

<b>Institution: Queen Mary University of London (QMUL)</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 30 History</b>
<b>Title of case study: Influencing Constitutional Affairs and Governance</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>This case study draws upon the research of the internationally renowned scholar, Peter Hennessy (<a href="http://www.parliament.uk/biographies/lords/lord-hennessy-of-nympsfield/4189">http://www.parliament.uk/biographies/lords/lord-hennessy-of-nympsfield/4189</a>), and the public engagement organisation that he established, the Mile End Group (MEG - <a href="http://www.mileendgroup.com/">http://www.mileendgroup.com/</a>). Hennessy's historically-informed understanding of constitutional and governance issues has enabled him to make direct interventions in key debates in the House of Lords and affect public debate and parliamentary democracy. Similarly, MEG has played a critical role in generating popular and public interest in its events and thus in the modern and contemporary history of British constitutional affairs and governance. MEG is a trusted environment in which historians, civil servants and politicians can frame decision-making with a proper appreciation of precedent, contingency and comparative studies. It has provided historical research and expertise in its work with No. 10 Downing Street, the Cabinet Office on the Cabinet Secretaries Project and with the Treasury for its in-house seminars 'Learning the Lessons of Past Spending Reviews'.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Hennessy (24 September 1992-) is the foremost scholar of Whitehall, Westminster and the Secret State. He has been an international pioneer in the field of contemporary history, developing new approaches to oral history, archival source work and historical narrative. His first major research monograph, <i>Whitehall</i> (1990), was an 800-page treatment of the history of the Whitehall machine and the people who operated it across the post-1945 era. Widely recognised as a classic of contemporary history, it led Hennessy to develop further his expertise in the history of the modern British constitution and government. This book was the foundation from which Hennessy produced his later research. The first of Hennessy's books to bear influence on this specific case study came in 1995. <i>The Hidden Wiring: Unearthing the British Constitution</i> was a major intervention into the history the government machine which extended Hennessy's research in <i>Whitehall</i>. With the publication of these books, Hennessy became a widely recognised expert on British government history. His consequent survey of the holders of the highest office – <i>The Prime Minister: The Office and Its Holders since 1945</i> – published in 2000 widened his reputation further. So too did his 2002 book, <i>The Secret State: Whitehall and the Cold War</i> (updated as <i>The Secret State: Preparing for the Worst, 1945-2010</i> in 2010). This work concentrated specifically on elements of domestic, defence and foreign policies in the history of Britain's response to, and readiness for, the Cold War. In 2006, Hennessy then published the second of his multi-volume history of post-war Britain, <i>Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties</i>.</p> <p>From <i>Whitehall</i> to <i>The Secret State</i>, Hennessy has broken new ground and pioneered contemporary British history. <i>The Secret State</i> in particular, remains a key text in the history of Britain's Cold War. It charts the evolution of British security contingency planning from the era of the Cold War, through to the 'war on terror'. It draws on a ream of recently de-classified archival material to analyse the changing nature of the threat and the response to it; in the process, Hennessy again provides unrivalled clarity into the workings of power and the production of policy. Through his accumulated research, Hennessy has confirmed himself as <i>the</i> historian of the modern/contemporary British political system. His expertise has effectively been institutionalised in MEG, of which he was the founding director in 2003. Under the executive directorship of Jon Davis (himself an established expert on the history of modern governmental administration – see <i>Prime Ministers and Whitehall, 1960–74</i>, 2007), MEG has emerged as a critical centre for debates over governance, security, and public policy. Through its 100 research events (the majority of which are public), it has brought together leading public figures from the worlds of academia, industry, politics and commerce, to discuss issues of historical and contemporary relevance, in what Hennessy</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

describes as “a rolling constitutional conversation”.

**3. References to the research****Peter Hennessy**

*The Hidden Wiring: Unearthing the British Constitution* (London: Gollancz, 1995)

*The Prime Minister: The Office and Its Holders since 1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2000)

*Having it so good: Britain in the fifties* (London: Allen Lane, 2006)

*Cabinets and the Bomb* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

*The Secret State: Preparing for the Worst, 1945-2010* (London: Penguin, 2010)

**Jon Davis**

*Prime Ministers and Whitehall, 1960-74* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007)

