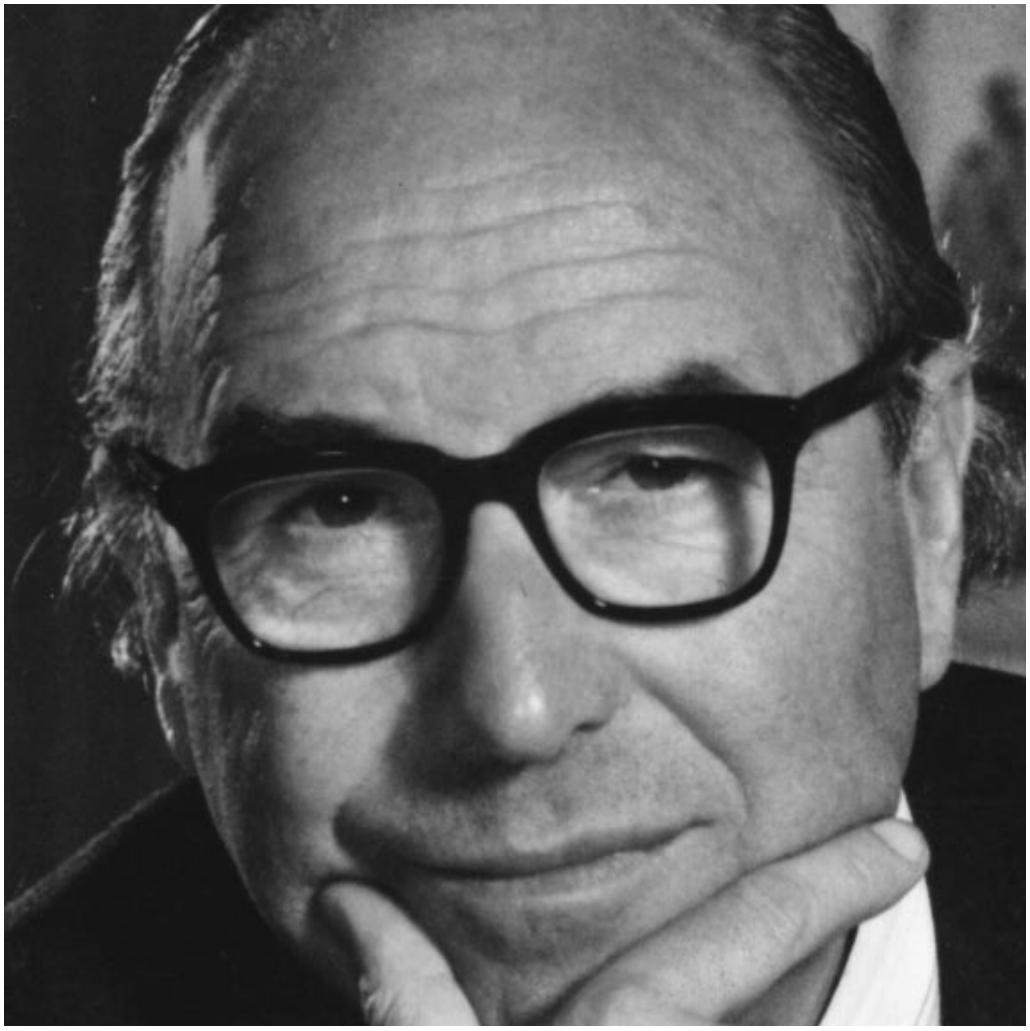
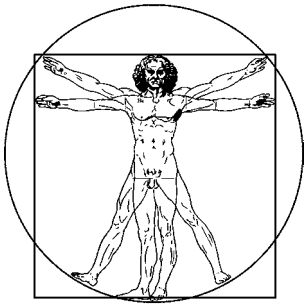
For the study of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat history

Issue 38 / Spring 2003 / £5.00

Journal of Liberal HISTORY



Roy Jenkins 1920–2003



Liberal Democrat History Group

Issue 38: Spring 2003

Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of historical topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the Journal and other occasional publications.

For more information, including details of publications, back issues of the Journal, tape records of meetings and archive and other research sources, see our web site at: **www.liberalhistory.org.uk.**

Hon President: **Earl Russell** Chair: **Tony Little**

Journal of Liberal History

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March 2003

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of the *Journal of Liberal History.* Or, to be more precise, the thirty-eighth issue of the publication first known as the *Liberal Democrat History Group Newsletter* and then (from issue 17) the *Journal of Liberal Democrat History.*

Why another change of name? Some time ago, members of the *Journal's* Editorial Board suggested that the 'Liberal Democrat' tag identified the *Journal* too closely with the party, and lessened its appeal to non-party members.

As regular readers will be aware, we exist to promote the discussion and research of historical topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism – but that broad spread was not necessarily apparent from the title.

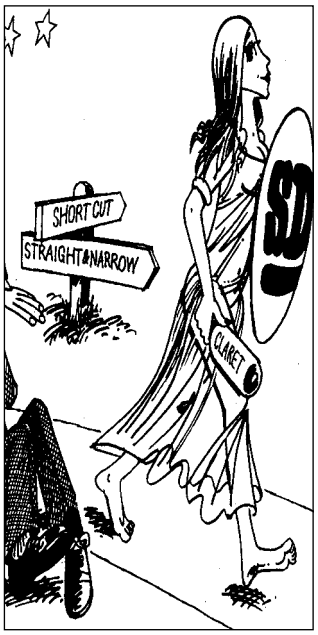
Consultation with the membership of the History Group failed to discover any opposition to the name change – which now brings the *Journal* into line with the titles of our books (*Dictionary of Liberal Biography, Dictionary of Liberal Quotations, Great Liberal Speeches*) and our website (www.liberalhistory.org.uk).

And with a name change, also a change in the *Journal's* design, building on advice given us by professional designers. Inevitably this will take a few issues to bed down, but we hope you like the new-look and new-name *Journal* just as much, if not more, than before.

Duncan Brack (Editor)

Next issue

The next issue of the *Journal of Liberal History,* no. 39, will be a special issue, devoted to the history of the Social Democratic Party – but with a difference. We will be using more than sixty cartoons, originally drawn for the *Social Democrat* newspaper, to illustrate the seven-year rise and fall of the SDP.



The original cartoons themselves will be available for sale, with *Journal* subscribers enjoying a 20% discount off gallery prices. *Journal* readers are also invited to a special private view of the originals at London's Gallery 33. See the leaflet enclosed with this issue for more information.

Together with articles by Bill Rodgers, Chris Rennard and Conrad Russell, a comprehensive bibliography and chronology, this edition should be special indeed. Look out for *Journal* 39, available in June.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery . . . (part II)

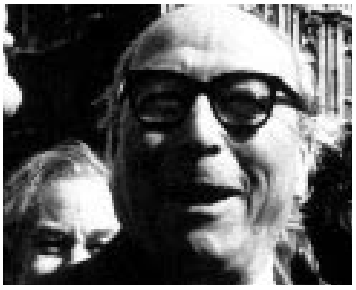
With the long-term success of the Liberal Democrat History Group now established and a Conservative History Group recently launched (see *Journal* 37), you might be forgiven for wondering whether Labour were now going to try and get in on the act. Well you would almost be right – or left even – since the Labour History Group actually launched last summer, in July 2002.

Its launch meeting, a debate entitled 'Labour's Second Term: Lessons from History' brought a varied audience to the historic Moses Room in Parliament to discus and ruminate. The panel included historian and biographer Lord (Kenneth O.) Morgan, trade unionist and former Labour General Secretary Lord (Tom) Sawyer and former Fabian General Secretary Dianne Hayter. Other participants in the discussion included former Opposition Chief Whip and MP Lord Graham of Edmonton, Tony Crosland's former PPS Dick Leonard, and MPs Chris Bryant and John Spellar.

More meetings are planned, and also a magazine, though in the Fabian tradition of gradualism, getting the organisation up and running has taken a few months. Forthcoming events will include a historical perspective on Labour and the media, led by Harold Wilson's former Press Secretary Joe Haines, David Hill, the former Chief Media Spokesperson of the Labour Party, and Tim Allan, the former Deputy Press Secretary to Tony Blair. A Labour History Journal is planned, initially twice a year, featuring articles, biographical portraits of Labour figures, reports of meetings, reviews and news of forthcoming events.

Chair Greg Rosen said: 'We were really pleased with the launch and the team is now working hard to build on that event. There is a myth that Labour's young members are uninterested in the party's history. The reality is that there is a great deal of interest in understanding the historical context of the current Labour government. This was clearly demonstrated by the quality of the contributions made by young Labour members to the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*. We hope to provide a lively and inclusive forum for those wishing to discuss and debate the key episodes in the Labour Party's history.'

For more information please contact Greg Rosen (GregRosen@excite.com) or Jayant Chavda (jayantchavda @hotmail.com). Membership costs £10 (or £5 concessions; cheque payable to the 'Labour History Group') and should be sent to Patrick Loughran, Labour History Group, Suite 5, 4th Floor, 2 Caxton Street, London SW1H 0QE.



Roy Jenkins (Lord Jenkins of Hillhead) died on 5 January 2003, at the age of 82. He was a good friend to the Liberal Democrat History Group, speaking at several of our meetings and contributing a number of articles to the *Journal*. **Andrew Adonis,** Jenkins' authorised biographer and currently Head of Policy in 10 Downing Street, wrote this appreciation of his life, which first appeared in *The Times* under the title 'The man who towered above left and right'.

ROY JENKI

Shortly before his sudden death, Roy Jenkins called to discuss his next book. He had almost finished writing a life of FDR, already two books on from his epic *Churchill* published barely sixteen months ago, and he did not want 'an excessive interlude' before his next project. He was 'veering strongly' towards JFK, 'who, with his circle, were for me the glamour of the sixties, and whose reputation is I think in need of re-rating upwards'. It was a neat vignette of Lord Jenkins's unstinting appetite for work and play, and his view of the good life (even at the age of 82) as one which keeps the two in harmony. A day without work – he typically wrote 500 words daily until his death – was as rare as a day without a good lunch.

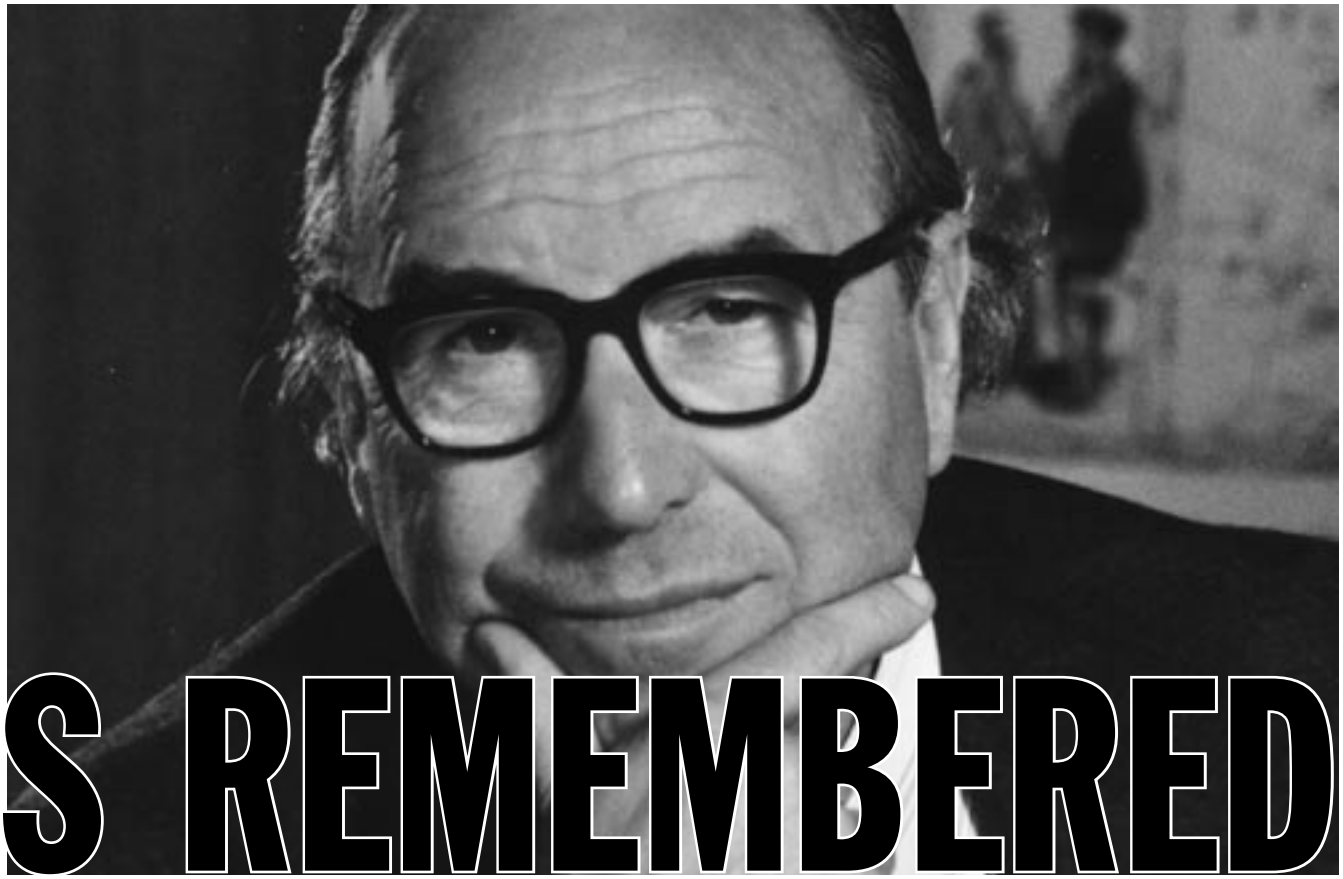
The gibe of dilettantism, directed by erstwhile cabinet colleagues, was the opposite of the truth. Jenkins was thoroughly dedicated, even driven. Politics, literary endeavour and a wide social circle were all pursued with a passion which few devote to any one of those pursuits. It was the combination of these, together with Oxford, his wife Jennifer and the influence of his remarkable father, a Welsh collier who won a scholarship to Ruskin College, which formed his outlook. Churchill, Jenkins liked to joke, 'combined a puritan work ethic with a great capacity for pleasure, even self-indulgence, a combination I find very attractive'.

His instinct for rating and classifying was an abiding Oxford trait. And the desire to 'upgrade' Kennedy, a glamorous liberal President leading a broad social coalition in pursuit of moderate progress, was of a piece with principles and prejudices ingrained by the time Jenkins left Balliol for war in 1942. But what of his ranking on the scoreboard of political history?

Most disputed is the wisdom of breaking with Labour and establishing the SDP in 1981, and the impact of that on Labour's reformation under Neil Kinnock and his successors. Perhaps Jenkins's critical misjudgment was of Britain's electoral system, which usually invests power in broad social coalition parties led from the centre – a force the SDP/Liberals could not become without winning more Labour voters than they were able to once Denis Healey had beaten the left-winger Tony Benn for the Labour deputy leadership.

After the failure of the SDP, new Labour successfully built its coalition out from the Labour heartlands into new territory. However much or little this process owed to the Jenkins legacy, the result is precisely the kind of broad cross-class coalition led from the centre-left which he preached, a movement of breadth and dynamism to match those led by Gladstone, Asquith and Attlee in their heydays.

Jenkins's other achievements are less disputed – the bold reforming Home Secretary, the resolute Chancellor who salvaged the first Wilson Government and Labour's claim to governing competence, and the pro-Europeanism which did so much to inspire a progressive generation



NS REMEMBERED

and to establish Britain as a serious force in the EU.

As the details of past battles fade, it is as a political inspiration that Jenkins will stand out. And in one respect above all: as a beguilingly tough radical who was serious about power yet never saw the 'radical Centre' as a mushy territory of no fixed beliefs. He refused to equate centre-left moderation with weakness – and his new Labour heirs are in the same mould.

Little given to the cant of party politics, Jenkins generally avoided calling himself a socialist even while climbing the Labour ladder. His earliest political tract, published in 1953, *Pursuit of Progress,* set his creed in the 'English progressive tradition' bestriding Liberals and Labour. Unambiguously on the left, with a coherent argument for greater equality (including more public ownership – a cause he dropped through experience), it also argued for levelling up not down, for economic stability and dynamism as the precondition for reform, and for individual empowerment as the principle of progress.

