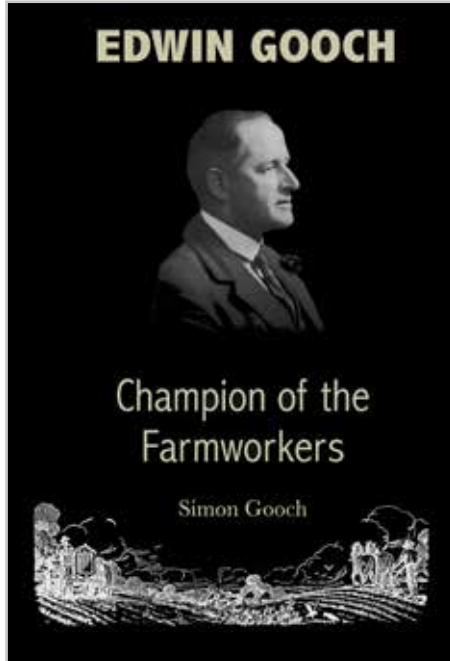


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Edwin Gooch, Chairman of the Labour Party, on the balcony of the County Hotel with the Gaitskells and the Attlees, Durham Miners Gala 1955.



Edwin Gooch, Chairman of the Labour Party, and Clem Attlee at the news conference announcing he will step down as Leader, 1955.

Poppyland Publishing is pleased to announce *Edwin Gooch: Champion of the Farmworkers* by Simon Gooch.

Edwin Gooch was a significant figure in agricultural trade unionism and Labour Party politics in the mid-20th century. After setting up South Norfolk Labour Party in his native town of Wymondham in 1918, he helped elect George Edwards MP, then came to prominence himself in the 1923 Great Strike of Norfolk farmworkers. As President of the National Union of Agricultural Workers from 1930 he served for almost 35 years in an honorary but influential role. In 1945 he was elected MP for North Norfolk, becoming Party Chairman ten years later. He led the fight for decent wages and conditions for farmworkers and campaigned against the tied cottage, with support from Labour heroes George Lansbury, Clement Attlee and Aneurin Bevan.

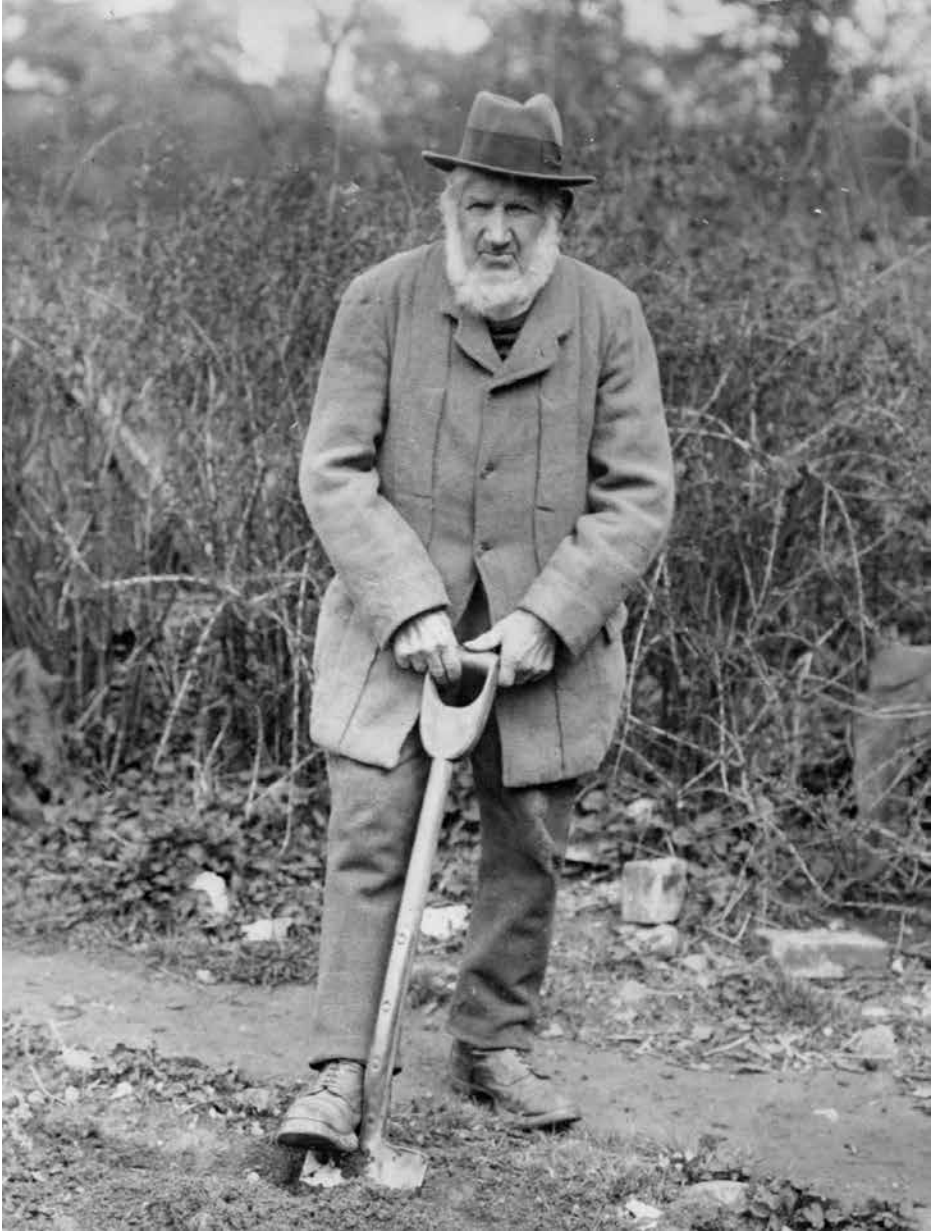
Edwin Gooch's role in the NUAW has been examined by labour historians, but this is the first biography. His grandson Simon Gooch has drawn on his late father's reminiscences, his own childhood memories and archival research—often using Edwin's own words from the NUAW's journal *The Land Worker*. The language of political debate comes back to life, creating a vivid portrait of a man whose strong Norfolk accent once rang around the House of Commons.

