

**Lord Lexden**

Conservative peer and historian

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## Margaret Thatcher

### The Prime Ministers Series

By **Iain Dale**  
Publisher **Swift Press**

**T**hose interested in the full details of Margaret Thatcher's amazing career will turn to Charles Moore's outstanding three-volume biography. Others, who want to understand her remarkable story more swiftly, will seek a succinct yet wide-ranging account of her life, free from any serious hint of bias. This is the book for them.

In 170 clear and briskly-written pages, marred only occasionally by an unlovely phrase, it covers all the first female prime minister's significant achievements and failures. This is a biography that weighs up both her merits and shortcomings with equal care and insight.

The book comes garlanded with endorsements and praise from journalists, historians and politicians. They testify to the high reputation that Iain Dale has built up for himself as a broadcaster and writer (with a taste for compiling books consisting largely of other people's contributions), having started out in life with little apart from his talents and a commitment to

hard work. He is a fine product of Thatcherite Britain.

Though well-known as an admirer of Margaret Thatcher, Dale is far too astute to allow personal feeling to cloud his historical judgement. As late as 1973, she said that she did not expect a woman to become prime minister in her lifetime. She hoped that in due course she might be appointed chancellor of the Exchequer, a post for which she was eminently well qualified. Events decided otherwise.

Dale emphasises at the outset that his principal purpose was "to introduce Margaret Thatcher to a new generation" that has grown up since she was forced from office in November 1990. Young people will have little interest in the details of the fierce arguments and disagreements that her controversial policies generated. They need a balanced assessment of the impact which this – to them legendary – figure had on life in their country, for good and ill. That is what this useful, short book provides.

School teachers in particular ought to take note of it and

commend it to their students. Opinion polls indicate a woeful ignorance among young people about our leading statesmen from Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee



onwards whose work has done so much to shape Britain today. Dale's careful assessment of Thatcher's strengths and weaknesses would contribute valuably to the correction of this sad state of affairs.

His final chapter, entitled "Twelve Myths", is especially helpful. The existence of entrenched Thatcher myths has helped create the excessive hero-worship to which she, like Churchill, has become subject, particularly among those Conservatives who foolishly believe that their problems today can be solved by copying her in slavish detail.

They think she was a conviction politician who never deviated from immutable principles: Dale demolishes this particularly pernicious myth. "She was actually a

pragmatist in most things. She has her beliefs but pragmatism often came to the fore, especially on trade union reform, Europe and many aspects of foreign policy." As for

Brexit, which the hero-worshippers insist she would have supported, Dale claims that "those closest to her all believe she would have voted remain".

There is no such thing as a defini-

tive biography. Nevertheless, as others have said, Iain Dale's brief life of Margaret Thatcher is a masterpiece of compression, bringing us a fuller understanding of one of the most controversial politicians of all time who divided our nation so deeply. ■

