

primarily to achieve a form of nationhood for Ireland to which she was entitled. For many, this emotional and spiritual ambition was secondary to the reforms required to give the Irish people the day-to-day government which reflected their own needs and agenda. The party leadership worked on both ambitions and it is this which differentiates the party from any Irish predecessors. Even short of achieving a parliament for Ireland, the party could always put proposals forward and sometimes achieve successes which met the needs of the electorate for land reform, better education, economic aid and local government.

This service function sustained the Home Rule party through the crisis of the fall of Parnell, the frustration of the 1892 Gladstone government and the growing disengagement of the Liberals from home rule that followed. Nationalists were able to exploit the alliance of the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists to secure and improve the lot of the Irish tenants. Despite splits within its ranks and the growth of Sinn Fein, with its more militant philosophy of boycotting Westminster, the Home Rule party was ready and able to exploit the hung parliament which followed the elections of 1910 and the removal of the Lords' veto.

O'Day provides another useful analytical tool by enumerating the eight groups each of whom was vital to the legitimacy of self-government. These included, naturally, the Catholic population of Ireland, and the adoption of the plan by one of the major British parties, support of the press and the consent of the British public. The plan needed to pass both the Houses of Parliament. 'Southern Irish Unionist opposition had to be moderated; and, finally, Ulster Unionist interests needed to be satisfied.' Catholic support was sustained, but the first two attempts in 1886 and 1892 failed the parliamentary and English public support hurdles.

Strangely, the position of the Ulster Protestants was not recognised by Gladstone in 1886, though Lord Randolph Churchill saw the poten-

tial for exploiting their fears, and Gladstone was prepared to give some protection to the religious minority overall. By 1892, the Ulster Unionists were better prepared, and in 1912 the support given to their intransigence by the Conservatives brought the greatest crisis for parliamentary government since the civil war. The even greater European crisis of 1914 put the Irish debate on hold, though with home rule on the statute book but not implemented.

The Great War changed many things, not least the landscape of Irish politics. The 1916 rebellion resurrected the military strategy. The introduction of conscription for Ireland in 1918 delivered the election into the hands of Sinn Fein. Those of its members not in prison met in Dublin rather than Westminster. But, perversely, their boycott allowed the British parties at Westminster to re-

solve the Ulster problem and grant dominion status to the rest of Ireland in 1922. It was a messy solution with few friends for which we are still paying a price, but for most practical purposes Ireland had ceased to be of contention in Britain.

O'Day's book provides a full coverage of each stage in the development of home rule. Written in the form of a textbook, it also comes with a clear chronology, potted biographies of each of the main characters and an assortment of relevant brief documents for students to use as evidence. However, the general reader should not be dissuaded by this structure. It is a clear and enjoyable read, written from the perspective of the Irish but not in any partisan way. This difference in viewpoint provides a valuable counterpoint to the traditional English Liberal historiography.

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## Three Acres and a Cow

David Stemp:

*Three Acres and a Cow: The life and works of Eli Hamshire*

*Reviewed by John James*

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When I saw this title on the bookshelf I guessed it would contain at least some kind of reference to land reform and poverty; I reached for my wallet; and I've not been disappointed. The book, written by the subject's great-great-grandson, is an ideal purchase for anyone interested in mid-to late nineteenth century history.

The book begins with some of the Hamshire family background and genealogy and is itself full of interesting anecdotes such as: 'had to pay sixpence for the redemption of English captives taken by the Turkish pirates'. It's Eli and his works, however, that really interested me. Eli Hamshire was born on Christmas Day 1834, at Ewhurst in Surrey, into a family of yeoman farmers down on their luck. He was largely self-

educated and became, amongst other things, a carrier. He was a thrifty chap: he was renting a field at the age of fourteen, and if he came upon a toll bridge he would unhitch the horse, lead it over and then pull the cart across himself to save a penny. At the age of twenty-nine he married Rebecca, who brought a modest fortune with her; it was not squandered. He also brewed his own beer, after falling out with the local

publican, eventually teaching his daughter to brew it before she left for school in the morning.

Hamshire was acutely aware of the disparity of wealth and the problems it caused, his greatest criticism being reserved for the clergy, who, he thought, cared for the shepherd (themselves) more than the flock. There is no mention of any books that may have guided his thinking except for the Bible. Perhaps the Bible was all he needed.

In his late forties he wrote *The Source of England's Greatness and the Source of England's Poverty* under the pen name of 'a Carrier's Boy'. The book was intended as an autobiography but is more a collection of his thoughts, events in his life, anecdotes, articles and correspondence. He sent copies to leading figures and eventually met his hero, Gladstone. He was a Radical and a Liberal and also claimed title to the idea and phrase, 'three acres and a cow', often attributed to Jesse Collings MP. He complained greatly of underused and vacant farmland and he detested the system of the workhouse and poor relief. He even stated that if the government held land in trust, the rental income would permit reduced taxation. He was also quite aware that taxing land would make sure it was put to use. He offered opinions on all sorts of matters: you can read his thoughts on poverty, inhumanity, hunting, the clergy, magistrates, pollution and even the price of fish!

His next book, *The Three Great Locusts*, is almost a continuation of the first. The locusts' are the Tories, the Church and lawyers. There are more stories of empty stomachs and shoeless feet in a community that misused land. His proposal to celebrate the jubilee of Queen Victoria must be mentioned. He starts by quoting Leviticus XXV, demands restoration of half the common lands for the poor and suggests most humbly that the Queen give a million to provide the cottages the poor would need. Also included are his views on war, an international army and court of law. You can read about the meetings he attended and can learn the legend of 'Dog Smith'.

If Hamshire lived today I think he would have been active in local, if not national, politics. He lived in a time of great social, economic and industrial change, a period of reform, in which he represented the common man's growing awareness of his rights as a citizen who could help mould his own and others lives. He was a son of the soil and thus more aware than most are today of man's need of

access to land and the connection between land use and poverty. It is not all politics and poverty, though – read his thoughts on manure, the fashion of women pinching their waists and his warnings against smoking.

The book is well produced and is as entertaining as it is interesting. It can be obtained from David Stemp, 27, Netley Close, Surrey, SM3 8DN.

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## Plugging the Gaps

Duncan Brack et al (eds):

*Dictionary of Liberal Biography*  
(Politico's Publishing, 1998)

Reviewed by Chris Cook

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All those interested in the history of the Liberal Party, whether they be historians or party activists, have suffered worse than their counterparts interested in the history of the Conservative or Labour Parties.

The origins and early rise of the Labour Party and its subsequent varying fortunes in the twentieth century have attracted enormous interest. Of the writing of books on Labour history, there seems no end. Similarly, the once-neglected Conservative Party has recently seen a spate of major historical studies, not only the completion of the multi-volume *Longman History of the Conservative Party* but also important individual one-volume studies by Alan Clark and John Ramsden. By comparison, the Liberals have been neglected. While the emergence of Victorian Liberalism and the triumphs of Gladstone, as well as the later achievements of Asquith and Lloyd George, are well covered, much of later twentieth-century Liberal history remains neglected. There are few studies of the 1930s, the dark days of the 1950s, or even such aspects as the post-war Liberal local government revival. Even worse has been the dearth of reference books devoted to Liberal history. Thus there

has been no single-volume guide to the key facts and figures of Liberal Party history or of the more general area of thought and action known as Liberalism.

The new *Dictionary of Liberal Biography* at least sets out to plug one very important gap. It brings together over 200 biographies of a variety of figures active in Liberal politics – not just in parliament, but in the higher echelons of party organi-