By the early sixties these elements had combined with an ardent Europeanism and a conviction of the need to liberalise (or 'civilise' as he put it) the relationship between state and citizen, to create a set of ideals and objectives more radical and relevant than anything on offer from either the Labour left or the Tory right until the rise of Thatcher. By 1960 Jenkins was calling for 'wholesale reform' in the Home Office, for the state to 'do much less to restrict personal freedom', and he had resigned from the Labour front bench in protest at his mentor Gaitskell's failure to embrace Europe.

He was as rigorous in government as in his thinking. As Home Secretary in 1965, Jenkins's first act was to change the entire management of the Home Office, including his do-nothing Permanent Secretary, a decision that enabled the enactment of a comprehensive liberal programme in only 23 months. He skilfully used Private Member's Bills as devices to enact abortion and sexual law reforms that would have proved impossible to pass quickly as government measures. He took the helm at the Treasury after the catastrophe of devaluation in November 1967 and within two years the balance of payments and public finances were largely restored. His only regret was that he failed to act more decisively to raise taxes at the outset.

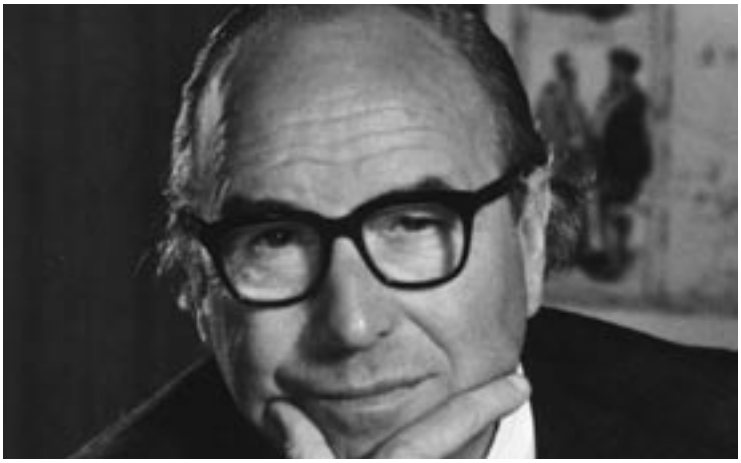
Churchill, Jenkins liked to joke, 'combined a puritan work ethic with a greatcapacity for pleasure, even self-indulgence, a combination I find very attractive'.

'He was a very considerable servant of the state; he kept the train of government on the rails over difficult stretches of country,' Jenkins writes of Harold Wilson, in a forthcoming essay intended as another 're-rating upwards'. The same could be said of Jenkins himself. But more than that, he was a bold social democratic reformer with a rare talent to translate vision into reality through force of personality and, at his peak, a superb mastery of the art of politics.

This appreciation first appeared in The Times *of 7 January 2003, and is reprinted with the kind permission of the author.*

INTERVIEW

The last major interview Roy Jenkins gave, in November 2002, was to Adrian Slade, on behalf of *Liberal Democrat News* and the *Journal of Liberal History.*



Roy Jenkins, since 1987 Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, first entered parliament in 1948. It seems hard to believe of a man who still gets up at around 6.30a.m., goes for a walk, reads the newspapers for an hour and a half over breakfast and spends the rest of the morning writing a few thousand more words of his next book. No doubt his afternoons are spent equally busily researching the detail of which his books are always full. He has also been Chancellor of Oxford University since 1987.

'My primary interest in recent times has been my writing,' he says. 'I don't know whether reading the papers is useful but I still like to keep in touch with the political process.' Following his much praised biography of Churchill, his new book, *Twelve Cities,* which he modestly dismisses as 'rather self-indulgent', has just been published, and he is working on a biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt. 'It will be relatively short, about 70,000 words,' he says. 'It's mainly for the American market.' That may be, but it is an even bet that, short or long, Liberal Democrats will want to read it too.

We talked in his room in the House of Lords, where he has spoken in debate only a few times since giving up the leadership of the Liberal Democrats peers nearly five years ago. 'I said something on Iraq recently but I don't believe that ex-leaders should get in the way of their successors too much.'

For many older people with an interest in politics Roy Jenkins remains the best prime minister that the country never had. He certainly shares with Churchill that rare gift of continuing to lead political thinking while writing lengthy, elegant and highly readable books. Anyone who has not read his *Asquith* and *Gladstone* is missing out on fascinating political history.

Roy Jenkins started in senior office as Minister of Aviation in Harold Wilson's government of 1964. He was soon given the Home Office, where, during his two and a half years, he introduced a series of reforming measures, particularly in the fields of sex discrimination, race relations and penal reform, of which he remains rightly proud. He also made sure that David Steel's private member's bill to change the abortion laws was given full time and backing.

In the late 1960s he became the Chancellor who got an unstable, post-devaluation economy back under control. 'Sometimes being Chancellor is like trying to build sandcastles on the beach just below the high tide line,' he

ING ROY JENKINS

says, 'But in the end I had some success.' That success just failed to win the 1970 election for Harold Wilson, but Jenkins returned as Home Secretary in 1974, when the principal challenge was intense IRA activity.

Were there any lessons to be drawn from this experience in dealing with Islamic terrorism today?

'I think it is an intractable problem,' he says 'And I am very sceptical that it will be helped by any invasion of Iraq. However that is done, and I do have a pretty fundamental objection to it: I am not convinced that it will reduce rather than increase Islamic terrorism against the West.'

When Roy Jenkins did not succeed Wilson in 1976, as some might have expected, he was appointed President of the European Commission, where he worked until the formation of the SDP in 1981.

Did he regret not having become prime minister?

He qualifies his reply with a broad smile. 'Well, I would have liked very much to *have been* prime minister,' he admits 'But I am not sure how much I would have liked the job at the time. I thought I'd say that to the retiring president of Brazil when I meet him in Oxford tomorrow. He may share my view. I also said it to John Major when he asked me, and in return I asked him whether he regretted having *been* prime minister. He appeared to enjoy my question.'

Earlier in our meeting I had explored with him his most recent, perhaps his last, major contribution to British politics – his chairmanship of the independent commission on electoral reform. 'I put a lot of effort into that,' he says. 'It took nearly a year, part of which I was working full time.' So far his proposals have been ignored, or at least not implemented.

Did he see any hope for them in the future?

'I am not sure that I see much short-term hope, but I do see medium-term hope. I'll tell you why. The climate has changed and is continuing to change. It is very noticeable that nobody would dream of setting up a new elected authority of any sort these days with first-past-the-post. And therefore I think the House of Commons, as a bastion of first-past-the-postism, is becoming increasingly isolated. It is rather remarkable that these days nobody, even those most sceptical in the government, would dream of proposing it for other bodies. Look at the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the European elections, the elected element of the House of Lords, the London Assembly. It is difficult to imagine the Commons holding out indefinitely when all its outlying bastions have fallen down.'

But wasn't the attitude also a great deal to do with majorities in parliament?

'As we pointed out, slightly cynically but correctly, in our report – "When political parties have the will for electoral reform they don't have the authority and when they have the authority they don't have the will" – and not even Asquith's Liberal Party was immune from that. But it is a knuckle point,' he says. 'For example, electoral reform became very popular in the Tory Party in the seventies when they perceived it as a protection against some kind of Stalinist Socialist threat. They have fallen away now, although why they haven't come round to it again, I don't know. If I were a Conservative today, which I find difficult to imagine, I would be strongly in favour of it, if only on the most narrow grounds of self-interest.'

Roy Jenkins himself in fact served in two minority governments – 1964–66 and the first parliament of 1974.

What had been his attitude to possible party co-operation in those days?

'I have always worn party affiliations fairly lightly,' he says, adding hastily. 'Don't set the alarm bells ringing with that. I am not going to leave the Liberal Democrats. But certainly in '64 I remember being very keen on keeping all lines of communications to Jo Grimond well open, particularly when I needed Liberal support. And in '74, even more strikingly, I won my own qualifications when I put a paper to the cabinet in early spring proposing a Speaker's Conference on electoral reform. Of course, I was shot down very heavily. Harold Wilson wasn't totally opposed but Barbara Castle wrote later in her diaries that "Roy came to us with some preposterous scheme from his instinctive Liberal coalition-mindedness. We sent him away with a flea in his ear."'

He knew Jo Grimond well in the 1960s and they used to talk socially together about co-operation and realignment.

Did he think Grimond was a good leader?

'Yes. He opened up the field of Lib/Lab co-operation and made the Liberals a much more serious party, although he did not get very far with Harold Wilson with his suggestions of an arrangement in '65. Actually he himself cooled on co-operation later. For example, he was very cool about my '79 Dimbleby lecture.' In many respects this lecture on the BBC had reflected Grimond's earlier views about realignment. 'But he did come round. He actually came to Warrington during the by-election in '81 and found himself quite impressed. And later of course we had that remarkable meeting at the Liberal Assembly in Llandudno.'

Although he was not part of it himself, how did Roy Jenkins view the earlier example of co-operation – the Lib/Lab Pact?

'I think it was a worthwhile exercise but I don't think there was enough of a union of hearts, as Gladstone once said about Ireland, so I don't think it was terribly productive for the future. I actually think it made it more difficult for David Steel to do what he wanted to do subsequently.'

Hadn't the Labour Government benefited more than the Liberals?

'Well, the Liberals didn't want an election in 1977.'

John Pardoe said he did.'

'Ah but John Pardoe always loathed Social Democrats. He and Healey couldn't get on at all and he never liked me much either. He was a curious figure but I was interested to read about him again the other day.'

How much, if at all, had David Steel's views influenced the creation of the SDP?

'He was enthusiastic about the Dimbleby lecture and he came to see me in Brussels two or three times subsequently. We were looking to a future of collaboration.'

Remembering long-standing party speculation about the conversations between them, I asked whether there been any talk of him joining the Liberal Party rather than forming a separate party. 'Some people wanted that, and I did discuss it,' he says. 'But, as I recall, it was David Steel's view, which I shared, that this would have made much less of a breakthrough into the new politics.' So in 1981 four rather different politicians joined together to found the SDP.

David Steel and I always got on very well, but then some people said: 'they would, wouldn't they, because David Steel was one of nature's Social Democrats and Roy Jenkins was one of nature's Liberals'

'Bill Rodgers was always a close friend and ally of mine,' says Roy Jenkins. 'Shirley slightly less close but also mostly an ally. The odd one out was David Owen, partly because he had about as little liberalism in him as Jack Straw and David Blunkett. Owen was arguably a Social Democrat too but never a Liberal in any sense. He despised not just Liberals but liberals with a small l. David Steel and I always got on very well, but then some people said "they would, wouldn't they, because David Steel was one of nature's Social Democrats and Roy Jenkins was one of nature's Liberals."'

Was that important to him, given what, I suggested, were the two strands within the SDP, one supporting David Owen and the other the other three?

'It was a little more complicated than that' he said, adding, surprisingly, 'Shirley voted for Owen in the leadership contest of 1982, although I think she regretted it afterwards. In fact Shirley and I were the two most instinctive liberals of the four. Bill Rodgers, for whom I had the greatest respect, always slightly believed in a more instinctively Morrisonian approach to discipline, which Shirley and I never did.'

Roy Jenkins insists firmly that he had always envisaged an alliance with the Liberals, and that Shirley Williams soon agreed with that. 'Owen was never wholly convinced and that was the real fault line,' he says. 'The Llandudno Assembly and its incredible atmosphere sealed it all for us, but David Owen was in America. It wasn't quite specifically that he had refused to come but he certainly did not think himself accursed that he wasn't there. It was said to be a joke made by Owen, although it was not really his style, that "Roy claims to love Liberals but he has never really spoken to one who isn't called Grimond or Bonham-Carter." Quite untrue, of course, and I suspect not really David Owen's joke. Perhaps John Pardoe invented it?'

Amid the 1981–82 Alliance negotiations on seats 'when Bill Rodgers played the hard man, although it all seems rather trivial now', Roy Jenkins courageously went on the by-election stomp once more, this time winning Glasgow Hillhead, but following the highs of the first two years the 1983 election result inevitably came as a disappointment.

Would he have done anything differently and was the supposed attempt to unseat him as Alliance leader during the election a factor?

'I had felt the beginnings of the ebb tide in the by-election and the Falklands War accelerated that. Also the natural tendency to perpetuate a two-party system had begun to reassert itself. As to the rather disagreeable meeting David and I had at Ettrick Bridge, I don't think it affected the result much. I have never borne deep resentment against David about that, although I told him afterwards that he did not handle things very well, and he agreed. David has many high accounts in my balance and one small debit has never left a scar.'

David Owen is said to have believed that Roy Jenkins had always envisaged merger with the Liberal Party as inevitable. 'I certainly never envisaged us fighting each other. Where I thought the Alliance might lead I am not quite sure. I think I could sum up my view with that Churchillian speech on American relations "Let it roll like the Mississippi and things will take their course." And, as you know, I subsequently became very keen on merger'.

He feels that over fifteen years the merger has proved very successful as a marriage of minds.

There had been very little backbiting, bitterness and jealously. The original high aim, to change the face of British politics, had not been achieved but the Liberal Democrats had made politics more tolerable and the fact of the party's presence had undoubtedly changed the Labour Party.'I don't think that necessarily damages our own long-term prospects' he says, 'but without the presence of the Liberal/SDP Alliance and our merged party there is no doubt that Labour have spiralled downwards, and Blair would not have been able to impose the reformism on the Labour party that he has.'

Roy Jenkins was one of Paddy Ashdown's most enthusiastic supporters in his bid for closer links with Blair's Labour Party.

Did he think more should have happened subsequently?

'Yes, I would have liked to have seen more but I think we were let down by the performance of the Conservative Party. If there had been a smaller majority, things might well have been different,' he believes. 'I said to Blair, and I think he rather likes sweeping perspectives of that kind,"Lib–Lab rivalry turned the 20th century into a Tory century in the way the 19th had not been. I don't want to see that happen in the 21st century."'

Given his obvious disappointment on that score, not necessarily a disappointment shared by all Liberal Democrats, what did he think of the concept of 'effective opposition'?

'I think that is the best role for now that we can possibly pursue. I believe full amalgamation is dead, at least for some time to come, but I don't think Paddy was wrong to pursue it. It's often worth pursuing holy grails that you don't necessarily achieve.'

In retrospect he believes that his first period as Home Secretary gave him his greatest satisfaction as a minister and, although he was reluctant to answer my question, he says he would like to be remembered by future generations as someone who, during a long political life, remained consistent in his broadly left-of-centre views without having swung violently about. 'But also' he concludes 'For managing, and it is an increasingly rare thing in British politics, to combine being a fairly major politician with many outside interests, without being dominated by them.'

With which assessment most people would readily concur.

A shorter version of this interview was first published in Liberal Democrat News *in January 2003*

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

If you can help any of the individuals listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information — or if you know anyone who can — please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 2) for inclusion here.

Cornish Methodism and Cornish political identity, 1918–1960s. Researching the relationship through oral history. *Kayleigh Milden, Institute of Cornish Studies, Hayne Corfe Centre, Sunningdale, Truro TR1 3ND; KMSMilden@aol.com.*

The Hon H. G. Beaumont (MP for Eastbourne 1906–10). Any information welcome – especially from anyone having access to material about the history of Liberalism in Eastbourne – particularly on his political views (he stood as a Radical). *Tim Beaumont, 40 Elms Road, London SW4 9EX.*

The letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65). Knowledge of the whereabouts of any letters written by Cobden in private hands, autograph collections, and obscure locations in the UK and abroad for a complete edition of his letters. *Dr A. Howe, Department of International History, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE; a.howe@lse.ac.uk.* (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, see www.lse.ac.uk/collections/cobdenLetters/).

