



Leadership Elections: Conservative Party

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In 1998, new rules were introduced for the conduct of Conservative leadership elections.

Three leaders, David Cameron, Michael Howard and Iain Duncan Smith, have been appointed under these rules. Both results are reported, and the current and previous rules for the election of the leader are described.

In 2005, the system of electing a Conservative Party leader was reviewed. Proposed changes did not secure enough support to be implemented and the 1998 rules were the basis on which the new leader was elected in 2005. The 2005 review is described and the candidates that have been nominated in the 2005 contest are listed.

Appendices list the Conservative Party leaders since 1900, and the results of previous leadership contests.

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A. Introduction

The current rules for electing the leader of the Conservative Party were introduced in 1998, initially set out in principle in the Conservative document *The Fresh Future*.¹ This document, described by, the then new leader, William Hague in the foreword as a “White Paper”, formed the basis for reforms to the organisation of the Conservative Party following its defeat in the 1997 general election. The origins of this document can be traced back to a speech by William Hague to the Party on 23 July 1997, in which he outlined six principles underpinning his vision for a new direction for the Party. These principles – unity, decentralisation, democracy, involvement, integrity and openness – fed directly into the publication of the consultation paper *Blueprint for Change*,² presented to the Party’s conference in October 1997. Each principle formed a chapter heading in *The Fresh Future* policy paper. The leadership rules were set out in the chapter headed “Democracy: giving power to the members” and formed part of the strategy to make the Party more accessible and responsive to Party members in the constituencies and to increase Party membership.

The new system for the first time, gave every member of the Conservative Party a say in the election of the leader.³ This represented a fundamental departure from the previous practices: the Parliamentary Party had traditionally chosen the leaders of the Conservative Party and the consultation with the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations played no decisive role. The system is outlined in Section E.

At the time of announcing his intention to resign in 2005, Michael Howard announced that the system of electing a Conservative Party leader was to be reviewed and changed. The review process is described in Section F. However, the proposed changes did not secure enough support to be implemented and the 1998 rules were the basis on which the new leader was elected in 2005.

A list of Conservative Party leaders since 1900 appears as Appendix 1 to this note.

B. 2005 Leadership Contest

Nominations for candidates officially opened on 7 October 2005, the day on which Michael Howard formally resigned.⁴ When they closed at noon on 13 October, it was confirmed that four candidates were standing for the leadership⁵:

Kenneth Clarke	candidacy announced 30 August 2005 ⁶
Liam Fox	candidacy announced 8 September 2005 ⁷

¹ *The Fresh Future: the Conservative Party renewed*, Feb 1998

² *Our Party: blueprint for change – a consultation paper for reform of the Conservative Party*, Oct 1997

³ In the 1997 leadership election, the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations had reported party members’ views to the 1922 Committee, but not on the basis of any systematic ballot of individual party members.

⁴ BBC, “Tories nominate as Howard Resigns”, 7 October 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4318248.stm

⁵ Conservative Party, *Leadership Election Timetable*, 13 October 2005,

http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=125664

⁶ “Clarke’s decision to stand for Tory leadership aimed at besting rivals”, *Financial Times*, 31 August 2005, p2

⁷ “Fox begins bid to lead Tories with Union flag policy for all schools”, *Evening Standard*, 8 September 2005, p8

David Davis	candidacy announced 29 September 2005
David Cameron	candidacy announced 29 September 2005 ⁸

A fifth candidate, Sir Malcolm Rifkind, who had declared that he would stand on 29 August 2005,⁹ pulled out on 11 October 2005.¹⁰ During the summer various other Conservative MPs names were mentioned in connection with the leadership contest.

In accordance with current Conservative Party rules, the first ballot was held on 18 October 2005.

The results were as follows:

First ballot (Tuesday 18 October)

David Davies	62 votes
David Cameron	56 votes
Liam Fox	42 votes
Kenneth Clarke	38 votes

Second ballot (Thursday 20 October)

David Cameron	90 votes
David Davies	57 votes
Liam Fox	51 votes

Accordingly, members of the Conservative Party were asked to choose between David Cameron and David Davies in a postal ballot, which closed on 5 December 2005.¹¹ The Conservative Party Board announced that the final results of the contest would be announced on 6 December 2005.¹²

The ballot forms were sent out at the beginning of November.¹³

During the voting period, eleven regional hustings meetings were held. The first hustings took place in Leicester on 14 November 2005, and the last took place in Exeter on 30 November 2005.¹⁴

