

The Unknown Prime Minister

Book Review: *Ferdinand Mount, Umbrella (Heinemann, 1994).*

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

Mount is a thoughtful conservative whose works have included *The British Constitution Now*. This novella tells the story of Lord Aberdeen in a series of vignettes of key episodes in his life.

Aberdeen would almost certainly win the prize for Victoria's Unknown Prime Minister, and yet he was a crucial figure in the history of the Liberal Party. A cousin to Byron, he made his early mark in meetings with Napoleon and was marked in return by the dismal sights of a Napoleonic battlefield. He took his place in government as a colleague of Peel, and went with Peel into the wilderness on the break-up of the Conservative Party in 1846. As the alternative Foreign Secretary to Palmerston, he always adopted the more conciliatory tone. Yet he was fated to be PM on the outbreak of the Crimean War, and it finished his career. Palmerston's advocates would argue that his more aggressive approach to the rest of the world was a greater deterrent to war than Aberdeen's apparently more pacific and reasonable stance.

Liberal Party Archives at the BLPES (continued)

in 1943. Amongst the archives' political posters and ephemera are posters produced by the Liberal Party, 1892–1910 (Coll Misc 519) and a large number of election addresses from Liberal candidates standing throughout the United Kingdom in all general elections since 1945. It must be noted that this is far from being a complete list of all our Liberal Party related holdings and that the Archives Division is regularly acquiring new material.

All these archive collections and further related material can be traced through the archive division's automated catalogue. This is currently only available to researchers visiting the Archive Reading Room but plans are in hand to make the main archive catalogue available online through the archive web pages located at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/blpes/archives/>. These pages give details of opening hours, new accessions, a general guide to holdings, details of services for readers and links to related sources. There is also provision for readers to make requests for searches to be undertaken by archives staff on the automated catalogue.

The archive collections and their users benefit from their location in a library which has always placed a high priority on collecting primary material. The printed book and journal holdings include Liberal Party and related material from the nineteenth century to the present day. The large pamphlet

Mount's work captures well the melancholy in Aberdeen's private life (he lost two wives to early graves) and the impact that it had on his public life. He turns the professional rivalry with Palmerston into a personal feud, but misses the role he played in the formation of the Liberal Party. Gladstone always saw himself as a disciple of Peel, but after Peel's death looked up to Aberdeen as more than just a leader of the remaining Peelites. On the fall of Aberdeen's government, Gladstone went angrily out of government and struggled to find his way back over the next four years. He was repeatedly tempted back to the Conservatives and could never bring himself to fully appreciate Palmerston. But at each temptation, Aberdeen helped keep Gladstone from sin until, in 1859, the right circumstances allowed Gladstone finally to reconcile himself to Palmerston and participate in the formation of the Liberal Party as we know it.

This book serves as an easy introduction to a needlessly neglected Premier.

collection includes Liberal Party publications on many topics which can be traced through the main card catalogue and its subject index, the London Bibliography of the Social Sciences. In addition there are runs of Liberal journals ranging from the Women's Liberal Magazine 1919–20 to *New Outlook* 1963–84, which can be located through the main BLPES book catalogue which is available via BLPES's web pages.

Individuals wishing to make use of any of the archives mentioned in this article should contact the Archives Division, 10 Portugal Street, London, WC2A 2HD

Tel: **0171 405 7223**

Email: **Document@lse.ac.uk**

Web Page: **<http://www.lse.ac.uk/blpes/archives/>**

The Archives Division experimental on-line catalogue can be found at: **<http://decomat.lse.ac.uk/eosindex.htm>**. Logon as **lsearchives** with password **beatrice**.

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