Robert Peel was Conservative prime minister briefly in the 1830s and then again between 1841 and 1846 during which period he is famous for the repeal of the Corn Laws, the tariffs imposed on imported foodstuffs. His character and motivation continues to attract lively debate and widely varying views. Was he a pragmatist acting in the national as opposed to the party interest? Or was he an intellectual in politics, persuaded only by the force of a good argument? This talk will examine the debates about Peel and suggest a different view, one that tries to explain Peel's sometimes eccentric and exaggerated behaviour in relation to his times.

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