On 6 December 2005, the result of the ballot was announced by Sir Michael Spicer, the Chairman of the 1922 Committee.¹⁵ The result was:

⁸ "The two Davids come out fighting", *Daily Telegraph*, 30 September 2005, p4

⁹ "Rifkind is 'one nation' candidate", *Daily Telegraph*, 30 August 2005, p6

¹⁰ George Jones, Brendan Carlin and Jonathan Isaby, "Then there were four as Rifkind quits Tory race", *Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 2005

¹¹ Conservative Party, "Leadership Election Update", 20 October 2005,

http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=125813

¹² Conservative Party, "Statement from the Conservative Party Board", 29 September 2005,

http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.press.release.page&obj_id=125206

¹³ George Jones, "Cameron gets vital 100 MPs as Fox supporters switch to join his side", *Daily Telegraph*, 31 October 2005

¹⁴ Brendan Carlin, "We go to the wire, says defiant Davis", *Daily Telegraph*, 15 November 2005

¹⁵ Conservative Party, *David Cameron elected new Conservative Leader*, 6 December 2005, http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=126741

David Cameron	134,446 votes, 68 per cent of votes cast
David Davis	64,398 votes, 32 per cent of votes cast
Eligible voters	253,689
Turnout	198,844 (78 per cent)

C. 2003 Leadership Contest

On 28 October 2003, Sir Michael Spicer, chairman of the 1922 Committee, announced that he had received 25 letters from Conservative Members of Parliament requesting a vote of confidence in the leadership.¹⁶ He subsequently announced that the vote of confidence would take place on 29 October 2003.

The motion before the Conservative Members of Parliament was

I have confidence in Iain Duncan Smith as leader of the Conservative Party

Sir Michael gave the result:

Yes	75
No	90

He also announced that nominations for the post of leader had to be submitted by noon on Thursday 6 November.¹⁷

When nominations closed, only one had been received, and accordingly Michael Howard was declared elected.¹⁸

Speculation on the calling of a vote of confidence lasted for a considerable time. Once the vote of confidence was announced, Iain Duncan Smith stressed the support he had among the Conservative Party's wider membership:

I know I have the confidence of the grass roots – and I look forward to their original election of me, and their continued support, being validated by my parliamentary colleagues. Then we can begin the campaign to win the next election.¹⁹

Michael Howard's was the only nomination received. Before his election was confirmed, he 'promised to submit his likely "coronation" victory to ratification by the wider party membership',²⁰ because of the 'wrath of the constituencies which remain resentful at the way Duncan Smith was removed from power'.²¹ However, it was subsequently reported that:

¹⁶ 25 MPs equated to 15 per cent of the 165 Conservative MPs

¹⁷ "Exit the Quiet Man, quietly. Now the stage is set for Howard", *The Independent*, 30 October 2003, p1

¹⁸ Conservative Party, "Michael Howard takes over as leader", see:

http://www.conservatives.com/news/article.cfm?obj_id=78396

¹⁹ "I have the confidence of the grass roots", *The Independent*, 29 October 2003, p4

²⁰ 'Howard: defeat changed me', *The Guardian*, 4 November 2003, p12

²¹ 'Michael Howard may turn out to be the Tory leader who lays Thatcher's ghost', John Gray, *New Statesman*, 10 November 2003, pp29-31

The speed of the bloodless coup was underlined when the party's board announced his leadership would not be subject to a formal ratification ballot of the membership. Following "overwhelming representations" from members, "informal consultation" with activists will instead be carried out over the weekend.²²

D. 2001 Leadership Contest

William Hague announced his resignation as Leader of the Conservative Party on 8 June 2001, following the Conservative Party's defeat in the General Election.

Following his election as Chairman of the 1922 Committee on 27 June 2001, Sir Michael Spicer announced that the closing date for nominations for the leadership would be Thursday 5 July.²³ Five Members stood for the leadership in the ensuing election contest:

Michael Portillo	candidacy announced 13 June 2001 ²⁴
Iain Duncan Smith	candidacy announced 19 June 2001 ²⁵
David Davis	candidacy announced 19 June 2001 ²⁶
Michael Ancram	candidacy announced 21 June 2001 ²⁷
Kenneth Clarke	candidacy announced 26 June 2001 ²⁸

There then followed a series of ballots in the Parliamentary Party. The rules state that the candidate in last place would drop out each time. However, in the first ballot two candidates tied for last place (which was not explicitly provided for in the rules²⁹) and so all five went forward to a second ballot.