Liberal foreign policy in the 1930s. Focussing particularly on Liberal anti-appeasers. *Michael Kelly, 12 Collinbridge Road, Whitewell, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT36 7SN; mmjkelly@msn.com.*

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16. *Andrew Gardner, 17 Upper Ramsey Walk, Canonbury, London N1 2RP; agardner@ssees.ac.uk.*

Liberals and the local government of London 1919–39. *Chris Fox, 173 Worplesdon Road, Guildford GU2 6XD; christopher.fox7@virgin.net.*

The Liberal Party and the wartime coalition 1940–45. Sources, particularly on Sinclair as Air Minister, and on Harcourt Johnstone, Dingle Foot, Lord Sherwood and Sir Geoffrey Maunder (Sinclair's PPS) particularly welcome. *Ian Hunter, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DL; ian.hunter@curtishunter.co.uk.*

The political life and times of Josiah Wedgwood MP. Study of the political life of this radical MP, hoping to shed light on the question of why the Labour Party replaced the Liberals as the primary popular representatives of radicalism in the 1920s. *Paul Mulvey, 112 Richmond Avenue, London N1 0LS; paulmulvey@yahoo.com.*

Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 1906–1935. Aims to suggest reasons for defections of individuals and develop an understanding of changes in electoral alignment. Sources include personal papers and newspapers; suggestions about how to get hold of the papers of more obscure Liberal defectors welcome. *Cllr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@ncl.ac.uk.*

The Welsh Liberal Tradition – A History of the Liberal Party in Wales 1868–2003. Research spans thirteen decades of Liberal history in Wales but concentrates on the post-1966 formation of the Welsh Federal Party. Any memories and information concerning the post-1966 era or even before welcomed. The research is to be published in book form by Welsh Academic Press. *Dr Russell Deacon, Centre for Humanities, University of Wales Institute Cardiff, Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff CF23 6XD; rdeacon@uwic.ac.uk.*

THE BRITISH LIB

From Gladstone to young Churchill, Asquith, and Lloyd George – is Blair their heir?

In this wide-ranging lecture, **Roy Jenkins** (Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, Chancellor of Oxford University), told the story of the rise and fall of the Liberal Party under prime ministers Gladstone, Churchill, Asquith and Lloyd George, and explored the place of the current prime minister, Tony Blair, in this tradition.

The British Liberal Tradition was the fourth annual Senator Keith Davey Lecture, delivered at Victoria University, University of Toronto, in 2000.

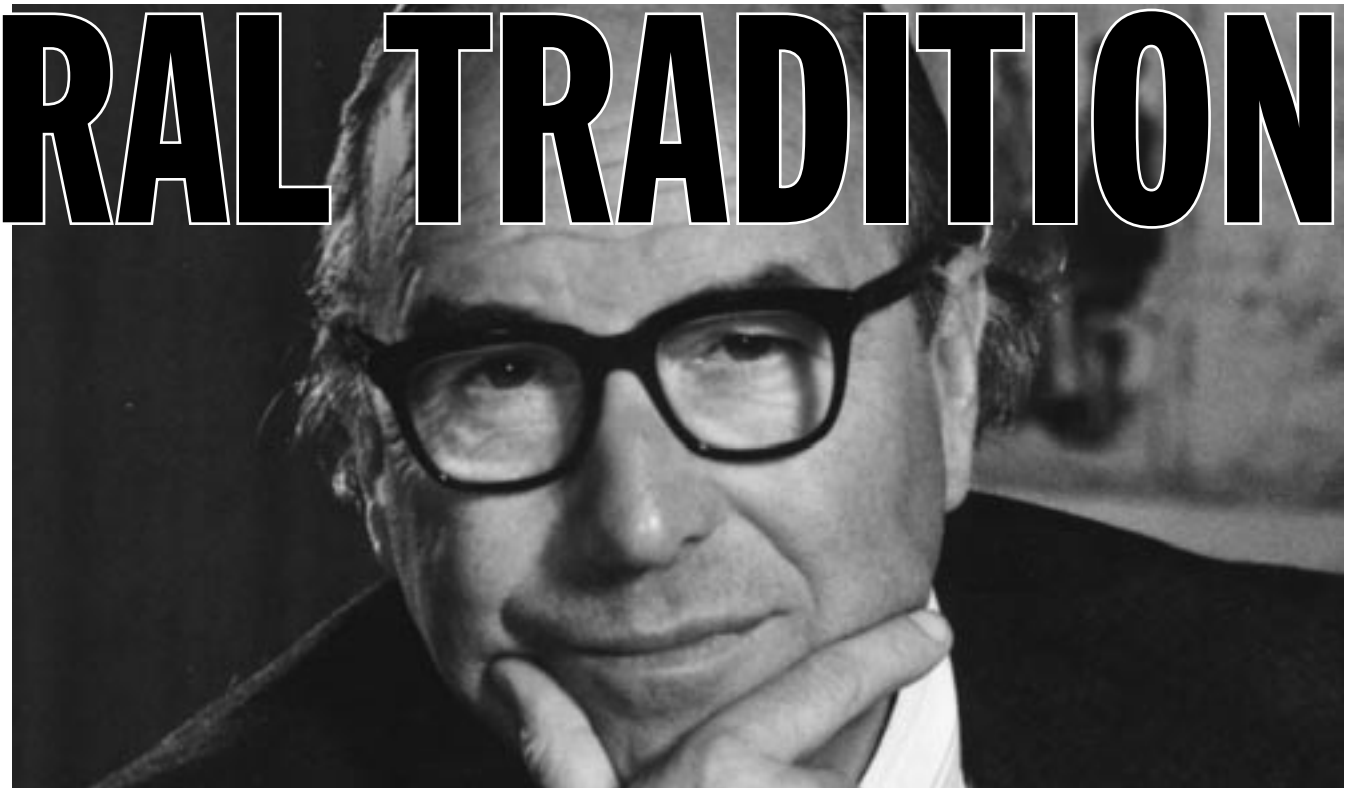
It is a great pleasure to me to pay what I think is my seventh visit to the city of Toronto, but my first for nearly four years; and to speak under the auspices of Victoria University but within the territory of the University of Toronto. As Chancellor of Oxford I am closely familiar with the complicated – sometimes delicate, but on the whole amicable – relations between free-standing colleges. We have thirty-nine of them, varying in age between 750 and 10 years – and varying in wealth, too – and an overarching but far from all-powerful university.

I am also delighted to be asked to give the Keith Davey lecture, which already in its four years of existence has achieved a considerable reputation – and not only for snowstorms. I have given quite a lot of named lectures, but only very rarely with the pleasure but also the challenge of having the eponymous figure present and sitting in the middle of the first row. I think the last occasion was when I gave a George Ball lecture at Princeton, in the presence of that powerful personality who, of all the major US foreign policy advisers in the days of the so-called Imperial Presidency, had the distinction of being almost invariably (so I thought) on the right side. Senator Keith Davey is in that position today, and I am honoured that he and his wife are here.

Now this is essentially a historical lecture, centred around the figures named in the somewhat cumbersome title. It is the story of the rise and fall of the British Liberal Party as a governing party, with a final section on where Tony Blair stands in relation to the Liberal tradition. There may be some lessons for Canadian politics in the story, but if there are, I leave it to you to draw them. I have always found it unwise to lecture an audience on a subject about which they manifestly know more than I do.

I think, however, that I ought to give you a few introductory words on my own political position. I have always been a liberal with a small 'l' but I am proud

ERAL TRADITION

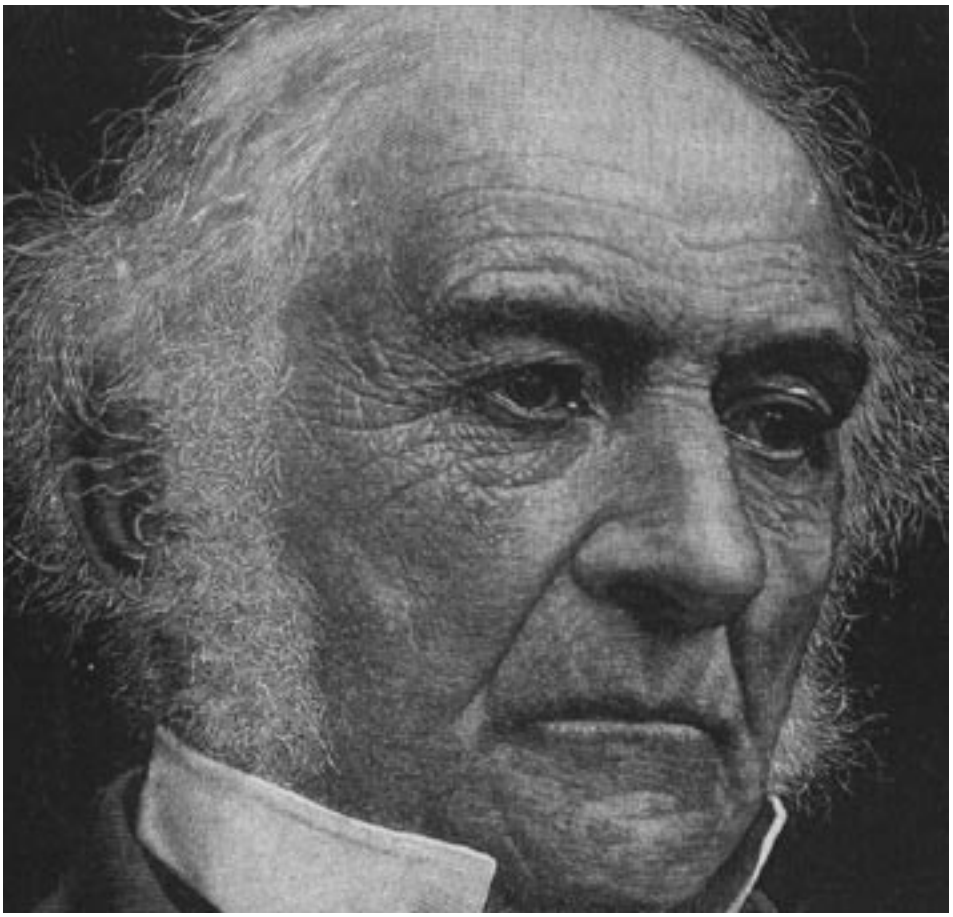


today to call myself a Liberal with a capital 'L' as well – a Liberal Democrat, of the party that was formed in 1987 by amalgamation with the SDP, made up mainly of those who had come out of the Labour Party in 1981 and had already fought three general elections in close alliance with the old Liberal Party. We are a party with a very strong base in local government – cities and counties – plus 46 seats in the House of Commons. And over the last four general elections we have polled an average of around 20 per cent of the popular vote.

The Liberal Party was born at a meeting in Willis's Rooms, St James's, London, on the afternoon of the 6th of June, 1859. It was an odd place for the accouchement of what was to be a largely nonconformist, even in many ways a puritanical party, for Willis's Rooms, was, as its name implies, a faintly rakish locale. It was the successor to Almack's, a fine haunt of early nineteenth-century gambling and general dissipation. Furthermore, among the 274 MPs and many members of the House of Lords who were present, there were several Whig magnates, who could easily have accommodated the whole lot in their own London house. And there was also the Reform Club, built to Charles Barry's palatial design only sixteen years before, and then – as it no longer is – politically partisan, which would have been more than adequately welcoming. But Willis's Rooms it was. And what there took place had a remarkable impact on the political life of Britain for at least the next six decades. In this context it was the equivalent of Martin Luther nailing his notice to the church door in Wittenberg, or of the embattled farmers by the rood bridge at Lexington firing 'the shot heard round the world'.

Of the six (or maybe seven) Liberal prime ministers of the next sixty years, the first two, Palmerston and Lord John Russell, were present at the creation. Indeed, by their somewhat pro forma expressions of mutual respect, they made the occasion, to which John Bright, a greater orator than a minister, also contributed. Another three future prime ministers – Rosebery, Campbell-Bannerman, and Asquith – were not present for the good reason that they were respectively aged twelve, twenty-three, and six at the time. Nor was Lloyd George, who was aged minus four, and who in any event was a somewhat doubtful member of the sextet or septet, for although he was a prime minister – and a most notable one – who was a Liberal, he never presided over a Liberal government, and indeed did a great deal to break the Liberal Party as an instrument of government. But the most surprising absentee was Gladstone, who was the greatest beneficiary of the event, and who in his four premierships was the dominant Liberal figure of the remaining forty-one years of the nineteenth century. He deliberately stood back.

Gladstone, who in my view was undoubtedly the greatest British prime minister of the nineteenth century, just as Churchill was of the twentieth, had not of course started his long political career, spanning



William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98)

sixty-three years in the House of Commons, as a Liberal. Indeed, he had been referred to in 1839 by Thomas Babington Macaulay famously and somewhat satirically as 'the rising hope of those stern and unbending Tories'. But he became a key figure in the 1841–46 government of Sir Robert Peel, which was nominally Conservative, although not nearly enough so for Disraeli, who made his name by splitting from Peel, although at the price of making the Conservative Party very nearly unelectable for twenty years.

Peel did a great deal to lay the foundations of Liberal England. At the beginning of the Peel government, Britain was far from being the stable and prosperous parliamentary semi-democracy of the middle and late Victorian period. Chartist agitation was at its height in the couple of years before the Peel government came in, and Britain was regarded as just as potentially eruptive a society as France, which bracketed those years with revolutions in 1830 and 1848. Britain was also still suffering from a long, post-Napoleonic Wars depression, and her public finances were in an appalling state. Interest on debt accounted for half the budget, and the other half was substantially made up by the payment of a great number of sinecure salaries. Her revenue – admittedly only £47 million – came from a vast spread of over 750 mostly illogical customs and excise duties. The Peel reforms not only repealed the Corn Laws – which led to the split with Disraeli and other old-guard Conservatives – but also cleared up a good deal of the mess and gave Britain the opportunity to be the major free-trade/free-market industrial power of the world. And it made the third quarter of the nineteenth century – in complete contrast with the second quarter – the period of Britain's most unchallenged industrial supremacy in the world, and with a marked spreading of quiet, unostentatious prosperity and greater political calm. It was also a period unsullied by the imperial pretension and showiness of the fourth quarter of the century. There was no tendency to imperial braggadocio or expansionary wars in the post-Peel third quarter. Indeed, the tendency was to reduce imperial commitments, as in the British North America Act of 1867 – the first major move toward self-government and the surrender of power within the British Empire.

Gladstone was an adjutant of and the heir to Peel. He was left a powerful but uprooted politician throughout the 1850s. He was powerful because of his phenomenal energy and oratorical force – 'the tremendous projectile' was a sobriquet aptly bestowed upon him. But he was uprooted because the Peelites, after the death of their leader in 1850, became a party of high quality but of few numbers, who were in transit from a Tory shore to – probably but not certainly – a Liberal harbour. Gladstone's trouble was that he found almost equally antipathetic the beckoning lights of both the departed shore (in the shape of Disraeli) and the other bank (in the shape of Palmerston). He distrusted them both – so he took some time to make up his mind. This was the reason he did not go to Willis's Rooms. But he eventually decided that Palmerston had at least the advantage of being the older – twenty-five years his senior, whereas Disraeli was only five years so. Gladstone was never a cynic, but he could sometimes act in a way that cynics might regard as well calculated to suit his future political convenience. So in 1859 he formed a 'hostile partnership' with Palmerston under which he was for six years his Chancellor of the Exchequer, disagreeing with him on almost everything, for Palmerston by the 1860s had become a Liberal only in the sense that he believed in keeping the Conservatives out of office. Yet somehow the two jogged along together, with mutual respect mingled with disagreement, with each observing the other's prerogatives, and with Gladstone

knowing that Palmerston could not last much longer. When he died, still in office and very old for the period, on the eve of his eighty-first birthday, there was a short Russell interregnum until 1867, when Gladstone succeeded to the full leadership, which he was to occupy until 1894, except for the few years of nominal withdrawal in the late 1870s in order to write theology. Yet this withdrawal enhanced rather than diminished his power and indispensability over twenty-seven years and four premierships.

These four premierships were of varying quality. The first was probably the best. It disestablished the Anglican church in Ireland, thus ending the anomaly of the religion of a tiny minority of the population enjoying full state privilege. Gladstone personally remained a passionately committed high Anglican to the end of his life, certainly more religiously committed than any subsequent prime minister except perhaps for Mr Blair, but he moved from a very authoritarian position on religion in his early books to a belief in full tolerance for others. The University Tests Act opened Oxford and Cambridge to dissenters and Roman Catholics. That first government also created the Ballot Act, which even with the limited franchise of less than three million was essential to fair as opposed to influenced voting. There was also an Education Act that for the first time provided a national framework of elementary schools to supplement the previous, religion-based system, which had been patchy. Internationally, Britain kept out of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, and in 1872 accepted the *Alabama* award, which involved Britain paying a vast sum in damages (5 per cent of the total budget) to the United States in compensation for the activities of a British-built and -launched Atlantic raider, which the Confederacy had used during the Civil War to inflict grave damage on Union shipping. This settlement was more than the greatest nineteenth-century triumph of rational internationalism over short-sighted jingoism; it also marked the crucial divide between the previous hundred years of two Anglo-American wars and the twentieth-century habit of close North Atlantic cooperation.

