The party politics of the inter-war period sees three related phenomena:

- Conservative dominance
- The rise of Labour
- The decline of the Liberals

LIBERAL COLLAPSE: THE FACTS

There are various staging posts that might be identified in the decline of the Liberals:

- 1906 election: 49% of the popular vote; 400 seats
- 1910 elections: Dec, 43.6% and 272 seats. Minority government with support from Labour & Irish Parliamentary Party
- Crises before the war: Labour unrest & class war, Home Rule, Suffragettes
- 1916: the fall of Asquith & the party began to split
- 1918: the Coupon election, the massacre of the ‘Squiffites & the party split; Sinn Fein won in Ireland
- 1922: Lloyd George fell from power
- 1922: Labour win 29.5% of the popular vote and 142 seats. The Liberals lost these seats & votes to Labour for good.
- 1923: last-minute reunification in opposition to tariff reform sees the Liberals come third to Labour, winning seats against Tories, but many of them with small majorities. Labour formed their first government
- 1924: the Labour government fell & there was a Conservative landslide, with the Liberal vote collapsed: 18%, 40 seats. The Liberals lost most of these seats to the Conservatives for good.
- 1929: after two years of revival under Lloyd George, the Liberal vote rose to 24%, but only 59 seats. They were now the third party.
- 1931: the party split between Simonites (Liberal Nationals), Samuelites and Lloyd Georgeites.

Is it fair to say that, in electoral terms, there are two key dates: 1922 (when they lose out to Labour), and 1924 (to the Tories)?

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE DECLINE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

Read *Flagship, pp 68-87*. Some parts of history have a very clear historiographical debate: this is one. There are several views:

- George Dangerfield: The Strange Death of Liberal England
- The rise of Labour: Pelling, McKibbin, Matthew & Kay
- The Liberals winning the class war: Peter Clarke, Neal Blewett
- New Liberalism was an illusion: Pelling, Bernstein, Searle
- Labour had their problems too: Tanner
- The Liberals may well have won in 1915: Pugh
- The Liberals had serious problems in 1914: Lemieux
- Hit by bus: Trevor Wilson

How strong was the Liberals political position in 1914? (Answer Qs 1 & 2, p 74)
HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE WAR TO LIBERAL DECLINE?

- Why the war could have split the Liberals, and how important Lloyd George was in keeping the party together in 1914
- The fall of Asquith
- The Maurice Debate
- Why total war went against Liberal principles
- The Union of Democratic Control and the loss of some radicals to Labour
- The Maurice Debate
- The collapse of the Irish Parliamentary Party
- The rise of the Labour Party
- The Coupon Election

WHY DID THE LIBERALS CONTINUE TO DECLINE UNDER THE COALITION?

- The impact of the Coupon election and after
  - Herbert Gladstone’s view, *Pearce & Stewart*, p 223
  - Conservative strength
  - The decline of local parties
  - The destruction of the ‘Squiffites
  - ‘Squiffite hatred of Lloyd George
- Lloyd George’s coalition government losing working class support
- The growing strength of Labour on the ground
- The weakness of the Lloyd George Liberals
- The 1922 election and the rise of Labour (Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour*)

Could Liberal decline have been reversed before 1922?

WHY DID THE LIBERALS DO SO DISASTROUSLY IN 1924?

- The two key politicians of the era, Stanley Baldwin & Ramsay Macdonald, both wanted to keep Lloyd George out of power
- Many leading Liberals felt the same
- In 1923, Baldwin called a snap election over tariff reform. The Liberals reunited, and fought on the great Liberal issue of Free Trade, but still came third behind Labour (Peter Clarke, *The Stranger Death of Liberal England*)
- They were forced to put a Labour government into power
- Baldwin abandoned tariffs, and when the Labour government fell, ran on a strong Red Scare ticket
- In the 1924 election, the Liberals were short of money and candidates

Could Asquith and Lloyd George have acted differently in 1923-24. If they had, could they have done better in 1923, or avoided the disaster of 1924?

WHY DID THE LIBERAL RECOVERY UNDER LLOYD GEORGE FAIL TO DELIVER ELECTORAL SUCCESS IN 1929?

- The 1924 election was a calamity: arguably, in terms of seats, the Liberals were never going to come back from 1924
Lloyd George continued to divide the party, yet was also its main creative force.
The party was divided over the General Strike.
There were new ideas: Liberal Summer Schools, The Green Book (Land and the Nation), Coal and Power, The Yellow Book (Britain's Industrial Future), The Orange Book (We Can Conquer Unemployment).
The Liberals had a string of by-election successes in 1927-29 from the Conservatives (Bosworth, Lancaster, St Ives, Eddisbury, Holland-with Boston). In 1928, they averaged 30% of the vote in by-elections, level with Labour. However, they only took one Labour seat. In the same period, Labour won 12 seats from the Conservatives. There were 5 by-elections in 1929, the liberals averaged 21%, Labour 44%.
In the 1929 election, the Liberal vote went up from 18% to 24%, 2.9m to 5.3m votes, but they had only 59 seats. In short, the first-past-the-post electoral system discriminated against them.

Was the Liberal revival under Lloyd George too little, too late?

WHY DID THE LIBERAL PARTY SPLIT IN 1931?
- The party split over how to deal with a Labour government: Lloyd George wanted to work with Labour in return for electoral reform; Simonites became National Liberals (de facto Conservatives).
- By 1931 the party had in effect split three ways: Simonite, Samuelite, and Lloyd Georgeites.