The results were as follows:³⁰

First ballot (Tuesday 10 July)

Michael Portillo	49 votes
Iain Duncan Smith	39 votes
Kenneth Clarke	36 votes
Michael Ancram	21 votes
David Davies	21 votes

Second ballot (Thursday 12 July)

Michael Portillo	50 votes
Iain Duncan Smith	42 votes

²² 'New leader takes charge with hint of Portillo role', *The Independent*, 7 November 2003, p8

²³ Taken as the date of call for nominations

²⁴ See statement in full on BBC News Online – http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk_politics/newsid_1386000/1386689.stm

²⁵ See, eg, - <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,10-2001210636,00.html>

²⁶ See, eg, *The Times*, 20 June 2001 – <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,10-2001210860,00.html>

²⁷ See statement in full – *The Times*, 21 June 2001 – <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,2001210019-2001220075,00.html>

²⁸ See, eg *The Times*, 27 June 2001 - <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,2-2001221647,00.html>

²⁹ Rule 26 now makes provision for this event. In the first instance, the ballot is re-run. If there is again a tie among candidates with the least votes, those candidates are eliminated. However, if only three candidates are involved in the ballot, the ballot is re-run until only one candidate has the least number of votes (Rule 34).

³⁰ Also reproduced on the Conservative Party website - <http://www.conservatives.com/leadership.cfm>

Kenneth Clarke	39 votes
David Davies	18 votes
Michael Ancram	17 votes

Michael Ancram was therefore dropped, and David Davies subsequently withdrew.

Third ballot (Tuesday 17 July)

Kenneth Clarke	59 votes
Iain Duncan Smith	54 votes
Michael Portillo	53 votes

A postal ballot of Conservative Party members³¹ was held over the summer. The Conservative Party website³² indicated that ballot papers were sent out in mid-August, and had to be returned by 11 September.³³ Due to events in the United States on Tuesday 11 September, the result was delayed twenty four hours and was announced on 13 September, by Sir Michael Spicer, Chairman of the 1922 Committee.³⁴

Iain Duncan Smith	155, 933 votes, 61 per cent of votes cast
Kenneth Clarke	100,864 votes, 39 per cent of votes cast
Eligible voters	328,000
Turnout	256,797 (79.1 per cent)

E. Current rules

The basic rules set out in the *Fresh Future* document were examined by the 1922 Committee (see below), which is responsible for the organisation of leadership elections. More detailed procedures were agreed by the 1922 Committee in February 1998. These have since been revised, and copies of the current rules are available from the secretary to the 1922 Committee.³⁵ The principles of the new procedure, although not the detailed rules appear as Schedule 2 to the Conservative Party Constitution,³⁶ reproduced as Appendix 3.

A leadership election is triggered either:

- by the resignation of the Party Leader, or
- following a vote of “no confidence” by Conservative Members of Parliament.

In brief, the election system consists of two stages:

- Conservative Members of Parliament select a choice of candidates to present to the membership of the whole Party
- Party members vote, on a "one member one vote" basis, for their preferred candidate from a shortlist of two

³¹ Those who have been members for at least 3 months at the date of the call for nominations (27 June)

³² <http://www.conservatives.com/leadership.cfm>

³³ According to press reports there were queries from about 3,000 members about missing ballot papers *Times* 14 September 2001 ‘Tory rivals welcome ‘fantastic poll return’

³⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk_politics/newsid_1542000/1542554.stm

³⁵ *Procedure for the Election of the Leader of the Conservative Party*

³⁶ First published Feb 1998; amended Oct 1999; amended July 2002

1. “No confidence” vote

To secure a confidence vote, 15% of Conservative Members of Parliament (“in receipt of the Conservative Whip”) must submit a request for such a vote, in writing, to the Chairman of the 1922 Committee. This can be done either collectively or separately, but the names of the signatories would not be disclosed (Rule 4). The Chairman in consultation with the Leader would determine the date of such a vote “as soon as possible in the circumstances prevailing” (Rule 5).

If the incumbent Leader wins the support of a simple majority in any such vote, they would remain Leader and no further vote could be called for a period of twelve months from the date of the ballot (Rule 6). If the Leader were to lose such a vote (again, on a simple majority basis) they must resign, and they may not stand in the leadership election which is then triggered (Rule 7).

2. Nominations

Nominations for the leadership are invited by the Chairman of the 1922 Committee, acting as Returning Officer for all stages of the election. Candidates must be proposed and seconded in writing (Rule 11). The names of the proposers and seconders is published (Rule 14). When nominations close (“at noon on a Thursday”) a list of valid nominations is published (Rule 15).

