

At last, Gladstone's 23,500

Sex (maybe) and violence join politics in prime minister's life

William Gladstone remains one of the great philosophers of English politics, matched as he was with his Conservative Party opponent Benjamin Disraeli during much of Queen Victoria's 1800s. Now his diaries are finally available, lending more depth to his personality.

By **GRAHAM HEATHCOTE**
The Associated Press

OXFORD, England — The great work is done. The diaries of William Ewart Gladstone, the greatest of Victorian statesmen, are in print in 14 thick volumes after more than a quarter-century of editing and research.

Four times prime minister, the charismatic leader of the Liberal Party gave up politics when he was 84 years old. He died four years later, in 1898, and is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Huge crowds flocked to see and hear the Grand Old Man and he can still be heard. He was the first European politician to speak on Thomas Edison's phonograph.

His diaries from age 16 to 86 contain 23,500 entries, brief and primarily a record of meetings, churchgoing and reading.

The editor, Colin Matthew, professor of modern history at the University of Oxford, has annotated the entries with information about the subjects and the 20,500

people mentioned.

"We now have the daily record of a remarkable man, the people he met, the Cabinet meetings he chaired and the 20,000 books, pamphlets and articles he read. A politician like Gladstone is unimaginable today," Matthew said in an interview.

"Even brief diaries are very unusual for a top politician." Such attention to history is rare. "Prime ministers and presidents don't have the time."

Always a politician

Elected to Parliament at 23, Gladstone never had to earn his living in the ordinary sense. His father, Sir John Gladstone, made a fortune importing American wheat and tobacco into Lancashire.

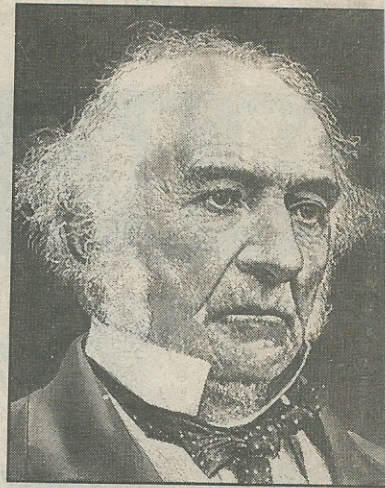
Young Gladstone was tall and strong, chopped trees for exercise, spoke Latin, ancient Greek, French and Italian, wrote all his own speeches, left a long record of legislation and is regarded as a parliamentary debater without equal.

He was deeply involved in the life of the Church of England, was a friend of the poet Tennyson and wrote books about the ancient Greek poet Homer.

Gladstone struggled for years, unavailingly, to persuade Parliament to grant Ireland "home rule," or control of its domestic affairs while remaining within the United Kingdom.

"One prayer absorbs all others: Ireland, Ireland, Ireland," Gladstone noted on April 10, 1887. History often waits to abide the future.

There are many diary references to the Irish politician Charles



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William Gladstone

Stewart Parnell, who raised huge sums of money among Irish-Americans for the home-rule campaign.

"Gladstone referred to Parnell in his diaries as the Sphinx," says Matthew, the editor. "He saw him as an ally because Parnell favored a constitutional solution, home rule — he could 'do business with him,' to use a modern phrase."

Parnell's political career ended in 1890 when Capt. William O'Shea was granted a divorce from his wife, Katherine, because of her adultery with Parnell.

Gladstone thought Parnell mishandled that situation as a party leader, but he was careful not to condemn Parnell from a personal point of view, Matthew says.

Gladstone referred to it as being like the sin of Tristan's love for Isolde, the wife of a king.

"Wagner's opera was well-known at that time and it's quite an interesting analogy," Matthew says. "Parnell was known as the 'uncrowned king' of Ireland and perhaps Gladstone saw himself as King Mark who in the mythical story sees his kingdom ruined by the behavior of Tristan and Isolde."

Mum on Disraeli

Yet, the diaries shed no light on Gladstone's personal feelings toward the witty Benjamin Disraeli, who headed the opposition Conservative Party and was himself twice prime minister.

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WINTER HO...

50 diary entries published

raeli's policies in his diaries, he's studiously silent about him personally," Matthews says.

"It was Gladstone's practice in his diaries not to write bad things about people he disapproved of and there is virtually nothing of hostility or rebuke."

Nevertheless, he certainly lost any popularity contest in Queen Victoria's eyes. He tended to lecture her, while Disraeli made her laugh.

Mysteries remain

Aspects of Gladstone's life still mystify historians, and the diaries record — but do not explain — his meetings with prostitutes who swarmed the London streets.

Gladstone and his wife, Catherine, went out to meet them, offered them advice and sometimes money, and occasionally invited them to Downing Street for tea.

"Part of the motivation was religious, charitable activity, but it's clear there was a good deal more to it," Matthew says.

After feeling particularly tempted, Gladstone whipped himself when he got home. He indicated this in the diaries with a whip sign, and he sometimes entered his thoughts in Italian.