All this, and other, lesser measures, too, added up to a formidable record for a single government. Like nearly all governments, it ended badly, but its five-and-one-quarter years of office made it in many ways the outstanding administration of the century.

Gladstone led three subsequent governments. He was the only man in Britain ever to achieve four separate premierships, and the only one ever to be in office until the age of eighty-four, beating both Palmerston and Churchill – his nearest rivals in this respect – by over three years. But none of these three subsequent governments compared in achievement with the first, although paradoxically he personally became an ever more dominant figure in the country, both loved and hated. The phrase the Grand Old Man, or GOM, increasingly used, was coined only in 1881. His last two governments, the one lasting only six months and the fourth no more than twenty, were dominated by Gladstone's conviction that home rule (that is, without a separate foreign policy or military independence) was the only solution for Ireland. He arrived at this view by a solitary process of ratiocination over the summer of 1885, a process that involved much study of the Canada Acts of 1840 and of 1867.

He was overwhelmingly right on the issue. There was no other way that the albatross of the Irish problem could be cut from the neck of British politics. But he was not good at presenting this dramatic change of position to his major colleagues. As a result he lost two of them, Hartington, later Duke of Devonshire, from the right of the party and Joseph Chamberlain from the left, while the loyalty of several others was

Herbert Henry Asquith (1852–1928)

severely strained, though without breaking. The Hartington/Chamberlain defection was enough to defeat the first Home Rule Bill (that of 1886) in the House of Commons. The second (that of 1893) got through the Commons by a narrow majority of 34, but foundered in the House of Lords by a crushing majority of 419 to 41. It was one of the most short-sighted votes ever cast in that archaic chamber, the historical sagacity of which is often exaggerated, for with it there disappeared the last hope of Anglo-Irish reconciliation within a common British polity.

And with it too (or very soon afterwards) there disappears from my theme (but certainly not from history) William Ewart Gladstone. He was not necessarily the greatest prime minister – I think I would put Churchill higher because he so matched his hour and succeeded in his central purpose – but Gladstone was certainly the most remarkable specimen of humanity ever to inhabit 10 Downing Street. This was so first because of his phenomenal energy, both physical and mental, which led to his touching life at so many different points. This displayed itself in his climbing Ben Macdhue – an eight-hour round trip – during a visit to Queen Victoria at Balmoral in his seventy-fifth year; and in his engaging with vigour in almost every theological and doctrinal dispute of the late nineteenth century, of which there were many; and in his filling in time, when he was prime minister, by translating the odes of Horace and writing slightly fantastical critiques of Homer, in which he endeavoured to portray him as part of the headwaters of Christianity; and in his claim, surprisingly well authenticated, that he had read 20,000 books – an average of nearly three hundred a year – during his reading lifetime.

And second because of the riveting nature of his oratory, which enabled him to hold great popular audiences spellbound for several hours at a time even when, without amplification, most of them could not easily hear what he was saying, and even when, if they could, it was pretty recondite stuff. His oratory was intensely physical – the flash of his eagle's eye, the swoop of his cadences, the drama of his gestures. It took a physical form that he might have used for perverse purposes, but did not. The Queen thought he might become 'a half-mad dictator' but few others did. He was deeply imbedded in the parliamentary process and gave almost too much respect to his cabinet colleagues, never sacking them. He believed in an international rule of law, as he showed in the *Alabama* case, and in the concert of Europe. *Securus judicat ortis terrarum* – the united verdict of the whole world must be accepted as conclusive – was his favourite precept, and mostly it was also his practice.

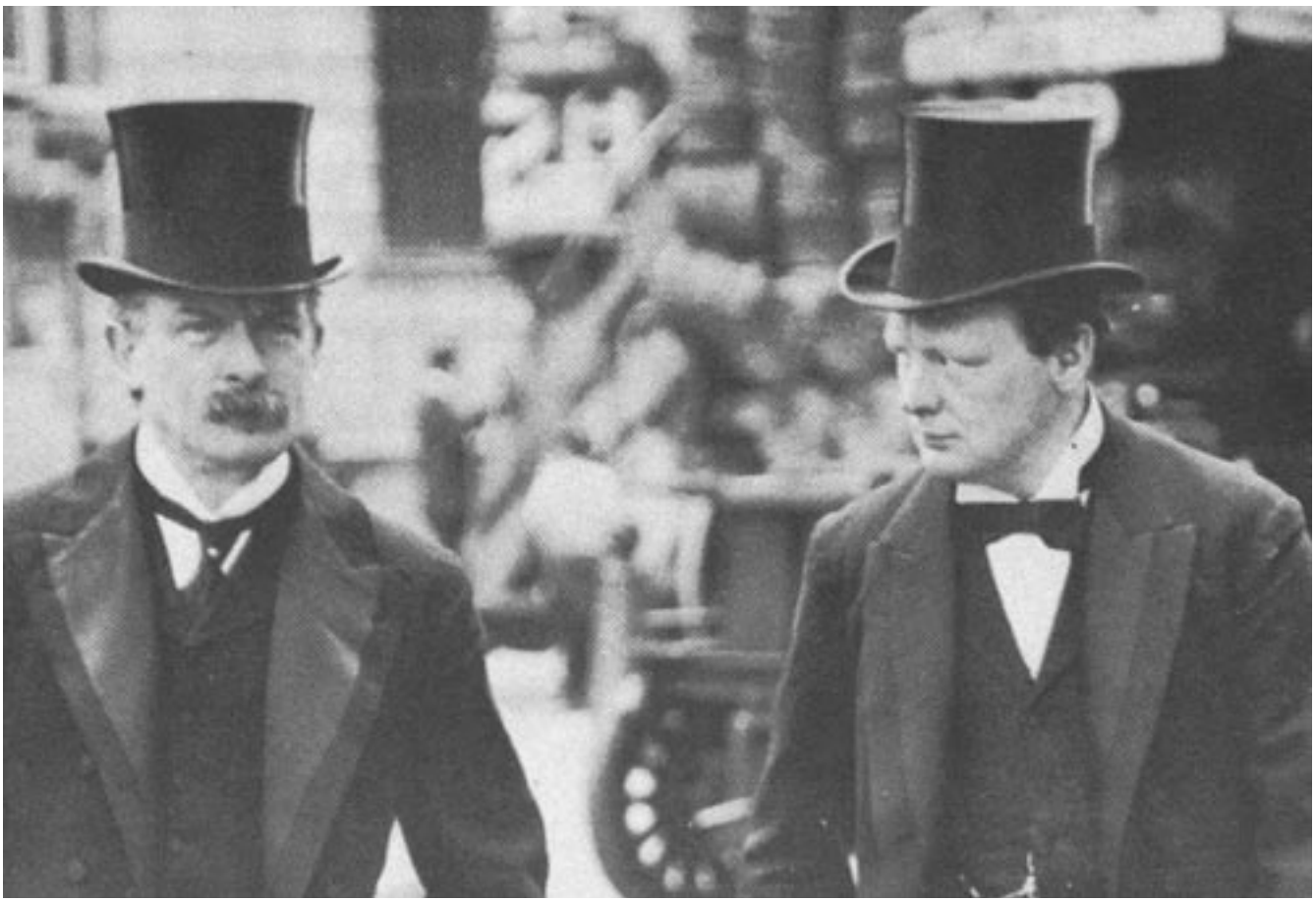
He was not necessarily the greatest prime minister – I think I would put Churchill higher because he so matched his hour and succeeded in his central purpose – but Gladstone was certainly the most remarkable specimen of humanity ever to inhabit 10 Downing Street.

In spite of all this he did not leave much of an immediate legacy to the Liberal Party. He was never much interested in social reform – or constructive radicalism, as he sceptically called it – which was coming increasingly into fashion at the turn of the century. His immediate successor (although not his choice) for the tail end of that Liberal government of 1892–95 was the 5th Earl of Rosebery, who was perhaps the least satisfactory of all the Liberal prime ministers, despite being a powerful, somewhat florid orator and an elegant literary stylist. But he was extremely selfish, always complaining, and veered off far to the right soon after he left office. Nor was he a nice man. Just as Gladstone was the greatest human being to occupy 10 Downing Street, so Rosebery may well have been the nastiest. But even had he possessed more virtues he probably would not have had a successful premiership. 'Tail-end Charlies' – in other words, those who come in after a long and powerful prime minister of the same party – practically never do. This has been true not only of Rosebery after Gladstone but also of Balfour after Salisbury, Neville Chamberlain after Baldwin, Eden after Churchill, Douglas Home after Macmillan, Callaghan after Wilson, and Major after Thatcher.

After Rosebery had flounced out, the Liberal Party was split into three factions by the South African war, and appeared for half a generation almost as unelectable as Disraeli had made the Conservative Party in the middle of the nineteenth century, and as the Labour Party was made by the defection of Ramsay MacDonald in the 1930s and made itself throughout the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. There were only three years of rather hesitant Liberal office between 1886 and 1905.

Then, in the strange way that parties recover, sometimes when they are least expected to do so, the tail end of the long Conservative government provided the Liberals with a number of defensive rather than adventurous issues on which they could come together. Joseph Chamberlain, perhaps the greatest wrecking genius of British politics, having split the Liberals over home rule in 1886, proceeded to split the Conservatives over protection and Imperial Preference in 1903. Balfour equivocated, and the Liberals, fortified by a few Conservative floor-crossing recruits, of whom by far the most notable was twenty-nine-year-old Winston Churchill, rallied to the defence of traditional free trade. A Conservative Education Bill, which, while rather progressive, nonetheless offended the sectarian susceptibilities of the mainly Liberal nonconformists, was another piece of cement for the Liberals.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, a benign walrus of a man who had been drafted in as leader at the time of greatest schisms, successfully put together a government at the end of 1905, after the Balfour government collapsed, and proceeded to win one of the only three (the others were Labour in 1945 and 1997) left-of-centre landslide majorities in the largely Tory-dominated



David Lloyd George (1863–1945) and Winston Churchill (1874–1965)

twentieth century. Campbell-Bannerman was quite a successful if easy-going prime minister for two-and-one-quarter years. He combined a taste for French culture and fashionable German spas with a determined Scottish radicalism. Edward VII paid him the compliment – very high from that self-indulgent gourmand source – of saying that 'Bannerman knows how to order a good dinner in all the best restaurants of Europe'. But from the beginning, the real lynchpin of the government was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Herbert Henry Asquith, who succeeded effortlessly to the top job when Campbell-Bannerman's health failed in 1908. Bannerman died in 10 Downing Street, the only prime, minister to do so, for power is generally speaking a considerable preservative.

Asquith was the last head of a Liberal government. He was a highly educated classicist from a lower-middle-class background, with as natural an aptitude for fashionable life as for the speedy and calm discharge of public business. He did not have the charisma of his distinguished lieutenants Lloyd George and Churchill, but for at least the first six years of his premiership he had the natural authority to remain in reasonable control of them, and the confidence to give them room for plenty of initiatives. He did not have an adventurous mind that breached new frontiers, but he had knowledge, judgment, insight, and tolerance. He was a great peacetime prime minister, and I would place him very high among the nineteen of the twentieth century's, either second or third. Like those other considerable radical prime ministers, Gladstone before him and Attlee (Labour prime minister from 1945 to 1951) afterwards, he was a man of rather conservative, establishment tastes in everything outside politics.

Throughout the Campbell-Bannerman period it did not matter that home rule was not proposed, for virtually every controversial bill of the new government – education, licensing (of alcoholic sales), a Scottish land bill – was destroyed by the House of Lords. Until that veto could be limited, the government with the biggest majority in recent history was locked in a vice of impotence.

It was Asquith's great achievement that he loosened that vice. He encouraged Lloyd George, whom he made chancellor when he became prime minister, to take command of the cavalry advance guard in this battle, and Churchill to be his second-in-command. But it was Asquith himself who retained calm control of the central operation, after the two general elections in one year that were necessary to persuade the King that he had no alternative but to agree, if necessary, to create enough new peers to override the massive Conservative majority in the Lords and to replace the absolute veto with a suspensory one of just over two years. This put home rule back on the agenda, for although the

Liberals had won the two general elections in the sense of leaving the Conservatives in a Commons minority and without allies, they were now dependent on Irish Nationalist and Labour support.

Lloyd George and Churchill, working for a time in close alliance and each always fascinated by the other's streak of political genius, were the so-called heavenly twins of radical social advance. They cut themselves firmly adrift from Gladstonian distrust of state interference in the coalition of the people. Lloyd George produced the so-called People's Budget of 1909, which, although very modest by later standards, was alleged at the time to amount to a several-pronged attack upon property. It was a free trade budget in the sense that it showed how the modestly mounting costs of social security and Dreadnought battleships could be paid for without resorting to import duties. It provoked the Conservative peers to rashly overextend their battlefront. In rejecting this budget they were challenging the doctrine that the Commons had exclusive control over finance, a doctrine that had been perceived as secure for several centuries; in so doing, they planted themselves on ground that ensured their defeat in the Parliament Act of 1911. Both Lloyd George and Churchill were active fighting generals in this battle, although Asquith remained firmly in the commander-in-chief's seat. Both were also eager skirmishers for various pieces of social legislation: health and employment insurance, minimum standards and wages in the sweated trades, and the setting up of labour exchanges to reduce frictional unemployment. All this made Churchill the sorcerer's apprentice to Lloyd George's sorcerer (the latter was over eleven years his senior). It also meant that they had turned their backs very firmly on the old Gladstonian tradition of concentrating on libertarian political issues and leaving 'the condition of the people' to look after itself.

What is certain is that Mr Blair would like to see cross-voting continue, would like a strong Liberal/ Labour alliance, would like almost a re-creation of the old governing Gladstonian party, thereby avoiding the split on the centre-left of British politics.

Both Churchill and Lloyd George were, however, never very strong party men, even though they often appeared violently partisan. Lloyd George, who came from a modest but pastoral (and therefore not squalid) North Wales background, was until 1914 seen as a scourge of the prosperous classes. Yet as early as 1910 he had written a memorandum strongly urging a Liberal/ Conservative coalition, with a trade-off of advantages for both sides. This had been strongly supported by Churchill, whose background was quite different – he was a duke's grandson and firmly upper-class. That much aside, in those pre-1914 days both were radical opportunists, natural partisans so long as the battle was joined, but always looking out for the opportunity of a favourable truce.

Churchill in those days was even more unpopular with the right than was Lloyd George. Both were seen as noisy firebrands, although Churchill, perhaps because his oratory was less musical, had an even greater capacity to jangle nerves. He was also seen as a class traitor and a turncoat; neither of these epithets was remotely applicable to Lloyd George in his radical days.

Their oratory was remarkably contrasting. Besides being more musical, Lloyd George's was far more spontaneous; Churchill's was more literary and high-flown and always meticulously prepared. The physical presence of an audience was crucial to Lloyd George, who wrapped himself around his listeners, as it were; for him, a successful speech was an emotional catharsis. Churchill depended far less on an audience. That was one reason why, from the 1920s onwards and above all during the Second World War, he was such a brilliant broadcaster. He could perform as well with only a microphone before him as in front of 2,000 people. Lloyd George could not.

Churchill was nonetheless very successful, even as a young minister – and he started as a full minister when he was thirty-one, the youngest for a century – at creating memorable phrases, which were strongly partisan, anti-Tory, and designed to enthuse the Liberal faithful. Yet there were always some who doubted whether he ever was a real Liberal. He had of course started as a Tory MP, and by1924 (and the age of fifty) he was back as a Tory and Chancellor of the Exchequer in a Conservative government. By then the hope of another Liberal government had become very thin. Lloyd George as prime minister had presided over a war-winning but largely Tory coalition, and had continued that alliance, on a still more Tory base, for the first four years of the peace. But in so doing, and as a result of his rupture with Asquith, he had destroyed the Liberal Party as an instrument of government. And Churchill was very much interested in government as opposed to the sterility of opposition.

But how good a Liberal was he in his Asquith Government days? He certainly believed in social reform, and during his year-and-a-half as Home Secretary he was strongly Liberal on penal policy. He was instinctively on the side of the underdog, and favoured him at the expense of the middle dog, especially provided he himself could remain a top dog. He was instinctively in favour of a hierarchical society and did not envisage reforms that would drastically upset the established social order. This did not, however, differentiate him from Gladstone, who pronounced himself to John Ruskin as a firm inegalitarian. What did differentiate him from Gladstone was his intuitive imperialism and the stimulus that he derived from the clash of arms. This latter quality was of crucial benefit to the Western world in 1940, but it was not Gladstonian. Gladstone would have been a rotten war leader, and he was very lucky that his sixty-two years in politics were among the most peaceful in British history.