If there is only one valid nomination, that person is declared elected (Rule 16). If only two valid nominations are received, both names go forward to the general membership of the Party (Rule 17). If more than two nominations are received, a ballot is held within the Parliamentary Party on the Tuesday immediately following the closing date for nominations (Rule 18). An exhaustive ballot system is used to select two candidates to go forward to the general membership of the Party, as described below.

3. Parliamentary Party ballots

A ballot paper is produced and issued to all Conservative Members in the House of Commons (Rule 19), who indicate one choice from the candidates listed (Rule 20). Proxy votes are possible (Rule 21). The ballot is conducted in secret (Rule 22).

If there are three candidates in the first ballot, the two who receive the most votes go forward to the general membership (Rule 24). If there are more than three, the candidate receiving the fewest votes withdraws and a second ballot, under the same rules, is held the following Thursday (Rule 25). If there are no more than three candidates in the second ballot the two receiving the most votes go forward to the general membership. If a third ballot is required, it is held the following Tuesday (Rule 32). This process is repeated as often as necessary on alternate Tuesdays and Thursdays (Rule 33). When a ballot with only three candidates is reached, the two candidates who receive the highest number of votes go forward to the general membership.

Candidates may withdraw their names at any time, ‘up to 24 hours of the opening of the ballot’ (Rule 27), but no new nominations will be accepted after the first ballot (Rule 28). The latter rule represents a significant departure from the previous system.

4. General membership ballot

The two candidates selected by the Parliamentary Party are then put to the full membership of the Party in a postal ballot. Each Party member, on a “one member one vote” basis, votes for their preferred candidate. The 1922 Committee rules state that the postal ballot would go to ‘all the members of the Conservative Party in good standing who have been members for not less than three months prior to the date of the announcement of the Vote of Confidence’ (Rule 33). It is not explicitly stated in the rules from when the three months applies, in the eventuality of the leader resigning, but Rule 5 in the “Rules for the Election of the Leader” (which appears as Schedule 2 to the *Constitution of the Conservative Party*³⁷) gives this as ‘immediately prior to the close of the ballot for the election of the Leader’.

The Chairman of the 1922 Committee would consult with the Board of the Conservative Party to agree the closing date for the ballot, which will be ‘as soon as practicable’ after the date of the last ballot in the Parliamentary Party (Rule 37). The Chairman, as returning officer, shall agree with the Board who is responsible, under his direction, for the receipt and counting of the votes (Rule 40), and the Chairman would announce the results ‘as soon as practicable’ to a meeting of the Parliamentary Party and representatives of the Conservative Party (Rule 41).

5. Timetable

When the position of Leader becomes vacant, Rule 1 of the procedure states that the Chairman of the 1922 Committee shall arrange for an election process to begin “as soon as practicable”. In the circumstances pertaining in June 2001 when William Hague resigned, it was not practicable to hold the leadership election until the new Chairman of the 1922 Committee had been elected, which happened on 27 June 2001 (see below). Other timings enshrined in the rules of procedure are as follows:

Parliamentary Party

- nominations close at noon on a Thursday (Rule 15)
- first ballot held on the following Tuesday (Rule 18)
- a second ballot, if required, held the following Thursday (Rule 25)
- subsequent ballots, if required, held on alternate Tuesdays and Thursdays (Rules 30 and 31)

³⁷ First published 1998, amended October 1999, amended July 2002 (schedule 2 reproduced in Appendix 3 to this note)

Party membership

- closing date for the postal ballot - as soon as practicable after the date of the last ballot in the Parliamentary Party (Rule 34); noon on selected date (Rule 35)
- result announced as soon as practicable (Rule 37)

6. Election expenses and campaigns

The final rule in the 1922 Committee procedures states that regulations will be issued not less than once in each Parliament ‘governing the administration, permitted expenditure, methods of communication, election addresses and any such other questions concerning advertising and communicating with and canvassing the electorate as appear [...] necessary and desirable’ (Rule 42).

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards reminded all leadership candidates of their obligations relating to registering donations in the Register of Members’ Interests. The guidance was that all financial contributions of £1,000 or more from any one source, together with benefits in kind to the same value, should be registered and the donors in question should be identified.³⁸ This is in line with the requirement for declaration of constituency election expenditure to the Electoral Commission, and also with the last leadership election and the London mayoral election in 2000. All such donations were recorded in the *Register of Members’ Interest*,³⁹ and disclosed to the Electoral Commission.