Simon Gooch was educated in Norwich and at art school in London. He worked as a graphic designer and illustrator until extended travels in the USSR and Eastern Europe led him into freelance journalism. He is now a genealogist and historical researcher.

His other published books include a biography, *Group Captain John 'Joe' Collier: Bomber Commander, Air War & SOE Strategist & Dam-buster Planner*, and *Holwood: A Stroll Around the Estate*, a study of Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger's country house in Kent.







"Old Boy" in a Norfolk jacket—a large format photograph from an Edwin Gooch album. He is possibly a relative.

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Dinner with Mr Khrushchev

AS luck would have it 1956 was the year in which the USSR's Communist Party General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev and Premier Nikolai Bulganin visited Britain. This was very much a novelty; Stalin had stayed well away from the democratic world. A new wind seemed to be blowing through the Soviet Union, though much remained behind closed doors: Khrushchev made his famous speech denouncing Stalin in February, but its content remained secret.

As part of their UK itinerary in April 1956 the Soviet leaders attended a private dinner, as the guests of Labour's National Executive Committee, that has since become something of a cautionary tale of how not to be diplomatic. Edwin Gooch, as Chairman of the Labour Party and "chair" on the night (and only recently recovered from an emergency operation) made a short speech of welcome to which Bulganin replied. Callaghan then called on Khrushchev to speak. The result was an hour-long harangue against the capitalist West. Richard Crossman wrote in his diary that Khrushchev was "a boss and a bully" who had threatened that if Britain did not join with the Russians "they would swat us off the face of the Earth like a dirty old black beetle".



A bouquet for Karl Marx from visiting Soviet leaders Bulganin and Khrushchev, Highgate 1956.

George Brown MP, fortified by drink, toasted Khrushchev teasingly as a "big boss". Khrushchev replied that Brown looked to him like a little boss. This developed into running banter between the two (and presumably a flustered translator) after the meal as the whisky flowed. As the press later commented, these two bullish individuals had "locked horns".

At one stage in his peroration Khrushchev defended the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, at which George Brown muttered "May God forgive you". Khrushchev demanded to know what he had said and Brown repeated it out loud, at which point "pandemonium" broke out.

Once Khrushchev had ended his diatribe, Labour's new leader, Hugh Gaitskell, made a conciliatory reply, but felt "honour bound" to bring up the subject of imprisoned Social Democrats in Eastern Europe. This seems ill-judged: at a first meeting at the Soviet Embassy the day before, the subject had caused a row. Now it made Khrushchev even angrier. He raged "If you want to help the enemies of the working class, you must find another agent to do it". Nye Bevan wanted to know who were the enemies of the working class and how was their guilt established. The press reported that he wagged a finger at the Russian leader. At this point Khrushchev and entourage stormed out of this "wasted evening".

Edwin Gooch was criticised by Gaitskell (though only privately, in the pages of his diary) for letting things get out of hand; but with two such hotheads as Khrushchev and Brown in close proximity, other Labour grandees—none of whom were shrinking violets—weighing in, and with copious supplies of alcohol available, it seems unfair and peevish to blame him alone for the spat.

A visit by Chairman and Leader to the Russians' suite at Claridges Hotel calmed the situation, and Edwin Gooch features in a Pathé newsreel entering the lobby with Gaitskell. Khrushchev and Hugh Gaitskell shook hands at the House of Commons the next day, but Brown was snubbed. Lord Callaghan recalled in his 2003 letter that "...your grandfather was seated in the centre of the top tables, but I don't think he was able to say much in what you call the crossfire between Khrushchev and George Brown".

