

some judicious skipping in chapters 2 - 4 would still allow the reader to keep pace with the main political achievements.

All Liberal Democrats should read at least one life of Gladstone, the economic agenda he tackled is still with us, as are the problems he left unsolved in Bulgaria and Ireland. Matthew gives the best available insight into Gladstone, the man and politician.

Gladstone: Further Reading

The following very brief list is merely a starting point. Most of the works listed have their own much more extensive bibliographies for the enthusiast.

Published Sources

The Gladstone Diaries: Many Volumes: Edited by MRD Foot & HCG Matthew
Detailed abbreviated daily doings. A feast for experts and aficionados but very heavy going for the rest of us.

The Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone & Ld. Granville: 4 vols.: Ed. A Ramm
Granville was Gladstone's closest political confidant and friend.

The Prime Minister's Papers: W E Gladstone: 4 vols.: Ed. J Brooke & M Sorenson
Memos, mostly autobiographical, kept by Gladstone, for the record.

Gladstone's Speeches: Ed. A Tilney Bassett
14 key speeches covering 535 pages plus an 84 page list of all the major speeches!

The Red Earl, The Papers of the 5th Earl Spencer 1835-1910: 2 vols.: Ed. P Gordon
Princess Di's ancestor was a Gladstonian Cabinet Minister; an insider's view.

Background

Nineteenth Century Britain: A Wood
A standard 'A' level textbook

Politics Without Democracy: M Bentley
Inexpensive paperback which gives a brisk survey of the period with added perspective.

The Palliser Novels: 6 vols.: A Trollope
Capture the mood, mores and something of the principal personalities.

The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915: R Shannon
Thought provoking, poses the problems faced by successive governments and their answers to them.

The Optimists, Themes and Personalities in Victorian Politics: I Bradley
How the, sometimes contradictory, ideas which make up Liberal politics came together.

Biography

Life of Gladstone: 2/3 vols.: J Morley
Still the unreplaced classic but it lacks the personal insights and 'warts' expected of a modern life.

Gladstone 1809-1865: R Shannon
A competitor to Matthew on the early career. Long and detailed but not without humour. Where is volume 2?

Disraeli: R Blake
Gladstone's chief competitor and antithesis. Infinitely preferable to the gossipy new biography by S Weintraub.

Robert Peel: 2 vols.: N Gash
Peel was Gladstone's first ministerial employer and the mentor who inspired the rest of his career.

Politics

McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book 1832-1918: Ed. J Vincent & M Stenton
The election results for every parliamentary constituency over the period, the psephologist's delight.

Elections and Party Management: H J Hanham
Political organisation and campaigning in the good old days before central organisation and Focus.

A Diary of Two Parliaments: 2 vols.: H W Lucy
How the Punch sketch writer viewed the party
combat; naturally stronger on personalities than
issues.

Book Review

The Launch of the SDP 1979-1981
Report of witness seminar in *Contemporary*
***Record*, Vol 7, autumn 1993, No. 2**

Reviewed by Malcolm Baines

*(A witness seminar is an exercise in oral history at
which participants in events are gathered together and
invited to discuss them before an audience.)*

This seminar forms part of a series of article in the
same volume discussing the history of the
organised Labour right from the 1960s to the
present. The discussion includes individuals from
both wings of the SDP, including some such as
Roger Liddle, Alec McGivan and Christopher
Brocklebank-Fowler who are still active in the
Liberal Democrats.

The participants began by discussing the origins of
the SDP and agreed that it revolved around the
three key issues of Europe, unilateralism and
constitutional change within the Labour Party,
where later Social Democrats took a view distinct
from that of the Labour mainstream. That these
issues defined the views of many leading Social
Democrats is itself significant in the light of later
conflicts within the Alliance and the Liberal
Democrats.

The seminar also raised, if it did not resolve, those
questions which are likely to be addressed by
future historians of the SDP. Should the SDP have
competed with the Liberal Party or should it have
fought them at the ballot box? Was there genuinely
a 'window of opportunity' for a new third party?
Was the SDP's ultimate failure due to its own
mistakes or due to the strength of the UK political
system?

The participants considered how far the
weaknesses of the SDP contributed to its lack of
success. the most interesting of those that they
highlighted was that the leaders of the SDP had
already been defeated in the Labour Party's
internal battles, and therefore were demoralised
and exhausted before the new party began. Too
many of its new supporters viewed it as a charity
to give passive endorsement to, and not a vehicle
for active participation. The SDP's lack of
innovative policy is also considered. As its leaders
had spent the previous decade fighting in the
Labour Party, they had not had the energy to
devise new ideas. it became a negative, anti-
Labour Party; while its new supporters were
wedded to the idea that the UK's problems could
be resolved by consensual discussion, rather than
fresh and radical ideas.

Fundamental to the SDP, not least because they
ultimately broke it, were its relations with the
Liberals. two-thirds of the National Committee's
time was occupied by this. What came across from
the seminar is the depth of the contempt of most
ex-Labour Social Democrats for the Liberals. A
typical view was that "they were a daft party, they
were badly organised, it was chaotic."
Consequently, the 1983 allocation in which the
Liberals fought rather more than half the seats, is
seen as an unmitigated disaster, which condemned
the SDP to parliamentary oblivion.

The article is therefore of great interest, especially
since it places the SDP in the context of a
breakaway from the Labour Party. It concludes by
trying to justify the whole adventure in terms of
the party's legacy within the Liberal Democrats
and on the 1990s Labour Party. especially
absorbing in the light of developments since 1983 is
the initial disdain for alliance with the Liberals and
the extent to which many ex-Labour Social
Democrats felt betrayed by Roy Jenkins'
sympathies for them. This seminar is one of the
first perspectives on the SDP's early history; a
subject hitherto only addressed by contemporary
accounts such as Hugh Stephenson's *Claret and*
Chips, and as such should be read by all those
interested in the formation of the SDP.