F. 2005 proposals to change the leadership election process

1. Initial proposals for electing a new leader

Following the Conservative Party’s defeat at the 2005 general election, in a speech on 6 May 2005, Michael Howard announced his intention to retire as leader of the Conservative Party. However, he indicated that before he stood down he wanted to oversee changes to the Party’s process of electing a new leader.⁴⁰ These new proposals were set out in principle in the Conservative Party document *A 21st Century Party*:

1. To be validly nominated, candidates would require the support of 10 per cent of Conservative MPs.
2. If one Candidate is nominated by over half of the Parliamentary Party, he or she would automatically be declared leader.
3. If no candidate is nominated by over half of the Parliamentary Party, each candidate would address and answer questions from the National Convention. The Convention would then vote and the result of this election would be published.
4. The MPs would then make the final choice. It will be for the 1922 Committee to determine how they do this but the candidate who received most votes from the National Convention would be guaranteed a place in each ballot including the final ballot.

³⁸ Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

³⁹ *Register of Members’ Interests as at 26th November 2001*, HC 419 2001-02, 3 December 2001

⁴⁰ “Full Text: Michael Howard’s Resignation Speech”, *Guardian*, 6 May 2005.

5. Candidates would be allowed to spend up to £25,000 from the opening of nominations. The Party Treasurer would be responsible for raising this money for each candidate. Any money raised from other sources would be deducted from the money they receive from the Party Treasurer.⁴¹

This proposal was put to the 1922 Committee on 15 May 2005, but rejected. About 100 of the 180 backbenchers that attended the meeting instead endorsed a motion drawn up by the executive of the committee. The 1922 Committee proposal included a consultative period with all local associations, but the choice of leader would ultimately be decided by the parliamentary party.⁴²

2. Revised proposals for electing a new leader

Under the 1922 Committee proposed system, Sir Michael Spicer, Chairman of the 1922 Committee of MPs, would seek nominations for leader from Conservative Members of Parliament. Contenders would need the support of 5% of the party, or 10 MPs (in the current Parliament), in order to stand.

Once nominations had closed MPs would then start a two week consultation process with their constituencies, MEPs and local councillors to ascertain their preferred candidates. They would then report back to Sir Michael, who would assess their findings and inform MPs of the two candidates who gained most support, in order of preference.

MPs would then hold the first ballot, in which all nominated candidates would be able to participate. As in the current system the MP with the lowest number of votes would be eliminated. The process would then be repeated, as required, until one candidate remained.⁴³

Andrew Tyrie, the Conservative MP for Chichester hailed the decision by the parliamentary party to accept the new proposals, by 127 votes to 50 on 20 July 2005 at a meeting of the 1922 committee, as a “victory for common sense”.⁴⁴

The 1922 Committee proposal was then put to the Conservative Party Board which duly supported it. Following this result Party Chairman, Frances Maude commented;

I am pleased that these changes, agreed by the Party Board and the 1922 Committee, are going to be put forward. If these changes go through, the Conservative Party will have a new Leader in place by the middle of November.⁴⁵

However, other MPs were less enthusiastic about the new system. In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* a number of MPs including David Willetts, Michael Ancram, Andrew Lansley, Theresa May and Iain Duncan Smith, wrote:

⁴¹ *The Fresh Future: A consultation paper setting out proposals to reform the Conservative party's organisation*, 25 May 2005.

⁴² “Tory backbenchers rebuff Howard's blueprint for rules reform”, *Financial Times*, 16 May 2005, p2.

⁴³ “Rule change puts the choice of Tory leader into hands of MPs”, *The Times*, 21 July 2005, p8

⁴⁴ “Tory MPs wrest back the power to choose leader”, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 July 2005, p2.

⁴⁵ Conservative Party, “Conservative Party Board decides on leadership postal vote”, 5 August 2005, http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=124236

It is not too late for the parliamentary party to find a way of involving grassroots members in the Conservative Party's most important decisions. Any proposals that do not facilitate democratic involvement deserve to be defeated.⁴⁶

3. Proposal not backed by the Constitutional College

When the results of the ballot of the Constitutional College⁴⁷ of the Conservative Party were announced on 27 September 2005, the proposals had failed to gain enough backing. A total of 1,001 (87.7% of full membership) ballots were returned, the votes in each section were:

	For	Against
MPs	132 (71.4%)	53 (28.6%)
Volunteers*	446 (58.4%)	317 (41.5%)
Peers and MEPs	33 (63.6%)	19 (36.5%)

This equated to a total of 61 per cent of the constitutional college in favour. For the changes to be approved, 50 per cent of all those eligible to vote were required to vote in favour, along with 66 per cent of MPs who voted and 66 per cent of the National Convention members who voted, it is this final threshold that was not reached.⁴⁸

As a result of the Constitutional College ballot, no changes were made to the party's rules on electing a leader. For clarification of these existing rules see section E.