In Britain any early hope of a

Tony Blair – anything of the British Liberal tradition?

future Liberal government perished in the 1920s; but this did not mean that the influence of liberalism disappeared from British politics. Baldwin was a liberal Tory prime minister in the 1920s and 1930s. So was Macmillan in the 1950s. There were considerable liberal influences in both the Labour and Conservative parties – but few Liberal parliamentary seats. In 1983, after new strength was injected into the old Liberal Party through its amalgamation with the short-lived but powerful catalyst the Social Democratic Party, the new alliance got 26 per cent of the popular vote but only 3.5 per cent of the seats.

Any significant recovery in parliamentary seats came only in the 1997 election, when Tony Blair was swept into power with 417 seats, nearly two-thirds of the House of Commons. The Conservatives were reduced to 165, and the Liberal Democrats secured 46 seats, the best Liberal showing in twenty years. But at least half of these 46 seats were gained – as were many of Mr Blair's 417, for he polled only 44 per cent of the popular vote – on the basis of spontaneous cross-voting between Labour supporters and Liberal Democrats. There was no formal pact. There was no withdrawal of candidates in each other's favour. But the electorate, feeling very strongly that the eighteen-year-old Conservative government had far overstayed its welcome, took matters into their own hands and created an unbaptised, almost unacknowledged, popular alliance. When it was thought that the Liberal Democrat candidate was more likely to beat the Conservatives, he or she got Labour support, and vice versa. This was welcome to Mr Blair, as it was to me and to most Liberal Democrats. It gave him, in a very loose sense, a 62 per cent as opposed to a 44 per cent mandate. What does this hold for the future? Was it purely a one-off phenomenon that will not repeat itself in new circumstances? No-one yet knows. The Liberal Democrats mostly support the Labour government rather than the Conservatives, but by no means always.

What is certain is that Mr Blair would like to see cross-voting continue, would like a strong Liberal/Labour alliance, would like almost a re-creation of the old governing Gladstonian party, thereby avoiding the split on the centre-left of British politics that made the twentieth century overwhelmingly a Conservative century, in a way that the nineteenth century never was and that he and I very much hope the twenty-first century will not be either. He would like all these things more than would much of his party. He has been a strong leader, partly from temperament and partly from his vote-winning ability, which does not yet show great signs of diminution.

This raises the question, how good a Liberal is he? The answer is mixed, but with the positive somewhat predominating. He has certainly rid the Labour Party of much of its old ideological baggage. Far from wanting further nationalisation, he has been almost as keen a privatiser as was Mrs Thatcher. He has laid to rest the view that the Labour Party is essentially a class party. He has pursued active policies of constitutional reform much in line with the Liberal tradition, policies that include devolution to Scotland and Wales, the removal of a large part of the hereditary element from the House of Lords, and the introduction of proportional voting systems for the Scottish, Welsh, and London assemblies and for the British members of the European Parliament. But he has so far balked at extending that to the Westminster Parliament, which is a central desire of the Liberal Democrats.

He is also torn between his commitment to decentralise power and his strong desire to maintain centralised control over his own party. This is half understandable, given the mess he thinks his party made of its electoral prospects in the 1980s. But he has not exercised his control at all skilfully, especially in relation to his choice of Labour candidate for the new, directly elected Mayor of London, and of the leader of the Welsh Assembly.

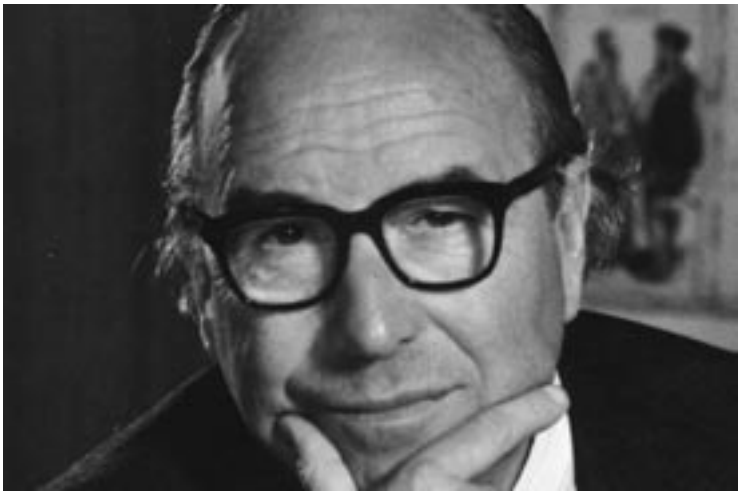
Furthermore, he is not instinctively a Liberal on social libertarian issues. He tends to want to tell people what they ought to do, rather than pull back the law from interference in people's decisions about their own lives and conduct where this does not clearly damage others.

He is, however, instinctively internationalist and pro-European, which is a very important item in the Liberal Democrat creed. He is the most pro-European British prime minister since Edward Heath, who left office twenty-six years ago. I think he wants to see Britain part of a single European currency, but has been hesitant – I think too cautious – about the timing.

So the balance sheet from a Liberal point of view is by no means bad, but not perfect either. But very few things in human life are perfect. Also, it is too early to make full judgments about Mr Blair's prime ministerial performance. It is unwise to tip the waiter before the meal is over. It is unwise to judge a prime minister in the context of history before he has run his course. Mr Blair has certainly shown himself a competent prime minister. Whether he will be a great one and a true Liberal heir to those others – Gladstone, Asquith, Churchill, and Lloyd George – remains to be seen. But I am not without hope.

WRITING ABOUT R

The obituaries and essays on Lord Jenkins of Hillhead brought forward the usual tributes and obsequies. They almost all noted Jenkins' first-rate intelligence, applauded the scale of his achievements as a political biographer and recounted his penchant for interesting conversation, good food and fine wine. The breadth of his hinterland – his life outside politics – was widely recognised.



At the same time, the Roy Jenkins that many friends and former colleagues remembered was a more disciplined and more professional politician and, indeed, a more down-to-earth person than was often supposed. He was polite and friendly to his political opponents, a delightful luncheon companion and, in the words of Lord Healey, 'a singularly civilised man'.[1]

But, as befits someone who was a significant figure in the country's public life for fifty years, the discussion of his political achievements and what they represented was more contentious, more politically charged.

Jenkins' record during his two stints as Home Secretary was widely praised. In the *Guardian*, David Marquand argued that Jenkins did 'as much as any other single person to make Britain a more tolerant and civilised country to live in'.[2] For the *Observer*, Vernon Bogdanor wrote that 'his tenure … was marked by a massive attack on prejudice and a bonfire of repressive legislation (homosexuality, abortion divorce) … decriminalisation of homosexuality has done more to alleviate human misery than any other post-war Act'.[3] And Lord Healey described Jenkins' first period at the Home Office as his 'greatest contribution', claiming 'it was nothing less than a social revolution'. Predictably, some conservatives struck the only sour notes. Ferdinand Mount saw Lord Jenkins as 'the personification of … the peculiar thoughtless complacency about the way we embarked on these new directions' in the 1960s. Thus he held Jenkins implicitly responsible for the free availability of drugs and pornography and blighted family lives on run-down council estates today.[4]

Indeed, what was most remarkable was the way in which the writers of obituaries and essays portrayed Lord Jenkins' achievements through their own political lenses. To David Marquand, who followed Jenkins to Brussels and then into the SDP, he was first and foremost the hero of the European cause. Jenkins

OY OBITUARIES AND APPRECIATIONS REVIEWED BY NEIL STOCKLEY

had, Marquand wrote, 'played an indispensable part in taking Britain into what is now the European Union'. He admired Jenkins' courage in leading the 69 Labour MPs who defied the party whip to vote in principle for joining the Common Market and argued that this 'gave the European cause a cushion of moral authority without which it would almost certainly have foundered'. Vernon Bogdanor lauded his integrity and political courage. And yet, as only *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* pointed out, in an attempt to save his position as deputy leader, Jenkins ended up voting with his Labour colleagues against the legislation that permitted Britain to join the Common Market.[5]

Marquand described Jenkins' achievements as President of the European Commission in considerably more detail than any other writer. During his four years in Brussels, Jenkins had 'left a more enduring mark on European politics than any British politician since Ernest Bevin'. In putting monetary union back on to the agenda, he said, Jenkins had set in train the European Monetary System (EMS), which 'laid the foundations for the European Single Act of 1985, the European Union of the 1990s and the single currency of today'. In a generally affectionate essay, Lord Owen, who broke with Jenkins partly on the European question, saw his record there as 'in some respects, a disappointment'.[6] The *Daily Telegraph* noted that the creation of the EMS 'attracted as much criticism as praise'. *The Times* was more positive, praising Jenkins' skill as an ambassador for Europe and stressing 'it was doubtful whether he could have done more'.

By contrast, Jenkins' achievements at the Treasury were the subjects of less praise from 'centre-left' writers and, indeed, somewhat more ambiguous comment. For making devaluation work, balancing the government's books and putting the balance of payments back into the black, *The Times* placed him 'in the first flight of Chancellors in the twentieth century'. Both Lord Owen and the *Observer*'s business correspondent, William Keegan, were also very positive.[7] But Keegan and, to a lesser extent *The Times,* noted that Jenkins had initially been too timid in his approach to fiscal policy. For their parts, Ferdinand Mount and the *Daily Telegraph* complained he had raised taxes too high. In my view, Dennis Kavanagh made the most accurate criticism: 'living standards for ordinary people showed only a tiny improvement and the pent-up wage pressures exploded under the successor government of Edward Heath'. Still, economic policy is intrinsically less suited to absolute moral judgements than either social reform or European integration. And perhaps we have seen so many booms and busts, false dawns and fallen idols that the heroes of post-war British economic policy are hard to recognise.

The most politicised aspect of the obituaries was surely the discussion of Jenkins' role as the 'principal begetter of the Social Democratic Party (SDP)' (*Daily Telegraph*). The debates over the party's impact were just as fierce as ever. To his erstwhile colleagues – and rivals – on the Old Labour right, he provided the perfect alibi for their defeats in the 1980s. 'Without Roy', said Lord Healey, 'Thatcher would never really have happened'. In other words, had the SDP not existed, she would not have been in power long enough to do her worst. *Tribune*'s political correspondent tried to show that in 1983 the Liberal-SDP Alliance increased Mrs Thatcher's Commons majority, despite a small drop in Conservative support, by splitting the centre-left vote.[8] But there is no guarantee that without the SDP, those opposed to Thatcherism would have fallen in behind the Labour Party that Tony Benn and his followers had fashioned. Indeed, the available evidence suggests the very opposite. Nor does Healey's claim that in taking away 27 moderate MPs '[the SDP] shifted the balance of power in the party to the left, and made its recovery much more protracted' hold much water.

Both David Marquand and Ferdinand Mount were sure that the party gave Labour the shock therapy and, starting with Jenkins' Dimbleby lecture in 1979, the roadmap for its long march back to power.

As was widely noted, the SDP failed to break the mould of British politics. (This was partly Jenkins' fault, for his period as leader was hardly a success – a point that only *The Times* came close to developing fully). But both David Marquand and Ferdinand Mount were sure that the party gave Labour the shock therapy and, starting with Jenkins' Dimbleby lecture in 1979, the roadmap for its long march back to power. This was 'a broad-based social-democratic party, capable of speaking to middle England … The fact that it was called the Labour Party', Marquand wrote, 'does not detract from the achievement'. Indeed, many

media commentators believed that Jenkins paved the way for Blair and in the words of Tony Benn, acted as the 'grandfather' to Tony Blair's 'New Labour Party'. But this is too simplistic.

First, Jenkins did not save the Labour Party. The traumatic process of policy reviews that turned Labour into a pro-'social market', pro-Europe and multilateralist party did not even start until the late 1980s – after the SDP's demise – and they were driven by Neil Kinnock and the erstwhile 'soft left'. And Middle England did not embrace Labour until the mid-1990s, after Tony Blair had forced yet more change on a demoralised and desperate party.

This leads into a second, more significant point about Jenkins' political legacy. After 1994, Blair embraced Mrs Thatcher's major economic changes and promised to keep to the Tories' spending limits for two years and not to increase income tax. This was a departure from Jenkins' repeated declarations that he believed in the mixed economy but thought there was much that should be done to make it less unequal. The Dimbleby Lecture was egalitarian and strongly anti-Thatcherite. Indeed, many of Jenkins' speeches from the 1970s and 1980s now read like a left-wing critique of the Blair Government from the left.

The Times noted that Jenkins acted as Blair's mentor, providing much of the historical case for 'the project' that sought to reunite the Liberal and Labour strands of Britain's progressive tradition. But it is well documented that he died disappointed with both Blair's reluctance to provide leadership over the Euro and his failure to pursue electoral reform for the Commons. And it is impossible to imagine a Jenkins Government indulging in the penal policies that we have seen since 1997 or being so eager to clamp down on civil liberties in the wake of al-Qaeda.

Still, Jenkins' political principles were, in many ways, inchoate and this was the subject of much discussion. Dennis Kavanagh believed they were largely a state of mind. 'He was committed to libertarianism, a mixed economy and internationalism [but] he did not espouse a political philosophy. He seemed to believe that, if you found twenty men and women of liberal disposition, good will and minds of their own, government could function almost by instinct; it did not need an ideology'. The *Daily Telegraph* saw him as 'more of a Whig than a radical'. *The Economist* simply called him a 'political reformist'.[9]

But these descriptions do not quite paint the complete picture. Lord Healey's comment that 'Roy was always really a liberal, no matter which party was in', while not meant as a compliment, may have been closer to the mark. For Jenkins started out as a Labour politician but came to recognise the limitations of a trade union-based party; he saw that the dichotomy between the liberal and the illiberal was, if anything, more important than the left-right divide. Vernon Bogdanor hailed him as the pioneer of 'a liberalised social democracy' that was based on two tenets: 'an aspirational society (individuals must be allowed to regulate their personal lives without interference from the state); and [the belief] that a post-imperial country like Britain could only be influential in the world as part of a wider grouping (the EU)'. This surely made Jenkins the grandfather not of Tony Blair's New Labour but of Charles Kennedy's Liberal Democrats.

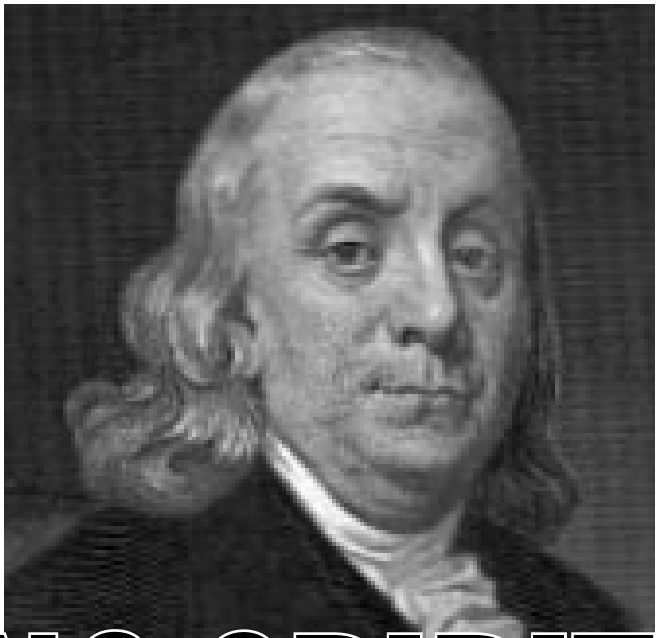
Roy Jenkins' political creed still has plenty of relevance for the twenty-first century. Harold Wilson's ex-spin doctor Joe Haines was not wrong when he called Jenkins 'a gifted failure'[10] because he did not become Labour Party leader or Prime Minister. But this is less important than the inspiration many still take from Jenkins' achievements as a practical reformer and the insights that were in many respects ahead of his time. In its editorial the day after Lord Jenkins' death, the *Independent* concluded: 'As the weakness of Mr Blair's attachment both to the European ideal and to liberal principles is increasingly exposed, the values Lord Jenkins espoused will become more precious'.