Who was more to blame for the Liberal decline: Asquith or Lloyd George?
How far were other leading Liberals to blame?
Make two lists of those figures in 20th century political history who left the Liberals for Labour or the Conservatives, then add those who came from Liberal families.
Was Liberal decline inevitable?
Could the Liberal decline have been reversed at any time?

On fact to bear in mind here is that even in decline, the Liberal vote still mattered. Twice in the 1920s, in 1923 and 1929, a Liberal recovery deprived the Tories of a majority. Liberal collapses helped the Tories win landslides. A further collapse in the Liberal vote would help the Conservatives win narrowly in 1951; a liberal recovery did a lot to bring about the Conservative defeat in 1964.

FURTHER READING, LISTENING & VIEWING
Sixth form history needs you to do reading of your own. Already, this guide had given you references to the Flagship textbook, and some other resources. You need to take steps beyond that both online and, of course, by resorting to another revolutionary technology, the book. For modern British history, there is a dizzying array of printed and online resources, of startlingly variable quality. If you do find something not on here that’s good, let the rest of us know through the Facebook page or email s.tilbrook@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk and we’ll add it.

For each topic or area, we have colour coded each book or article:
- Blue is essential
- Yellow means if you want to develop a deeper understanding you should read one or all of these
Green means this is a monograph, or a sophisticated or highly detailed account. Learn how to dip into real history books, a vital study skill; you might sometimes find full books actually become more engrossing.

Pink is for choices that are more loosely related, and have grabbed someone’s interest at some point. Try one or two, they might be fun.

A WORD ABOUT ONLINE RESOURCES
Three of the best resources are, of course, the History department’s very own Blog, Facebook page and Twitter feed.

The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)
Beyond that, for the British history course, get used to using one of the best resources available, and for free; the DNB. Any local library card will get you in: anyone can join the City Library via this link
https://eforms.newcastle.gov.uk/popup.aspx/RenderForm/?F.Name=JvTDqdafo
Once you have a library card number, got to http://www.oxforddnb.com/ and fill in your number. You then have access to it all. They vary in quality from the good to absolutely excellent, and they are all written by leaders in the field. The best have a particularly good last section, dealing with how history has viewed these men and women, and their historiography. There are also some very good Themes, such as the one above on the Union of Democratic Control.

History Today
Beyond that, another invaluable resource is History Today. We have institutional access to the entire archive, here: http://www.historytoday.com/user/login
Username: Tilbrook
Password: historian
You can search at your leisure, and find all sorts. These guides will flag some up for you.

Philip Allan Resources
Another good resources is Philip Allan Magazines Online, aimed very much at sixth-form students: here http://my.dynamic-learning.co.uk/default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2farchive.aspx
Username: j.richardson@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk
Password: rgs1
The archive is then searchable

FURTHER READING: textbooks and student introductions
There is a range of series aimed at sixth form history students. None make for exciting reading, and they vary in quality, but you should always aim to read at least one. The Liberia decline is pretty well
Stephen Lee, British Political History 1914-1995 (Lon 1996), ch 3
Malcolm Pearce & Geoffrey Stewart, British Political History 1867-2001 (3rd ed, Lon 2002), ch 6

Here are some other overviews:
Chris Cook, A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900-1997 (5th ed, Lon 1997), chs 6-9
Michael Bentley, The Liberal Party 1900-1939; in Chris Wrigley (ed), A Companion to 20th
Century Britain (Oxford 2003), ch 2

Pugh is one of the best current writers on the history of Britain in the first half of the 20th century (see below)

Three classic works:
George Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England (Lon 1935)
CL Mowatt, Britain Between the Wars (Lon 1955)
AJP Taylor, English History 1914-45 (Oxford 1965)

There are some specifically relevant articles too:
Derrick Murphy, The Decline of the Liberals and the Rise of Labour
Philip Allan: 20th Century History Review | Modern History Vol 8 | 4 April 1997
Iain Sharpe, The Fall of the Liberal Party 1916-29
Philip Allan: 20th Century History Review | Modern History Vol 14 | 2 November 2002
Trevor Fisher, The Strange Death of Liberal England
Philip Allan: 20th Century History Review | Modern History Vol 9 | 4 April 1998
David Powell, The Decline of the Liberal Party (2009)
History Today: http://www.historytoday.com/david-powell/decline-liberal-party

The missing ingredients that prevented Liberal revival.
History Today: http://www.historytoday.com/mark-rathbone/liberal-party-1920s

The Liberals & the 1923 election
History Today: http://www.historytoday.com/york-membery/liberals-last-hurrah

Some counter-factual speculation: was Liberal decline inevitable?
History Today: http://www.historytoday.com/ian-garrett/general-election-1915-0

Graham Goodlad, Liberal Decline 1868-1992
Putting the era in a wider picture

Simon Lemieux, The Third Party in Britain
On the fate of third parties
Philip Allan: 20th Century History Review | Modern History Vol 14 | 1 September 2002

The DNB entries on Lloyd George and Asquith are essential, but others are also worth a look
Roy Hattersley, David Lloyd George: the Great Outsider (Lon 2010)
A largely hostile account from another political insider. Hattersley was a minister in the 1970s and Labour Deputy Leader to Neil Kinnock in the 1980s
Roy Jenkins, Asquith (Lon 1966)
Jenkins was a major figure in the Labour Party of the 1960s and 1970s, though was perhaps always more of a natural Liberal (he went on to found the SPD in 1981). This is a sympathetic and thoughtful, if dated, account from a political insider.

Stephen Koss, Asquith (Lon 1976)