G. The 1922 Committee

The 1922 Committee has traditionally been responsible for the organisation of the ballot for leader. Under the current rules the Chairman of the 1922 Committee will act as Returning Officer at all stages of the leadership election and will also "settle all matters in relation thereto" (Rule 2).

The 1922 Committee comprises all Conservative private Members. When in government, that means the entire backbench membership of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, but in Opposition, it comprises all Conservative Members bar the Leader. It is sometimes thought that the Committee is so called after the famous meeting of Conservative Members at the Carlton Club in October 1922 which led to the ending of the 1916-1922 Coalition Government and the departure of Austen Chamberlain as leader. In fact, Philip Goodhart's history of the 1922 Committee states that the Committee was actually set up in April 1923 following an initiative by new Conservative Members elected at the 1922 General Election to facilitate cooperation within the party and assistance in integrating new Members.⁴⁹ It is chaired by a senior backbencher, who enjoys access to the party leader

⁴⁶ "Grassroots involvement", *Daily Telegraph*, 19 July 2005, p23.

⁴⁷ Constitutional college has a total of 1,141 members and is made up of MPs, MEPs, the officers of the Association of Conservative Peers, frontbench spokesmen in the Lords, and members of The National Conservative Convention (Association Chairmen, area and regional officers, members of the Board and other senior volunteers).

⁴⁸ Conservative Party, "Way now clear for leadership election", 27 September 2005, http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=125133#

⁴⁹ *The 1922: the story of the Conservative Backbenchers' Parliamentary Committee*, 1973, pp 14-5

and keeps the leadership informed of backbench opinion. Other office-holders are elected annually to form, with the Chairman, an Executive Committee. The Committee acts as a “sounding board” of opinion among Conservative Members. The press often refer to the Committee as ‘the influential 1922 Committee’, and indeed it is influential, although not so much in terms of policy. Philip (now Lord) Norton alluded to the popular presumption that a visit from a delegation of the 1922 – dubbed the ‘men in grey suits’ – constitutes the traditional means of removing a leader, but he went on to state:⁵⁰

In practice, no leader had ever gone as a result of any such visit; nonetheless, this mythology has helped underpin the influence of the 1922 Committee.

The position of 1922 Chairman was vacant at the start of the 2001 Parliament, following the retirement as an MP of Sir Archibald Hamilton at the General Election. The leadership election could not therefore take place until the 1922 Committee had elected a new Chairman. This took place on 27 June 2001 and Sir Michael Spicer, the former Environment Minister, was elected as the new Chairman.⁵¹ A list of Chairmen of the 1922 Committee appears as Appendix 4.

H. Previous systems for electing the leader⁵²

Before 1965, leaders of the Conservative Party were not elected, but “emerged” after discussion among Conservative MPs, a system which is described by one academic as “an opaque process of negotiation and ‘soundings’ involving senior party figures”.⁵³ The leadership race that took place at the 1963 Conservative Party Conference following Macmillan’s resignation through ill-health proved most controversial,⁵⁴ and prompted Ian Macleod’s reference in an article for the *Spectator* in January 1964 to the “magic circle” within the Party.

Thus in 1965 the Party introduced a procedure for the leader to be elected by a ballot of Conservative MPs. There was provision for more than one round: if there was no clear winner on the first ballot, the election went on to a second ballot and possibly a third. To succeed on the first ballot a candidate had to obtain more than 50% of the vote, and also be 15% clear of the second placed candidate. In a second ballot, a candidate could win with an overall majority of the vote only. If the second ballot failed to produce a winner with more than 50% of the vote, a third ballot was held. Originally the third ballot would be held between the top three candidates using the alternative vote system; this was amended in 1991 to confine the third ballot to the top two candidates. The procedure was used six times: three times decided on first ballot, twice on second and once on third (see Appendix 2).