Neil Stockley is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

1 'Death of a singularly civilised man', *Independent,* 6 January 2003.
2 'The Lord Jenkins of Hillhead,' Obituary, *Guardian,* 6 January 2003.
3 'The great radical reformer,' *Observer,* 12 January 2003.
4 'Roy's lunches were better than his legacy, *Sunday Times*, 12 January 2003.
5 'Lord Jenkins of Hillhead,' Obituary, *The Times* 6 January 2003 and Lord Jenkins of Hillhead OM, Obituary, *Daily Telegraph,* 6 January 2003.
6 David Owen, 'Roy's hand in Britain's destiny,' *Evening Standard,* 6 January 2003.
7 William Keegan, 'Jenkins and the war for Blair's ear,' *The Observer,* 12 January 2003.
8 Hugh Macpherson, 'Jenkins: pomp and circumstance,' *Tribune,* 10 January 2003.
9 Obituary, 'Roy Jenkins' *The Economist,* 11 January 2003.
10 Joe Haines, 'Resolved to be irresolute,' *New Statesman,* 13 January 2003.

Jenkins' biggest gamble? The launch of the Social Democratic Party, 26 March 1981. Jenkins is flanked by David Owen and Bill Rodgers.

Were Liberals really the inventors of community politics? **Tony Little** takes a look at a practitioner from the eighteenth century.



PIONEERING SPIRIT

The Liberal Democrats have built much of their electoral success on the techniques developed under the heading of community politics. Initially, campaigning is undertaken to solve small-scale local problems neglected by the other parties and the appropriate government authorities. The campaign and its success are publicised in *Focus* newsletters delivered to every house in the area. The credibility built by *Focus* forms the basis for council and, sometimes, parliamentary elections. Credit for pioneering this campaigning system is often given to Trevor Jones but I would like to suggest that the method is considerably older.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–90) was one of the founders of the United States of America and one of the committee of five who drafted the Declaration of Independence. He started out as a jobbing printer and his initial interest in politics developed from the material he printed. Franklin was always a practical man, one of the early experimenters in electricity, and his political methods reflected this. In 1751 he lived in Philadelphia and as he later wrote in his autobiography:

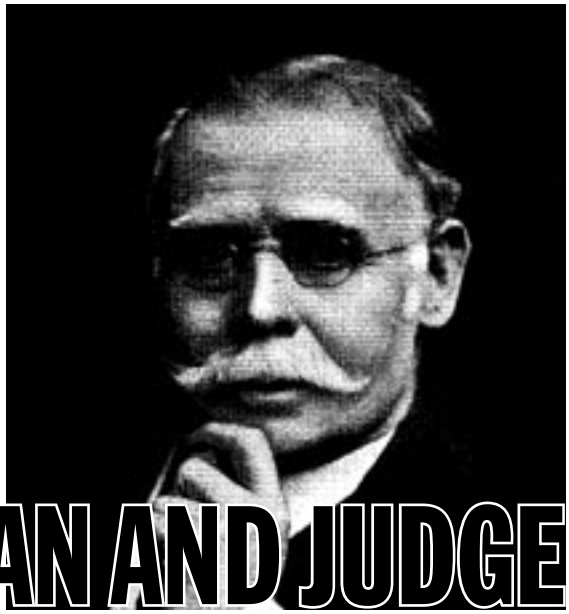
> Our city, though laid out with a beautiful regularity, the streets large, straight, and crossing each other at right angles, had the disgrace of suffering those streets to remain long unpaved, and in wet weather the wheels of heavy carriages ploughed them into a quagmire, so that it was difficult to cross them; and in dry weather the dust was offensive. I had lived near what was called the Jersey Market, and saw with pain the inhabitants wading in mud, while purchasing their provisions. A strip of ground down the middle of that market was at length paved with brick, so that, being once in the market, they had firm footing; but were often over shoes in dirt to get there. By talking and writing on the subject, I was at length instrumental in getting the street paved with stone between the market and the brick foot pavement that was on the side next the houses. This, for some time, gave an easy access to the market dry-shod; but the rest of the street not being paved, whenever a carriage came out of the mud upon this pavement, it shook off and left its dirt upon it, and it was soon covered with mire, which was not removed, the city as yet having no scavengers.
>
> After some inquiry, I found a poor industrious man, who was willing to undertake keeping the pavement clean, by sweeping it twice a week, carrying off the dirt from before all the neighbours' doors, for the sum of sixpence per month, to be paid by each house. I then wrote and printed a paper setting forth the advantages to the neighbourhood that might be obtained from this small expense; the greater ease in keeping our houses clean, so much dirt not being brought in by people's feet; the benefit to the shops by more custom, as buyers could more easily get at them; and by not having in windy weather the dust blown in upon their goods, etc., etc. I sent one of these papers to each house, and in a day or two went round to see who would subscribe an agreement to pay these sixpences; it was unanimously signed, and for a time well executed. All the inhabitants of the city were delighted with the cleanliness of the pavement that surrounded the market, it being a convenience to all, and this raised a general desire to have all the streets paved; and made the people more willing to submit to a tax for that purpose.[1]

Are there even earlier examples to be discovered?

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

1 B. Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Hutchison & Co. (1903) pp. 147–49.

Robert Shiels
examines the career of Tommy Shaw (1850–1937) one of Campbell-Bannerman's law officers.



LAYWER, POLITICIAN AND JUDGE

In the scheme of things in Britain, a political career has never been regarded as wholly inconsistent with later judicial appointment. Lord Salisbury wrote, and warned, in 1897 that 'the judicial salad requires both legal oil and political vinegar: but disastrous effects will follow if due proportion is not observed'.[1] In the same year, he also observed more prosaically: 'there is no clearer statute in the unwritten law than the rule that party claims should always weigh very heavily in the disposal of the highest legal appointments'.[2]

The career of Tommy Shaw encompassed that of lawyer, politician and appeal judge in the course of a long life. He was born the son of a baker in 1850 in Dunfermline in West Fife. Shaw was five years old when his father died, aged 53, and he was an only child. He went to local primary schools and Dunfermline High School. He was brought up in what was then the United Presbyterian Church. He started work at the age of 14 as a clerk in a solicitors' office.[3] He completed an apprenticeship and qualified as a solicitor, but he had his eye on the wider view. He attended the University of Edinburgh and graduated MA LLB; he was admitted to the Scots Bar in 1875.

Shaw took to advocacy; a contemporary wrote, 'with a jury he was superb. Some indefinable charm in his most suasive voice always seemed to sway them to his client. And in the art of cross-examination no one at the Scottish Bar has approached his subtle, insidious way of extracting the truth.'[4] Shaw himself said that in these matters he was a high-strung actor.[5] His legal practice was, however, greater than merely that of court work; for many years, for example, he held a general retainer to act as counsel to Glasgow Corporation.[6]

There was little in the way of quick advancement in the legal profession for Shaw; in his time Crown Counsel (the supreme court prosecutors) were entirely political appointments. Shaw, having sided with the Liberal Party, was then linked with the political fortunes of the party. It was thus not until 1886 that Shaw was appointed as Crown Counsel, but then only for the short period of Gladstone's third administration. His next appointment was of a different magnitude, for in 1894 he was made Solicitor-General for Scotland.

By that time he was a Member of Parliament; his Parliamentary career extended from 1892 to 1909. He was returned on five occasions for the constituency of the Hawick District of Burghs, covering the towns of Hawick, Galashiels and Selkirk. In each electoral contest Shaw had only one opponent, on each occasion a Liberal Unionist, the last of whom was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.[7]

In politics Shaw was a strong Gladstonian: in particular he supported home rule, he was an ardent land reformer and later he was marked out as being a vociferous pro-Boer (anti-war) speaker. Shaw came closest to losing his Parliamentary seat at the election of 1900, most probably on account of his anti-war stance. He spoke out at several public meetings against the war amidst scenes of disorder, and he and his house in Edinburgh were attacked; his views and the consequent reactions were not dissimilar to those of Lloyd George at this period. He was also a founder member of the Young Scots Society.[8] One point, however, indicates how Shaw's political career developed: he had close political connections, some thought too close, to Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman ('CB').[9]

Shaw became a government law officer, as Lord Advocate, in the Liberal administration of 1905–09. Few other Scots lawyers had the legal knowledge and the necessary acceptable political experience that Shaw had at that point. Although he was not in the cabinet, it seems clear that Shaw was close to the centre.[10] Shaw was often a guest of CB at the latter's home in Meigle in Perthshire and seems to have become a friend as well.[11] CB was considerably older than Shaw and a not

uncritical friend; CB is thought to have told Asquith that Shaw was too often 'maximus in minimus, minimus in maximus'.[12]

Shaw's resignation as Lord Advocate brought with it a minor incident that has generally overshadowed his judicial appointment. An unexpected death of a Lord of Appeal in Ordinary left a vacancy for an appeal judge in the House of Lords. Two aspects might have been thought of as preventing Shaw taking up the post: first, there was another judge with a stronger claim, applying the ordinary rules of professional succession. Secondly, Shaw had never been a judge at first instance (a trial judge). because as Lord Advocate he had been the senior public prosecutor for Scotland. Even then it was thought preferable to have had some experience as a judge at first instance before becoming an appeal judge.

Shaw left Edinburgh and went to see the Prime Minister, by then Asquith, and secured the appointment as Lord of Appeal, which he took up in February 1909. Commentators at the time and over the years have sought to make much of this; there were suggestions of clients having been left in the lurch, but that is doubtful.[13] In any event, Shaw served for twenty years as a Lord of Appeal and his speeches in appeal cases have been said to demonstrate a Scottish tradition within the judicial committee – a tendency to avoid pure legal analysis in favour of a keen sense of the political and social conditions bearing on the questions faced by the appeal judges.[14]

Shaw had political sense and courage and his whole attitude towards the law was said to be more that of a politician than a lawyer.[15] It was most probably his political sensitivity and radicalism that led to his appointment to chair various inquiries: there was a Departmental Committee on the Truck Acts (1908), a Royal Commission on the landing of arms at Howth in Ireland (1914), a Departmental Committee on the state purchase and control of the liquor trade in Scotland (1918) and the Court of Inquiry into transport workers' wages and conditions of employment of dock labour (1920).[16]

Shaw maintained an interest in literature and history. As a student he made various contributions to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Soon after appointment as Lord of Appeal he published a lecture that he had given at University College, London: *Legislature and Judiciary* (1911). In later life there were several books: *Letters to Isabel* (1921) and *The Other Bundle* (1927) were a series of letters to his daughter relating events in his life. The former volume has often been cited for his narration of events surrounding the formation of CB's administration in December 1905. Shaw visited the annual meetings of the American and Canadian Bar Associations and his addresses to their members formed *The Law of the Kinsmen* (1923). There was a play in verse, *Darnley* (1925), a study of *The Trial of Jesus Christ* (1928), *Leicester* (1931), and a biography of a Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court: *John Marshall in Diplomacy and in Law* (1933).

When Shaw retired as an appellate judge in 1929 he was advanced from a judicial life peerage to the rank of viscount, becoming known as Lord Craigmyle. It has been said that Shaw's contribution has been denigrated over the years.[17] He seems to have been rather outspoken and abrasive at times, especially towards his political opponents, many of whom were his legal colleagues. Shaw maintained a diplomatic silence on contemporary domestic political issues during his time as a Lord of Appeal, although he was an ardent supporter of the League of Nations. It is remarkable, however, that he made his way from a modest and probably impecunious background, via the advanced wing of the Liberal Party, to so senior a legal position.[18]

In his personal life Shaw married Elsie Stephen of Aberdeen and they had a long and seemingly happy marriage. They had one son and three daughters. The son, Alexander Shaw (1883–1944) was Liberal Member of Parliament for Kilmarnock from 1915 to 1923, later became a Director of the Bank of England, and succeeded to the viscountcy on the death of his father on 28 June 1937.

'With a jury he was superb. Some indefinable charm in his most suasive voice always seemed to sway them to his client. And in the art of cross-examination no one at the Scottish Bar has approached his subtle, insidious way of extracting the truth.'

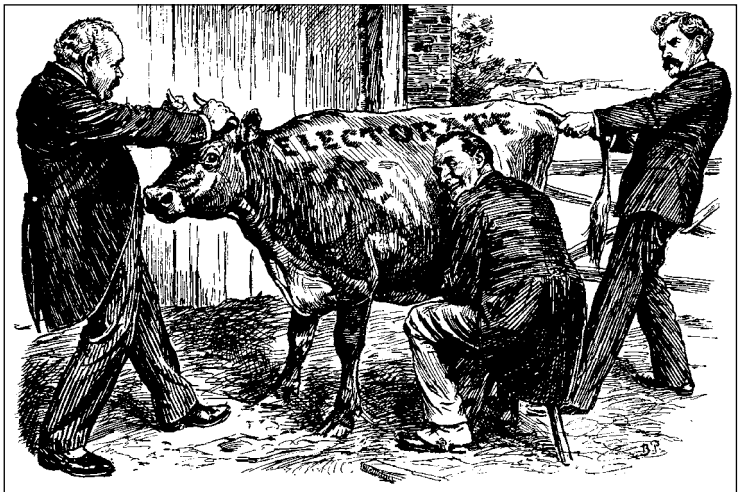
Robert Shiels attended Dunfermline High School and then the Universities of Dundee and Glasgow before becoming a solicitor in Scotland in 1979.

1 Quoted in R. F. V. Heuston, *Lives of the Lord Chancellors 1885–1940* (1964), p. 57.
2 *ibid* p.52.
3 He worked 55 hours a week and there was no pay: *Letters to Isabel* (1936 ed) p. 25.
4 See the article 'The Apotheosis of the Lord Advocate' in *The Outlook,* February 20, 1909, at p. 254.
5 *Letters to Isabel* (1936 ed) p. 46.
6 (1909) 1 *Scots Law Times* 51.
7 See F. W. S. Craig *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885–1918* (2nd ed 1989) p 511
8 See R. Ian Elder, 'The Young Scots Society: A lost Liberal legion remembered', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 36 (autumn 2002), for more information on the YSS.
9 J. Wilson, *A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (1973) p. 430. CB himself referred to 'Tommy' Shaw; in an age when Christian names seemed not to be used often, this probably indicated a special relationship
10 It has been said to be not easy to determine which, if any, of CB's Cabinet colleagues were closest to the heart of power: J. F. Harris and C. Hazelhurst, 'Campbell-Bannerman as Prime Minister' (1970) 55 History 360 at p. 379.
11 See R. Shiels, 'CB and Tommy Shaw: Prime Minister and Lord Advocate' (1993) 61 *Scottish Law Gazette* 50.
12 'Great in small things, small in great things'. Wilson *supra* p. 589.
13 See R. Shiels, 'Tommy Shaw and the Gilded Chamber' (1994) 62 *Scottish Law Gazette* 48.
14 R. Stevens, *Law and Politics: The House of Lords as a Judicial Body: 1800–1976* (1979) at p. 130.
15 Stevens *supra* at p. 248.
16 Details can be found in S. Richard, *British Government Publications: an index to chairmen and authors, 1900–1940* (1974) p. 135.
17 Stevens *supra* at p. 253.
18 Generally see L. G. W. Legg (ed) *DNB: 1931–1940* p. 807.

THE

Mark Rathbone examines the role of a little-known radical group in the 1890s in the evolution of the Liberal and Labour parties.

The publication of the first volume of Paddy Ashdown's *Diaries* in 2000 focused renewed attention on the relationship between the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party. From the first meeting between Ashdown and Tony Blair at the latter's house on 4 September 1994, less than seven weeks after his election as Leader of the Labour Party, both men were committed to 'The Project' to bring about a rapprochement between the two parties. 'It was a good evening,' Ashdown wrote, 'Jane and I agreed in the taxi on the way back that it could even prove a historic one'.



'The Triangular Test', from 'Punch', 10 July 1912

On the day of the general election in 1997, Blair phoned Ashdown to say, 'I do want you to know that I am absolutely determined to mend the schism that occurred in the progressive forces in British politics at the start of this century'.[1] Blair's determination may have looked a little less absolute by election day in 2001, but at the time, both leaders were aware of the historical resonances of the process they were beginning.