In retrospect, however excruciating an experience it must have been for Edwin and many others present, there is something heroically anarchic about this Cold War head-to-head. It was free of hypocrisy, an unbuttoned assertion of both democratic values and absolutist strength. One would imagine that Khrushchev—as Soviet leader—can never have been spoken to like that before. *Time* magazine, in its report, called it "The Night of the Long Spoons".

Gaitskell-Gooch relations may have been further strained (though Edwin was in many ways a natural supporter of that centrist politician) when the party leader attended the National Union of Agricultural Workers' Golden Jubilee Biennial parade at Great Yarmouth in June 1956. He was photographed marching along the seafront before a Union banner with Edwin Gooch, Harold Collison and others. But then, in the lounge of the Star Hotel, came Gaitskell's fateful encounter with Edwin's grandson Simon, then a one-year-old extremist, who—like a miniature Khrushchev—smashed a tiny fist against the guest of honour's cup and saucer, spilling tea all over the Labour Party's 'lost leader'.

Nevertheless, Gaitskell's speech at the Marina was a cheerful one: "He, the President and General Secretary, had all marched in step from the beginning to



Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell, flanked by Edwin Gooch, President, and Harold Collison, General Secretary, at the NUAW's Golden Jubilee celebrations in Great Yarmouth, 1956.

the end of the parade and he suggested that there was probably some significance in the fact that the Leader of the Labour Party, the Leader of the Parliamentary Party and a member of the TUC General Council could all be in unison. He pledged to abolish tied cottage evictions when Labour next came to power”.

Gaitskell would later come up to North Walsham, in 1961, to open the new North Norfolk Labour Party constituency office, Edwin House. All was forgotten and forgiven.

Edwin Gooch presided over the Labour Party Conference at Blackpool in 1956 (considered “the best since 1945”) at which the Suez Crisis took centre stage, with an emergency resolution denouncing the Eden Government’s “lamentable handling” of the affair. At the conclusion of events Edwin received this vote of thanks from the NEC: “He has guided the Conference with a quiet confidence—but this is what we expect of a man with his feet so firmly planted on good soil”. He wound up proceedings with a Presidential Address: “Our resolve must be to work for the common good; to feed, clothe and shelter the depressed and the helpless; and not to spare ourselves until nation is drawn unto nation in peace and goodwill”.

Smaller-scale political gatherings are recorded in various press photographs. In several of them Nye Bevan addresses a Union rally against the tied cottage, in

about 1959. Bevan had criticised the NUAW and other unions' moderate leaderships in a *Tribune* pamphlet in 1951, but continued to speak at farmworkers' events.

In 1954 Edwin Gooch had been widely acclaimed for speaking out against German rearmament, but "this did not make him a Bevanite" - i.e. a unilateral disarmer (if pushed he might have described himself politically as a "Morrisonite"). But then at the 1957 Labour Party Conference he supported Bevan's switch to a multilateral position, which Nye marked with his famous phrase condemning unilateralism as sending any British foreign minister "naked into the council chamber". However, nuclear tests should be unilaterally brought to an end, said Bevan, to give the United Kingdom the moral advantage.



Nye Bevan speaks at an NUAW rally against the tied cottage. Edwin Gooch, cigarette in mouth, ruminates.

In 1958 Edwin wrote about the madness of the arms race, "Better to talk to those from other lands about freeing the world from want of food...", and in 1960, perhaps inspired by the rise of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, he joined Labour Party Conference delegates in voting in favour of getting rid of nuclear weapons. This was the occasion of Gaitskell's famous "Fight and fight again" speech against the motion, which he lost but then reversed in 1961. In 1962 Edwin wrote "We live in a disturbing age... World disarmament must be the goal".

He underwent another operation in the summer of 1958, but recovered quickly and was straight off to the International Labour Organisation in Geneva, and a few months later in Copenhagen he was re-elected President of the International Landworkers' Federation. At the Party Conference in Scarborough that year Edwin Gooch introduced Labour's document on agricultural policy, *Prosper the Plough*, subtitled "a policy for a sound and efficient British agriculture", which proposed, as Edwin said, "moderate expansion... This may not be exciting either to the Conference, or the farming community, but it is immeasurably reassuring compared with the standstill policy of the present Tory Government".



Edwin Gooch, Labour NEC, on the conference platform in Scarborough, 1960, when Hugh Gaitskell gave his famous speech against unilateral disarmament. Harold Wilson looks on.

In February 1959 the *Land Worker* wished the President a happy 70th birthday: "A man who has worked in the interests of agricultural workers for most of his life, he is still able to put vigour, backed by a wealth of experience, into all he does. In fact, during the period surrounding his birthday he made two trips abroad in the interests of international trade unionism and solidarity.

Bro.Gooch has been the Union's president for the past thirty years. He brings to the council chamber some of the hard-headed common sense for which his home county of Norfolk is famous. May he continue to do so for many years to come!"

E.G.Gooch won North Norfolk again in the 1959 General Election, with a majority of 658.

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