⁵⁰ *The Conservative Party*, 1996, p131

⁵¹ The results of the election: Sir Michael Spicer – 79 votes; Gillian Shephard – 66 votes; John Butterfill – 11 votes. For further details see BBC Online – http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk_politics/newsid_1410000/1410769.stm

⁵² An excellent account of the history of the selection of the leader of the Conservative Party appears in Vernon Bogdanor’s chapter “The Selection of the Party Leader” in A Seldon and S Ball’s *Conservative Party Century*, 1994, pp 69-96

⁵³ P Webb, *The Modern British Party System*, 2000, p 197-8

⁵⁴ For a brief resume of these events, see article by Lord Norton of Louth , “Leadership scramble”, *House Magazine*, 5 Oct 1998, p30

Most Party leaders have resigned before leadership elections have taken place. Margaret Thatcher has been the only Conservative Party leader (in fact, the only leader of any party) to have been removed against her will under the leadership rules whilst serving as Prime Minister. Edward Heath was similarly removed while serving as Leader of the Opposition.

Edward Heath was the first leader elected (on one ballot) under the election procedure agreed in 1965. He resisted resignation following the Conservative defeats in both 1974 general elections and the ensuing challenge brought Margaret Thatcher to the leadership in 1975 (after two ballots). Both Margaret Thatcher (in 1989) and John Major (in 1995) successfully saw off challenges in a leadership contest. Margaret Thatcher, having defeated Sir Anthony Meyer (widely regarded as a “stalking horse” candidate) in 1989, lost a subsequent challenge one year later. John Major was elected as a result of that contest, on the second ballot. John Major himself precipitated the 1995 leadership election by standing down in order to initiate an election and end speculation over his ability to lead the Party. (This would not now be possible under the new rules: a leader who has resigned cannot stand in the ensuing election.) Having won that election (on the first ballot), he resigned in 1997 and William Hague became the leader in an election that went to three ballots.

The 1997 leadership election was examined by Keith Alderman who identified several distinctive features of that contest:⁵⁵

- it was the first election under the then procedures in which the incumbent leader had resigned;
- the election went to a third ballot for the first time;
- at seven weeks from announcement of resignation of leader to election of new leader, it was also the longest contest;
- the electorate (i.e. the number of Conservative Members of Parliament) was far smaller than on previous occasions;
- the campaign expenditure by candidates was far higher.

These issues, and other factors following the Conservative Party’s defeat in the 1997 General Election, led to an examination of the leadership election procedures, which ultimately resulted in the new system.

⁵⁵ Keith Alderman, “The Conservative Party Leadership Election of 1997”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 51(1), Jan 1998, pp 1-16

I. Further reading

- Keith Alderman, "The Conservative Party Leadership Election of 1997", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 51 (1), Jan 1998, pp 1-16
- Keith Alderman, "Revision of Leadership Election Procedures in the Conservative Party", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 52 (2), April 1999, pp260-274
- Keith Alderman and Neil Carter, "Conservative Leadership Election 2001", *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol 55 (3), July 2002, pp569-585
- A Seldon and S Ball, *Conservative Century: the Conservative Party since 1900*, 1994

Appendix 1 - Conservative Party Leaders since 1900⁵⁶

1900	M of Salisbury
14 Jul 1902	Arthur Balfour
13 Nov 1911	Andrew Bonar Law
21 Mar 1921	Austen Chamberlain
23 Oct 1922	Andrew Bonar Law
28 May 1923	Stanley Baldwin
31 May 1937	Neville Chamberlain
9 Oct 1940	(Sir) Winston Churchill
21 Apr 1955	Sir Anthony Eden
22 Jan 1957	Harold Macmillan
11 Nov 1963	Sir Alec Douglas-Home
2 Aug 1965	Edward Heath
11 Feb 1975	Margaret Thatcher
28 Nov 1990	John Major
19 Jun 1997	William Hague
13 Sept 2001	Iain Duncan Smith
6 Nov 2003	Michael Howard

Notes:

- 1 *Bonar Law (1911-21) and Austen Chamberlain (1921-22) were Leaders of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons. Formerly when the Party was in Opposition there were separate Leaders in the Commons and the Lords and the title "Leader of the Conservative and Unionist Party" did not officially exist. It was conferred in October 1922 on Bonar Law when he was elected for his second term of office.*
- 2 *Neville Chamberlain remained the Leader of the Conservative Party until 4 October 1940, although he was succeeded as Prime Minister by Winston Churchill on 10 May 1940 and resigned from the Government on 30 September 1940.*

⁵⁶ Butler & Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts 1900-2000*, 2000, p 135