**4. Details of the impact**

Over a period of many years, Hennessy has shaped policy-making on the civil service, national security, and political transitions. He has briefed opposition parties on managing Whitehall; given public evidence to House of Commons Select Committees; provided scanning sessions for Ministry of Defence Higher Command; and worked closely with the Institute of Government (IfG) on civil service/ministerial relations. Most recently, having been raised to the House of Lords (as Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield) – the greatest impact that his research has had – he is now a frequent contributor to Lords debates, directly shaping the formation of new legislation. This is particularly so with regards to proposals for reform of the House of Lords. During the Lords’ hearing of the Bill in 2011-12, Hennessy attended 28 of the 30 pre-legislative sessions and Hansard records show that his speeches (his maiden speech; on the second reading; and on the report) called on his historical knowledge, as did his input on the Joint House of Commons/House of Lords Committee on the Draft House of Lords Bill. Beyond this particular committee, Hennessy has also given evidence born of his research to a number of Parliamentary Committees (see corroborating evidence below).

Hennessy’s research on the secret state and nuclear policy of the United Kingdom is widely recognised. Reviews for *The Secret State* exemplify the regard for his research; for example, the *Daily Telegraph* wrote: ‘Hidden away in the archives and unearthed by the indefatigable Peter Hennessy, the so-called war books provide a tantalising but chilling glimpse of what might have happened if history had unfolded differently’. Similarly, *The Guardian* said of the book: ‘From among the documents which have been released, it brings to light some chilling gems, rich in human detail, supplemented by some riveting interviews with retired officials.’ Hennessy’s expertise has been called upon by various arms of parliamentary government related to defence issues. He is a member of the Chief of the Defence Staff’s Strategic Advisory Panel and in that role he produced an assessment of the current security challenges facing the UK. He has advised the government’s Joint Intelligence Organisation Staff Horizon Planning by providing a background presentation (entitled ‘History of Horizon Scanning since 1902’) which has influenced the report which will be published in 2013. Hennessy is also a member of the Basic Trident Commission on Future Nuclear Weapons Policy along with former secretaries of state for defence and foreign secretaries.

Hennessy continues his long-standing campaign for freedom of public access to government documentation. He began this campaign in 1992 by leading and supporting the Waldegrave initiative for openness in government records. That led to a constant stream of additional releases from the National Archive which has enriched the public debate about British history. Hennessy continued this activity from 2004 to 2011 as a member of the Cabinet Office Advisory Group on Security and Intelligence Records.

The Mile End Group has held 100 events (mainly lectures and seminars), the vast majority of which are publicly accessible (drawing up to 100 attendees from government, parliament, press, industry and academia), on a wide range of aspects related to the history of the constitution and governance in the United Kingdom. The first, on 1 January 2004, saw Davis debate with Sir Robin Mountfield (former Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office) on Whitehall Reform, 1970-74. The 100th, on 28 October 2013, saw Tony Blair reflect upon Whitehall and governance during his premiership. MEG's status as a leading and trusted forum where historians, practitioners and commentators debate a range of policy-relevant issues of contemporary and historical relevance to British governance results from the research carried out by members of the MEG (academic staff in the School of History including Hennessy and Davis, PGRs and MA students), the events that it has held, and the network of former and current politicians, officials, parliamentarians, journalists and industry figures that it has established over nine years. For instance, in 2006, MEG was asked by MI5 to organise a lecture by its then director Elizabeth Manningham-Buller; in 2010 this was followed by a further lecture, generating global headlines. MEG has also hosted former defence official Sir Kevin Tebbit, security co-ordinator Sir Richard Mottram and a seminar on 'The Ethics of Intelligence' with leading security figures. These lectures brought together senior security personnel, historians, and policy-makers in an academic environment which Whitehall and SIS officials have found consistently insightful and productive.

MEG has also focused especially on energy policy and contemporary issues of governance, hosting a series of policy-focused lectures from Sir Crispin Tickell, Professor Sir Roger Williams and Sir Mark Allen. The latter resulted in a series of lectures from the Baronesses Hayman, Jay and James. A critique of modern government practice included lectures from Sir Michael Barber (formerly of Downing Street) on Whitehall delivery and Gillian Shephard MP on politicians and civil servants. Each event attracted a wide range of participants, allowing influential engagement on governance issues between historians, politicians and policy-makers.