RAINBOW CIRCLE

Indeed attempts to resolve the relationship between Liberalism and Labour began even before the formation of the Labour Party. As long ago as 1893, a small collection of young Liberals, Fabians and socialists began meeting regularly to begin piecing together a new forward-looking political agenda. By the autumn of 1894, the Rainbow Tavern in Fleet Street had become the venue for its meetings and the group became known as the 'Rainbow Circle'. The name stuck, although by early 1896 the meetings had moved to the home of Richard Stapley at 33 Bloomsbury Square, because, according to the later recollection of one of the Circle's members, of 'shortcoming in its consumption of the more profitable forms of drink'.[2] Membership was limited to twenty

RAINBOW CIRCLE AND THE NEW LIBERALISM

and dinner (at half a crown) at 7 p.m. was followed by discussion at 8 p.m..

The group's membership was eclectic. There were Liberals of course: George Gooch was just twenty in 1893, but was later to enjoy a successful career as a historian and journalist, with a particular interest in British foreign policy, as well as being Liberal MP for Bath from 1906 to 1910. John Hobson, in his mid-thirties and already building a reputation as a radical journalist, was to emerge as one of the leading thinkers of the New Liberalism, writing *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), a radical critique of imperialism, and *The Crisis of Liberalism* (1909). Herbert Samuel and Charles Trevelyan were ambitious young Liberals with distinguished parliamentary and ministerial careers ahead of them. John Robertson, another future ministerial colleague of Samuel and Trevelyan, was already well known as a radical and humanist journalist.

But it was far from being an exclusively Liberal group. Ramsay MacDonald, who was a member, at various times during the 1880s and 1890s, of the Social Democratic Federation, the Fabian Society and the ILP, was later to become Secretary of the Labour Representation Committee on its formation in 1900. William Clarke, a journalist on the *Daily Chronicle*, was a member of the Executive of the Fabian Society. Graham Wallas was another Fabian who was also a member of the Rainbow Circle and a contributor to the famous *Fabian Essays on Socialism*, published in 1889. He was involved in the establishment of the London School of Economics in 1895, and was later to become Professor of Political Science there. Sydney Olivier was another contributor to *Fabian Essays on Socialism*, as well as being Honorary Secretary of the Fabian Society from 1886 to 1889.

What were the objectives of this varied collection of Liberals and socialists? A statement of the Rainbow Circle's aims includes the following: 'to provide a rational and comprehensive view of political and social progress, leading up to a consistent body of political and economic doctrine … a programme of action, and … a rallying point for social reformers'. The same document included what amounts to an agenda for the group's discussions:

> It is proposed to deal with:
> 1. The reasons why the old Philosophic Radicalism and the Manchester School of Economics can no longer furnish a ground of action in the political sphere;
> 2. The transition from this school of thought to the so-called 'New Radicalism' or Collectivist politics of today;
> 3. The bases, ethical, economic and political, of the newer politics, together with the practical applications and inferences arising therefrom in the actual problems before us at the present time.

This programme demonstrates a clear recognition that neither Gladstonian Liberalism nor traditional radicalism were adequate to deal with the problems of the day. Two of the papers delivered to the Circle in its first few months were J.A. Hobson on 'The Economic Deficiency of the Manchester School' (7 November 1894) and Murray MacDonald MP on 'The Ethical Deficiency of the Old Radicalism'. If this sample of the first season's discussions has a essentially negative flavour, one attacking the inadequacies of established political doctrines, the 1895–96 season was more forward-looking, with Herbert Samuel presenting a paper on 'The New Liberalism' (6 November 1895) and other members leading discussions on 'The Socialist Societies', 'The Ethical Societies' and 'The Religious Societies' in succeeding months.[3]

COLLECTIVISM

The members of the Rainbow Circle rose above the sectionalism of the time and attempted to steer the Liberal Party in a new direction. The group realised that the

Leading lights of the Rainbow Circle: Charles Trevelyan, Herbert Samuel and Ramsay MacDonald

traditional individualism of the Liberal Party would have to be tempered by a move towards collectivism, and a major role of the Circle was to discuss the implications of such a change, both on principles and practicalities. The group was a formative influence on the 'New Liberalism' which blossomed under the Liberal Governments of 1905–15. The term was certainly in regular use by members of the Circle, as the title of Samuel's paper in November 1895 demonstrates.

Three broad topics stand out among the Rainbow Circle's concerns as being of especial significance and it is in these areas that its influence was strongest – the need for greater government intervention to promote social reform, relations between the Liberal Party and Labour, and hostility towards imperialism. These three concerns can be traced in the pages of the *Progressive Review*, a periodical founded in 1896 to give the Rainbow Circle a voice. 'The idea,' wrote Ramsay MacDonald, 'would be to afford the progressive movement in all its aspects … a medium of expression such as the Whig movement had in the *Edinburgh Review*, and later Radical and Positivist movements found in the original *Fortnightly*.'[4] A company was formed to control the new journal and MacDonald was appointed Secretary, with William Clarke as Editor.

NEW LIBERALISM

Much space in the *Progressive Review* was devoted to the philosophy of Liberalism and the need to adapt it to new conditions. The principles of the New Liberalism were neatly summed up in the first issue: 'If Liberals still cleave to their honourable name they must be willing and desirous to assign a new meaning to liberty: it must no longer signify the absence of restraint, but the presence of opportunity'.[5] This passage, incidentally, is closely echoed by J.A. Hobson in his book *The Crisis of Liberalism*, published in 1909.[6] The editorial of which this passage is a part was unsigned, so it is impossible to know whether the original was written by Hobson himself, though it seems more likely that it was the work of William Clarke. Whether in 1909 Hobson was, understandably, seeking further mileage from a euphonious phrase of his own or borrowing it from someone else is impossible to say, but either way it is a good example of the influence of the Rainbow Circle on one who in the new century was to become one of the leading philosophers of the New Liberalism. Freeden describes him as 'by far the most original and penetrating of the new liberal theorists at the turn of the century'.[7]

The *Progressive Review* did not confine itself to discussing the policies and internal affairs of the Liberal Party and it is significant that neither its Editor nor its Secretary were Liberals. Liberals, such as Samuel, Charles Trevelyan and Richard Stapley were, of course, involved,[8] but the publication's very title suggests an attitude to politics which rose above party distinctions and its editorial line was critical of the Liberal Party, at least in its existing form.

'We shall not expect to find ourselves in close or frequent sympathy with a party dominated by vested interests and inspired by a rooted and unconcealed distrust of popular government', proclaimed the *Progressive Review*'s first, rather self-righteous, editorial. 'Neither can we find in the existing Liberal party, as represented either by its leaders or its average members, such leading and such light as may adequately serve our cause … We shall, however, give glad recognition and hearty support to the policy of whatever party from time to time contributes to the realisation of our principles, reserving to ourselves at the same time an attitude of frank independence.'[9]

LIBERAL–LABOUR RELATIONS

Predictably, one topic which

quickly made its appearance in the pages of the *Progressive Review* was the relationship of the Liberal Party to the recently founded Independent Labour Party. Herbert Samuel, for example, in a reply to an article on the party by one of its founders, James Keir Hardie, argued that only the ILP's adherence to socialism separated it from the Liberal Party. He suggested indeed that able Labour men would be of greater use to the Liberal Party than many right-wing Liberals who obstructed the reforms demanded by New Liberals.

'A Labour organisation,' he wrote, '… which should send capable men to fill the places in the House of Commons, in local governing bodies, and in the party organisations of those false Liberals whose presence is a barrier to the full activity of the party … would be heartily welcomed by all earnest Liberals.'[10] It was clearly implied that the ILP, at least in its existing form, could not fulfil this role, because its commitment to socialism was unacceptable. Samuel himself was heckled by ILP supporters at a Liberal meeting in Paddington the very month his article was published.[11]

The Labour Representation Committee, on the other hand, was exactly the sort of Labour organisation which Samuel had in mind. In the years following its formation in 1900, it was indeed welcomed by Liberals. Samuel described himself as 'The Liberal and Labour Candidate' in his successful by-election campaign at Cleveland in 1902, and secured warm letters of support from Labour men Sam Woods and Ben Tillett, as well as from the Liberal leader Campbell-Bannerman.[12] Such examples of local co-operation were given national sanction in the electoral pact negotiated between Ramsay MacDonald and Herbert Gladstone in 1903, in which the Liberals agreed not to oppose LRC candidates in thirty seats to give them a clear run against the Conservatives.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Another feature of the *Progressive Review* was its strongly anti-imperialist line. The outstanding imperial issue in the late 1890s was the situation in South Africa, and the *Progressive Review* took an uncompromising line. In March 1897, for example, the Jameson Raid was condemned as 'not only … a grave breach of international law, but an act which was incalculably mischievous in its results upon the peace, unity, and progress of the whole of South Africa'. Two months later, an editorial predicted (all too accurately, as it turned out) a war in South Africa between the Boers and the British, a prospect which, it was said, 'history will rank as one of the most discreditable incidents in the expansion of England'.[13]

In his study of the anti-imperialist movement, Porter assigns to the Rainbow Circle a position of great importance in the development of a radical critique of imperialism: 'The new "anti-imperialist" ideology of the turn of the century came chiefly not from the Labour or Liberal parties, but from this intellectual "Lib-Lab" group in the middle'.[14]

Not all members of the Circle, however, supported this line. William Clarke wrote a furious letter to Ramsay MacDonald on 2 February 1896 complaining that the anti-imperialist intentions of the *Progressive Review* were being undermined by a 'pestilential mischievous clique, led by Herbert Samuel', who were, it seems, 'out to promote a bastard Liberalism and a lot of imperialist tosh in which I do not believe'.[15] Clarke was, however, notoriously abrasive – the following year MacDonald was himself complaining of 'Mr Clarke's ill humours', and saying that, 'I have some reasonable grounds for feeling insulted'.[16]

The *Progressive Review* folded because of financial difficulties later in 1897, but the Rainbow Circle continued to meet, though there was some turnover of membership. On October 1901, Herbert Samuel wrote to Charles Trevelyan, 'The Rainbow Circle want to know whether you wish to continue your membership. You didn't attend once last session. Shame!'[17] Trevelyan resigned from the Circle the following month. Samuel's membership continued until 1912, although his attendance at meetings had become increasingly patchy for several years before that. The Circle survived until 1931, but clearly its heyday was in the 1890s.[18]

'If Liberals still cleave to their honourable name they must be willing and desirous to assign a new meaning to liberty: it must no longer signify the absence of restraint, but the presence of opportunity'.

LONG-TERM IMPORTANCE

Influential in its day perhaps, but what was the long-term significance of the Rainbow Circle?

First, as we have seen, it played a vital role in the development of the New Liberalism. Put into practice by the governments of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith between 1905 and 1914, this political philosophy laid the foundations of the welfare state, the rise and decline of which were such prominent features of British history in the twentieth century. New Liberalism remains a discernible influence on the policies of the Liberal Democrats a century later.

Secondly, the Rainbow Circle was important because of the subsequent careers of its members and the lasting contacts between them. It is remarkable that such a small group should have produced so many men who went on to have illustrious careers in politics, journalism or education. No less than ten of the Rainbow Circle's members were elected to parliament in 1906 and several were colleagues in the Liberal governments of the years between then and 1915.

It is also clear that the friendships established in the Rainbow Circle in the 1890s had a long-term significance. Ramsay MacDonald as Prime Minister in 1924 and from 1929–1935 made use of contacts originally formed in the Rainbow Circle in the 1890s. Two of the ministers MacDonald appointed when he first became Prime Minister in 1924 were former Rainbow Circle

colleagues, Charles Trevelyan and Sydney Olivier. Trevelyan, having joined the Labour Party in 1919 after ministerial experience as a Liberal before the First World War, was President of the Board of Education in both of MacDonald's Labour ministries in 1924 and 1929–31. MacDonald appointed Olivier Secretary of State for India in 1924, elevating him to the peerage as Baron Olivier. Although it was unconventional to bring a retired civil servant who had never sat in parliament into the government, Olivier's career in the Colonial Office, notably as Governor of Jamaica from 1907–13, and in senior domestic civil service posts at the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Treasury between 1913 and 1920 was valuable to a party which had no previous experience in government.

In 1931, MacDonald was expelled from the Labour Party after forming the National Government, a coalition with the Conservatives and Liberals. The Acting Leader of the Liberal Party, who became Home Secretary in the National Government, was another former Rainbow Circle colleague, Herbert Samuel. One wonders if, when they were cabinet colleagues in 1931, MacDonald and Samuel ever reminisced about the evenings they had spent together thirty-five years before, setting the world to rights over a half-crown dinner in the Rainbow Tavern. What would the fiery young socialist MacDonald have said then had it been revealed to him that he would one day be expelled from the Labour Party over his insistence on cutting unemployment benefit and lead a Conservative-dominated coalition government?

Finally, the Rainbow Circle represented an early attempt by Liberals and Labour politicians (even before the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900) to work out the relationship between these two strands of progressive politics. Although the two parties have remained separate, there have been examples of constructive, if often uneasy, dialogue between them. The electoral pact of 1903 has already been mentioned and benefited both parties in the 1906 election. Labour and Liberal ministers were colleagues in wartime coalitions between 1916 and 1918, and between 1940 and 1945. The Lib-Lab Pact of 1976–78, forced upon James Callaghan's Labour government by electoral circumstances, was not an entirely happy experience for either party.

'The Project' to realign British politics in the late 1990s is a more recent example of the complex relationship between the two parties. On election day in 1997 Tony Blair told Paddy Ashdown of his determination to mend the schism in the progressive forces in British politics. Whether the Joint Cabinet Committee on constitutional reform on which Blair invited Ashdown to sit in 1997 really amounted to something quite so earth-shaking looked doubtful four years on: Charles Kennedy took the role of opposition rather than that of ally in the Liberal Democrats' successful 2001 election campaign, and he and Tony Blair agreed in September 2001 to suspend the Joint Cabinet Committee.

Nevertheless, the co-operation between the two parties between 1997 and 2001 has yielded some results: devolution, the Human Rights Act, the Freedom of Information Act and the first stage in reform of the House of Lords.[19] By 2000 the two parties were also sharing power in Edinburgh and in Cardiff after the first elections to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. No doubt the members of the Rainbow Circle would have approved.

'The Project' to realign British politics in the late 1990s is a more recent example of the complex relationship between the two parties.

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1 Paddy Ashdown, *The Ashdown Diaries,* Volume One 1988–1997 (Penguin, London, 2000), pp. 278 and 555.
2 J.A. Hobson, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic* (London, 1938), p. 95.
3 Many of the agendas and other documents relating to the Rainbow Circle's early years are preserved in the Samuel Papers in the House of Lords Record Office, notably A/10 (1–4).
4 Samuel Papers A/10 (2).
5 *Progressive Review* Vol I, No. 1 (October 1896), pp. 3–5.
6 Hobson wrote (p. 92) that Liberals 'tended to lay an excessive emphasis upon the aspect of liberty which consists in absence of restraint, as compared with the other aspect which consists in presence of opportunity'.
7 M. Freeden, *The New Liberalism* (CUP, 1978), p. 253.
8 Hobson, op. cit., p. 52.
9 *Progressive Review,* Vol I, No. 1 (October 1896) pp. 3–5.
10 *ibid.,* Vol I, No. 3 (December 1896), p. 259.
11 Samuel Papers A/155(II) (12).
12 Samuel Papers A/18 (1, 4, 10 and 15).
13 *Progressive Review,* Vol. I, No. 6 (March 1897), p. 540; Vol. II, No. 8 (May 1897), p. 176.
14 B. Porter, *Critics of Empire,* p. 157.
15 Quoted in B. Porter, op. cit.
16 MacDonald to Samuel, 3 July 1897; Samuel Papers A/10 (6).
17 Samuel to Trevelyan, 24 October 1901; Samuel Papers A/14(4).
18 *The Minutes of the Rainbow Circle 1894–1924,* edited by Michael Freeden, were published by the Royal Historical Society in 1989 (Camden Fourth Series, Volume 38).
19 See Mark Rathbone, 'Labour and the Liberal Democrats', *Talking Politics,* April 2002, for a fuller discussion of this issue.

Lawrence Iles examines the life of Sir John Harris (1874–1940), campaigner against slavery and colonial exploitation in Africa and Liberal MP for North West Hackney, 1923–24.

CAMPAIGNER AGAINST SLAVERY

Sir John Harris was one of the last Liberal politicians to regard his political career as an adjunct of his religious faith; and one of the first MPs to have made a career (albeit modestly) from lobbying, in his case against slavery and colonial exploitation in a Britain uneasily coming to terms with the transition from Empire to 'Commonwealth trusteeship' as he called it. His brand of nonconformist Liberalism was going out of fashion by the 1920s and, as a result, his career in Parliament was brief. But his work as Secretary of the British International Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society for thirty years from 1910 was highly influential in terms of bringing race issues to the attention of the public.