Appendix 2 - Previous Conservative Party Leadership Elections⁵⁷

1965	<i>1st Ballot</i>							
28 Jul 65	E Heath ⁵⁸	150						
	R Maudling	133						
	E Powell	15						
1975	<i>1st Ballot</i>			<i>2nd Ballot</i>				
4 Feb 75	M Thatcher	130	11 Feb 75	M Thatcher	140			
	E Heath	119		W Whitelaw	79			
	H Fraser	16		Sir G Howe	19			
				J Prior	19			
				J Peyton	11			
1989	<i>1st Ballot</i> ⁵⁹							
5 Dec 89	M Thatcher	314						
	Sir A Meyer	33						
1990	<i>1st Ballot</i>			<i>2nd Ballot</i>				
20 Nov 90	M Thatcher	204	27 Nov 90	J Major	185 ⁶⁰			
	M Heseltine	152		M Heseltine	131			
				D Hurd	56			
1995	<i>1st Ballot</i> ⁶¹							
4 Jul 95	J Major	218						
	J Redwood	89						
1997	<i>1st Ballot</i>			<i>2nd Ballot</i>			<i>3rd Ballot</i>	
10 Jun 97	K Clarke	49	17 Jun 97	K Clarke	64	19 Jun 97	W	92
	W Hague	41		W Hague	62		Hague	
	J Redwood	27		J Redwood	38		K Clarke	70
	P Lilley	24						
	M Howard	23						

⁵⁷ Butler & Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts 1900-2000*, 2000, p 135-6

⁵⁸ Although the rules required a larger majority, R. Maudling immediately withdrew in favour of E. Heath

⁵⁹ There were 27 abstentions

⁶⁰ Although the rules required a larger majority, both M. Heseltine and D. Hurd withdrew in favour of J. Major when the results of the second ballot were known

⁶¹ There were 22 abstentions

Appendix 3 – Election rules in Conservative Party Constitution

Constitution of the Conservative Party, first published February 1998, amended October 1999, amended July 2002

SCHEDULE 2 RULES FOR THE ELECTION OF THE LEADER

- 1 The Leader shall be elected by the Party Members and Scottish Party Members.
- 2 A Leader resigning from the Leadership of the Party is not eligible for re-nomination in the consequent Leadership election.

Election of Leader

- 3 Upon the initiation of an election for the Leader, it shall be the duty of the 1922 Committee to present to the Party, as soon as reasonably practicable, a choice of candidates for election as Leader. The rules for deciding the procedure by which the 1922 Committee selects candidates for submission for election shall be determined by the Executive Committee of the 1922 Committee after consultation of the Board.
- 4 If there is only one candidate at the time laid down for the close of nominations, that candidate shall be declared Leader of the Party.
- 5 Only those Party Members and Scottish Party Members who were members of the Party from the time of the call for nominations by the Chairman of the 1922 Committee for the election of the Leader and have been members for at least three months immediately prior to the close of the ballot for the election of the Leader shall be entitled to vote.
- 6 A candidate achieving more than 50% of the vote among the Party Membership shall be declared elected Leader of the Party.
- 7 In the event of there being only one valid nomination at the close of nominations prior to the first ballot being held by the Parliamentary Party for the election of the new Leader, the election of the nominee may if so ordered by the Board be ratified by a ballot of the Party Members and Scottish Party Members to be held within one month of the close of nomination.
- 8 Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the rules for the conduct of the ballot or ballots of Party Members and Scottish Party Members shall be agreed by the Board and the Executive Committee of the 1922 Committee.
- 9 The Chairman of the 1922 Committee, acting on behalf of the Party, shall act as Returning Officer for all stages of the election.

Appendix 4 – 1922 Committee Chairmen⁶²

Jan 1923 – Nov 1932	(Sir) G Rentoul
Dec 1932 - Dec 1935	W Morrison
Dec 1935 – Jul 1939	Sir H O'Neill
Sep 1939 – Nov 1939	Sir A Somerville
Dec 1939 – Dec 1940	W Spens
Dec 1940 – Dec 1944	A Erskine Hill
Dec 1944 – Jun 1945	J McEwen
Aug 1945 – Nov 1951	Sir A Gridley
Nov 1951 – Nov 1955	D Walker-Smith
Nov 1955 - Nov 1964	J Morrison
Nov 1964 – Mar 1966	Sir W Andstruther-Gray
May 1966 – Jul 1970	Sir A Harvey
Jul 1970 – Nov 1972	Sir H Legge-Bourke
Nov 1972 – Nov 1984	E du Cann
Nov 1984 – Apr 1992	C Onslow
Apr 1992 – May 1997	Sir M Fox
May 1997 – May 2001	Sir A Hamilton
June 2001 -	Sir M Spicer

⁶² Butler & Butler, *Twentieth Century British Political Facts 1900-2000*, 2000, p 139