Encounters with prostitutes, recorded in bland phrases such as "saw Miss Smith," are marked with an X.

'X' marks what?

Matthew never quite defines the quality of "X." It could mean bad behavior by Gladstone or charitable behavior.

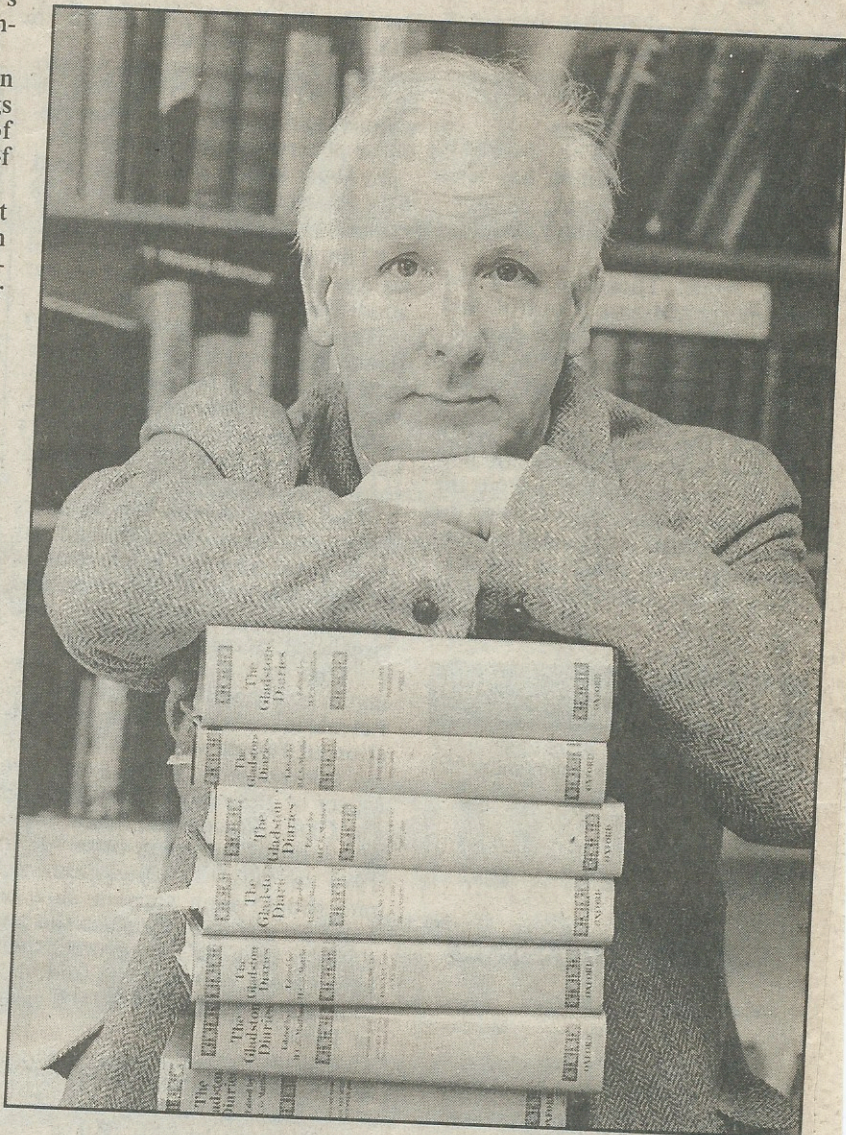
"What is interesting about this is the intensity it held for Gladstone. Quite what happened we don't know," Matthew says.

"It's clear that in the prime of life he went through intense temptation, which clearly shot up when his wife was away. She often was sick after her sister Mary Lytton who had 14 children and died in childbirth."

Gladstone stopped these meetings in 1886 after being warned of the danger of blackmail.

"I don't think Gladstone ever had full sexual relations with a prostitute," Matthew says.

At the end of his life he said he



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Colin Matthew, professor of modern history at the University of Oxford, rests on some of the diaries of Prime Minister William Gladstone, the most eloquent of Victorian statesmen.

wanted to rebut rumors and he sealed a statement of marital fidelity to be opened only after his death."

Gladstone wrote: "At no period of my life have I been guilty of the act which is known as that of infidelity to the marriage bed ... I limit myself to this negation."

The family gave Gladstone's papers to the nation in the 1920s, but Matthew says the diaries were a problem because of the references to temptation and whipping.

Diary's odyssey

They eventually went to the library of Lambeth Palace, official residence of the archbishop of Canterbury. In the 1960s, Arch-

bishop Geoffrey Fisher authorized publication.

Volume 1 came out in 1968, edited by M.R.D. Foot. Matthew joined him in 1970 and took over fully after Vol. 4.

The final part of Matthew's two-volume life of Gladstone to accompany the diaries is due out in March.

Matthew's epic task gave him a deep look into Victorian affairs, a valuable resource in his next editing epic for Oxford University Press: the new edition of the Dictionary of National Biography to the year 2000.

As he put it, "50,000 people in 45 million words."