The research carried out by MEG's members, and the Group's reputation as a centre of contemporary British governmental history, has led to its associations with three departments of government. MEG was involved with the construction of No. 10 Downing Street's new history webpages with MEG members writing biographical descriptions of past prime ministers (e.g. Davis on Blair: [www.gov.uk/government/history/past-prime-ministers/tony-blair](http://www.gov.uk/government/history/past-prime-ministers/tony-blair)). It also pioneered, with No. 10 and the Cabinet Office, the online Cabinet Secretaries Project, a video and textual oral history of Cabinet Secretaries ([www.cabinetsecretaries.com](http://www.cabinetsecretaries.com)). The current Cabinet Secretary, Sir Jeremy Heywood, wrote that he 'would like to thank the Mile End Group and others within Queen Mary for the fantastic job they have done. ... This project is a great example of how collaboration between government, academia and business can help find innovative ways to engage the public in the work of Government. I'm sure it will be a key resource for historians for many years to come.'

Hennessy's and Davis's expertise in the history of the Treasury, and MEG's ability to provide historical research contemporary policy debates, led the Group to present two 'Learning the Lessons of Past Spending Reviews' seminars inside the Treasury for officials working on the 2013 spending review. The current Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, Sir Nicholas Macpherson, explained MEG's contribution: 'History tends to repeat itself with unerring regularity in Whitehall. And all too often the lack of institutional memory in the Civil Service results in a failure to learn from previous successes and failures: the wheel is reinvented unnecessarily. The Mile End Group plays a vital role in reconnecting Whitehall with its past. The recent seminars MEG organised in the Treasury brought key ministers and civil servants together with serving Treasury officials, the better to prepare the department for the 2013 Spending Round. The programme was first rate.'

MEG is now widely recognised for doing what no other academic organisation does. As *The Guardian* put it in a 2011 editorial, 'By reconnecting present and past, a group concerned with Britain's hidden wiring is doubling up as a constitutional hard drive.' (*The Guardian*, 'In praise of the Mile End Group', 28 January 2011).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

## Hennessy

For Hennessy's individual contributions to policy debates see: House of Lords, Hansard (repeated references: 27 June 2012, gave evidence to The Select Committee on the Constitution inquiry on Accountability of Civil Servants; 27 March 2012, Post-legislative scrutiny of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 –; 13 January 2011, gave evidence to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee on the constitutional implications of the Cabinet Manual; 9 September 2010, gave evidence to the House of Commons Public Administration Committee, Who does UK national strategy?). Also see Hennessy's role in the Judicial Executive Committee (January 2010); the Ditchley conference on transition governance (November 2009); the MI5 Centenary Lecture (November 2009); the No10 Downing Street Strategy Unity (September 2009); the Whitehall Chief Scientists Fusion Group (July 2009); and a private session with Francis Maude MP (Jan. 2009).

–Reviews of Hennessy's *The Secret State*: [The Daily Telegraph](#); [The Guardian](#)

–On Hennessy's contribution to the Joint Intelligence Organisation Staff Horizon Planning: [www.civilserviceworld.com/looking-beyond-the-horizon](http://www.civilserviceworld.com/looking-beyond-the-horizon)

–Hennessy's National Archives Podcast on the Waldegrave Initiative: <http://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/filling-the-gaps/>

## MEG

For a full list of MEG events, see [www.mileendgroup.com/past-events](http://www.mileendgroup.com/past-events). MEG events have consistently attracted widespread media attention – again, indicative of its ability to shape the debate. See, for example, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* (10 November 2006) and *The Washington Post* (11 November 2006) for responses to the Manningham-Buller speech. In April 2011, MEG was the subject of an approving, lengthy profile in *The Guardian* (2 April 2011).

–Eliza Manningham-Buller's 2010 lecture to MEG:

[www.parliament.uk/business/news/2010/03/baroness-manningham-bullers-lecture-on-intelligence/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2010/03/baroness-manningham-bullers-lecture-on-intelligence/)  
[www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/mar/10/manningham-buller-torture](http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/mar/10/manningham-buller-torture)

–No.10 Downing Street history [webpages](#).

–*The Guardian's* [editorial](#) on the Mile End Group, 28 January 2011

## Individuals who can be contacted to corroborate impact:

1. Lord Andrew Adonis, House of Lords on: MEG's role as a forum for exchange between historians, parliamentarians, politicians, officials, industrialists and journalists.
2. Sir Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary, Cabinet Office on: MEG's role in the creation of the Cabinet Secretaries project.
3. Sir Nicholas Macpherson, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, HM Treasury on: MEG's role as provider of historical expertise in the Treasury's in-house seminars.