clark in this witty and moving adaptation of his best-selling diaries. Blessed with lavish cynicism and cursed with an intrusive libido, Alan Clark schemes his way through the corridors of power at the height of Thatcher's Britain, offering his own inimitable insights into the Tory grandees of the time - including Tom King ('Too ghastly'), Michael Heseltine ('Odious'), Ken Clarke ('A podgy life insurance risk') and Mrs Thatcher herself ('So beautiful. She has wonderful, small feet'). As his political career falls apart through a succession of gaffes, scandals and personal self-doubts, Clark struggles to find true meaning in his life before it is too late. With a sharp, literate script and truly outstanding performances from a distinguished cast that includes Jenny Agutter as Clark's wife Jane, Victoria Smurfit as his secret mistress X, and Julia Davis as Jenny Easterbrook, The Alan Clark Diaries has been universally acclaimed as a triumph for television drama.

Links **Reelection:** http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kT_mnm2tWTc
Alan Clark's home at Saltwood Castle: <http://www.saltwoodcastle.com/>