



37 Days: Countdown to World War One

3 August: Germany declares war on France

Prof Christopher Clark:

It was standing here in the Foreign Office building looking out in the direction of the Old Admiralty that Sir Edward Grey said the famous words 'The lamps are going out all over Europe we shall not see them lit again in our time', and it's a beautiful piece of improvised lyricism and one can see why this formulation has become such a cliché.

But it's also slightly misleading: it implies that Britain's role was to stand back and watch Europe go down. The reality was that British foreign policy, and rightly enough, was deeply embedded in the chains of events that led to the war of 1914. The men who had the power to make decisions in these crucial last weeks and days of peace were not slithering towards the abyss – they were walking in watchful steps towards war.