John Hobbis Harris was born on 29 July 1874 at Brightwell, Berkshire, the son of John and Elizabeth Harris. His family was relatively prosperous – his father was described on the 1881 census as a master plumber and glazier – and he was educated at the King Alfred School, Wantage, and privately.

Harris seems to have been something of a rebellious spirit at school, with no clear idea of where his talents lay, never mind how to use them. He trained in accountancy in London but the turning point in his life came on 6 May 1898 when he married Alice Seely, of Frome, Somerset, like Harris a firm Baptist. They were to have four children. Alice's strong personality must have influenced their decision to become missionaries for their church. By 1904 they had departed for the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), a country apparently chosen by chance, on a trip which was to change their lives.

On returning to London Harris wrote, lectured and displayed photographs of the horrors he and his wife had witnessed: cannibalism, the mutilation of children's genitals, murderous gang rapes, and the systematic extermination of 'unproductive' elderly villagers. This was not, as might have been popularly imagined, due to the barbarity of a savage population, and tribal animosities, but was a deliberate policy of the state's government, with which the Belgian King, Leopold II, was closely connected. Harris linked the atrocities he saw to the flourishing trade in rubber, which was a principal export of the Congo and a source of profit to its ruler. Demand for rubber was increasing rapidly because of the development of the motor car. The atrocities Harris chronicled were intended to intimidate Congolese villagers into working in rubber plantations and to generate higher production.

While not being the first to point to the exploitation of native populations by their colonial masters – Joseph Conrad had done as much in his 1902 novel *Heart of Darkness* – Harris provided details of more outrages than could be safely ignored by even the most ardent imperialist. Although not a writer of sparkling prose, he worked tirelessly to find new facts and to bring them before the British population and government. Inevitably, he was not popular with the Belgian authorities and required protection by the British government – including by Roger Casement, later to achieve notoriety in Ireland – on later visits to the Congo. He cultivated good relations with the UK government, which urged the Belgian King to be more open about the role of his agents in the territory. By 1914, Harris had secured Papal condemnation of the Congolese atrocities and had done much to associate Leopold II with colonial exploitation in the public mind.

The situation in the Congo was not the only focus for Harris before 1914. He clashed with senior ministers, not least Lord Morley, in attacking Portugal, a traditional ally of the UK, for the use of indentured labour on plantations in the Cape Verde Islands. He also exposed the expropriation of land by white settlers in Rhodesia. Harris and his wife were the subject

of physical threats and vicious assaults in print as a result of such campaigns, but they were undeterred.

Harris was a Liberal throughout his life, serving the Dulwich Liberal Association and London Liberal Federation for many years. His political and religious faiths were intertwined and for that reason, although we was on the radical wing of the Liberal Party, he was never tempted to join Labour.

As with many Liberals, the First World War made a deep impact on Harris. Ever the optimist, he saw opportunities for a new colonial system to emerge from the fall of Germany's African possessions. He advocated a 'new commonwealth', presided over by the British, French, US, Australian and New Zealand governments in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, in which traditional patterns of land ownership would be combined with modern scientific developments and a benign capitalism to secure steady economic growth; and in which majority populations would be granted some measure of self-government. Harris's ideas were supported by many in the Liberal and Labour parties but were derided by the Labour left, particularly Fenner Brockway and his younger supporters such as Barbara Castle, and the evolving South African National Congress and Kenyan Kikuyu Native Rights Association, which called for full self-government.

Harris's vision did not become reality. Where autonomy was granted, it was to minority white populations which expropriated land for themselves and used all available means to keep the natives in their places. This outcome did not affect Harris's religious faith: the white establishment in countries such as Kenya was firmly Church of England and little better could be expected of them. Harris's political beliefs were shaken, however. His advocacy of self-government waned to the extent that in 1933 he called (in the *Liberal Women's News*) for direct rule of the colonies from London in order to protect the welfare of the indigenous populations.

Harris's parliamentary career was short but active. He first stood in 1922, perhaps motivated by distaste with the Lloyd George government and a desire to put an undiluted brand of Liberalism before the electorate. He contested North West Camberwell, which was held by a prominent Lloyd Georgite, T.J. Macnamara, but came a distant third. In 1923 he was elected for North Hackney, defeating the incumbent Tory with a 14.2 per cent swing. This was one of a number of inner London seats in which the Liberals polled well during the inter-war years. It was predominantly working class, but, owing to the preponderance of small employers, was not heavily unionised. This characteristic helped the Liberals withstand the onslaught of Labour throughout much of the inter-war period, and the Liberals retained some residual strength in such seats into the 1950s.

For Harris, the House of Commons provided an unrivalled platform from which he could air his views and press for government action on a range of international issues, from the Abyssinian slave trade to the vegetable oil industry in West Africa and from prostitution in Hong Kong to the Takoradi Harbour Works in the Gold Coast.

In the few months available to him before the Labour government fell towards the end of 1924, he spoke over twenty times and asked over sixty questions. His focus was not solely on foreign affairs; he questioned the government vigorously on issues affecting military servicemen and also on the working conditions of civil servants. He presented a bill to remove the disqualification of Church of England ministers from sitting in the House of Commons, a measure which hinted at support for disestablishment. The under-resourcing of medical and sanitary inspectors was another concern, of particular importance in inner-city Hackney.

His views were the product of an odd mixture of individualism and collectivism; he was one of

only three Liberals to vote for an Independent Labour Party motion calling for the nationalisation of natural monopolies such as water, but he also argued for strikes by key workers, such as bus drivers, to be prohibited. Although a radical, he voted against the Labour government in the division on the Zinoviev allegations which precipitated the 1924 election.

Like most Liberals, he lost heavily in 1924 and did not return to Parliament, making fruitless attempts to do so for North Hackney in 1929, where he was narrowly pushed into third place by Labour, and for Westbury in 1931. This last campaign was significant because Westbury was one of the Liberal Party's most winnable seats. Harcourt Johnstone had lost in 1929 by only sixty-seven votes, but Harris was defeated by nearly 6,000 in a disastrous election for his party. It is noticeable that his later election addresses had lost the sanctimonious edge of their predecessors, in which he had more or less urged electors to vote for Good (Harris) against Evil (his opponents). Harris appreciated that the days when the Liberals could bank on the nonconformist vote had gone, thanks to the challenge of a largely secular Labour Party, and its message that economics was the key issue of the age.

In or out of Parliament, Harris was a prodigious writer of books, pamphlets, articles (especially for the *Contemporary Review* and the *Daily Herald,* as its 'native affairs authority') and letters (especially to *The Times*). The Vauxhall Bridge office of his anti-slavery league was always busy. He was a member of the executive committee of the League of Nations and, in 1926, helped negotiate a formal protocol that was intended to prohibit a person being defined as a 'chattel' and therefore capable of being another's property. In 1933 he began to raise the issue of the treatment of the black population in the southern states of the United States, exposing the practice of lynching, and comparing unfavourably the attitude of the US state authorities with the governments of Kenya and South Africa. He was not afraid to speak out against slavery and barbaric practices in countries such as Ethiopia and China, where there was no colonial power to be blamed, earning the reprobation of fellow campaigners who felt that this could undermine their efforts to put pressure on the colonial powers. Harris, however, exposed and condemned oppression wherever he found it.

Harris was knighted in 1933, possibly on the recommendation of his friend Sir John Simon. During the 1930s he seemed to have lost some of his former cutting edge and in his writing often supported rather than challenged the status quo, for example in arguing against mixed-race marriages. In many respects he was now well behind the latest thinking on race issues and his attitudes and the terminology he used were old-fashioned compared to those of the new generation of activists on the left in the UK and Africa. Some African-Americans were suspicious of his involvement in their cause, considering him an apologist for old-style European colonialism, but he had the strong support of activists such as Dr William du Bois and Dr Carter Woodson who ensured his books and articles were published widely in the US.

In 1938, Harris and his wife returned to Africa to visit the protectorates established in modern-day Botswana and Lesotho. They visited the Kalahari Desert to interview a man who claimed to be the oldest in the world and a former warrior of the Zulu King Chaka. More seriously, on the same visit, Harris had an angry confrontation with South African premier General Hertzog about the discrimination against the non-white majority practised by his government, which heralded the apartheid regime of later years. Shortly afterwards, Harris's health began to fail and he suffered a number of heart attacks. Forced into semi-retirement, he remained reasonably active up until his death at the age of sixty-five on 30 April 1940.

Parliamentarians with backgrounds in pressure groups are now common, but Harris was one of the first, and most effective, of the breed.

Sir John Simon had described him, at a dinner to celebrate his knighthood, as possessing 'boundless enthusiasm and optimism, detailed knowledge and courage'. Lord Noel-Buxton described him on his death as a genial, open-minded man, religious to his core but lacking in religious bigotry. As a campaigner and politician he had the common touch, the ability to convey a complicated message with power and simplicity in his speeches and writing. Parliamentarians with backgrounds in pressure groups are now common, but Harris was one of the first, and most effective, of the breed.

Among the most significant of Harris's books catalogued by the British Library are *Down in Darkest Africa* (1912), *Portuguese Slavery: Britain's Dilemma* (1913), *Germany's Lost Colonial Empire, and the Essentials of Reconstruction* (1917), *Africa: Slave or Free* (1919), *The Chartered Millions: Rhodesia and the Challenge to the British Commonwealth* (1920), *Slavery or 'Sacred Trust'?* (1926) and *A Century of Emancipation* (1933). The records of the British International Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society and Harris's unpublished autobiography are held at Rhodes House, Oxford University. Anti-Slavery International in Lambeth hold some of the photographs taken by Alice Harris of the Congolese atrocities. There is also a substantial collection of Harris's journalistic output at the McGill University Library, Montreal.

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REPORT

Remembering Jo – The Legacy of Jo Grimond

Fringe meeting report, September 2002, with Michael McManus, William Wallace, Tony Greaves and Tom Dale

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

There is a mythology of Jo Grimond among contemporary Liberals.[1] Good-looking, charismatic, aristocratic from an impeccably Liberal lineage, the man who transformed the Liberal Party from a marginalised, right-leaning grouplet into a radicalising force, inspiring a new generation of Liberals, showering ideas and new thinking on a moribund political scene – while at the same time providing the party with a real hope of electoral revival.

Despite the importance of Grimond to Liberals, no major biography of him was published until 2001; perhaps because he left no inviting diary, or substantial collection of papers to tempt a scholar, perhaps because, ultimately, Grimond failed. The revival faltered, there was no realignment of the non-socialist left under his leadership of the Liberal Party. As Lord Rodgers recalled at a History Group fringe meeting in Brighton in 1998,[2] after speaking, typically, to a largely empty Commons chamber, Grimond would leave in a lonely way with his head held slightly to one side. In the end, what changes did he really make?

Would this meeting, at Brighton in 2002, reinforce or undermine the potent Grimond mythology?

WRITING GRIMOND'S LIFE

The first speaker was Michael McManus, the author of the biography of Grimond, *Towards the Sound of Gunfire*. McManus is a Conservative, a former private secretary to Edward Heath, so his confession to being on the liberal wing of the Tory party was a clue to his interest in Grimond. At one point, McManus alluded to the empathy he had built up with his subject, finding himself quoting Grimond from Conservative political platforms and hearing the audiences approving his words. He began his talk by exploring how it was strange that Grimond was the only significant post-war political leader in Britain not to warrant a biography; this despite the very fullness of Grimond's life. But the question of sources soon raised itself as an explanation - no diary, no ordered catalogue of papers, his wife also dead and the greatest omission of them all, the absence of any ministerial papers. Nevertheless the opportunities to gather information did present themselves and McManus was soon running through the story of Grimond's life. He had a privileged childhood, born into a wealthy Dundee mercantile family, and went to Eton, where he played cricket rather well. He went to Oxford, read for the bar, had a reasonable war and then went into politics. He spent time working for the United Nations and the National Trust before winning Orkney & Shetland at the 1950 general election.

McManus found that most people's recollections of Grimond were of a charming and delightful man, with great manner and presence, a fine and witty raconteur. Reminiscences of a more negative kind, the sort of thing a biographer can seize on to bring out the multi-coloured patterns of a life, were often hard to come by. But there were some. Russell Johnston described Grimond as 'the dilettante revolutionary', and Tam Dalyell, whose family had trouble with the National Trust over their ancestral home, the Binns, had a very low opinion of Grimond. McManus recounted a story told to him by Alan Watson about Grimond's deafness and the way in which he would use this disability to protect himself against bores and the prolix by turning down his hearing aid at appropriate moments. He also discovered that Grimond conformed to the Scottish stereotype of being careful with money, having never found anyone who had been bought a drink by him.

POLITICAL IMPACT

Turning to the substance of Grimond's political achievements, McManus described how Grimond had taken over the leadership of a defunct political party, reminding the audience that at the general elections of 1951 and 1955 Grimond was the only Liberal MP of the six returned to be opposed by the Conservatives – in McManus' view as a result of personal arrangements between Grimond's mother-in-law Lady Violet Bonham Carter and her friend Winston Churchill. The Liberal Party was desperately close to annihilation at Parliamentary level when Grimond succeeded Clement Davies as leader in 1956. His first achievement, then, was to move away from the position of closeness to the Conservatives, turn his back on possible further deals on seats like those in Bolton and Huddersfield, start the party thinking about its true location on the political spectrum and head in the direction of realignment of the left.

Under Grimond the electoral revival took shape, not just the great Parliamentary by-election triumphs of Torrington and Orpington, but getting candidates in the field after the humiliations of previous general elections and seeing the election of a steady stream of local coun-

cillors after years of decline. Grimond did this by force of personality, taking advantage of the beginnings of the age of television, on which he came over well. He also used the opportunity presented by the Suez crisis to make a real impact on the political classes, including the defection to the Liberals of some more liberal-minded Tories. The process went wider than that, though; Grimond was positioning the Liberal Party, McManus argued, to take advantage of the postwar social de-alignment of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In this analysis, McManus was clearly taking his partisan audience with him. But he now began to dissent from the Grimond mythology with the opinion that Grimond's ideas and intellectual originality had been overplayed as contributors to the Liberal revival. Grimond, McManus argued, did not really take his ideas and policy positions seriously and if there was merit in Grimond's ideas, though they were planted in the period of his leadership, they only really came to bloom at a later time and on other parties' political agendas – home rule for Scotland, the reduction in the role of the state and the deadening hand of bureaucracy, the case for cooperation with Europe, and the whole question of realignment. Despite McManus' emphasis on the failure of these ideas to resonate with what the wider electorate then felt was important, from our current Liberal Democrat perspectives it just seems as if Grimond was ahead of his time.

Grimond resigned the leadership of the Liberal Party after the 1964–66 Parliament. The 1964 general election had failed to capitalise on the promise of Orpington or bring the party genuine leverage as they just missed holding the balance of power. Harold Wilson held out the prospect of influence but at the 1966 general election, although the Liberals gained more seats their overall vote declined and Labour came back with a landslide majority. McManus felt Grimond had by then done as much with the leadership of the party as he could. He had become bored and slightly tired, perhaps even a bit humiliated by the way in which he thought Wilson had used the situation. He could see that the potential for realignment, with the Liberals still having only a handful of seats, was a long way off and he had had enough. Once he had stood down from the leadership however, backing Jeremy Thorpe to succeed him in 1967, he regretted it and took on a new role, becoming a complete nuisance to the new leader.

In general after retirement as leader, McManus thought, Grimond took the opportunity to question and dissent from party policy and thinking and relished the furores he caused. First he flirted with the Scottish Nationalists (which so annoyed Russell Johnston) and then he adopted an out–of–character Euro-scepticism which continued even through the 1975 referendum campaign, although both of these approaches could be tracked to movements of opinion in his Orkney & Shetland constituency. In rather capriciously enjoying this outspokenness and dissent, McManus argued, Grimond denied himself full association with the success of the ideas he had floated throughout his career in politics.

POLITICS THEN AND NOW

The next speaker was William Wallace, academic, Liberal Democrat working peer, and principal contributor to some of the party's election manifestoes. During the 1966 general election campaign he had managed Jo Grimond's press publicity. On the train to Brighton, Wallace had met the political correspondent Peter Riddell, who on finding out that Wallace was going to speak about Grimond admitted he had just read Michael McManus' book and whereas he had never previously appreciated why people were so impressed by Jo Grimond, he now began to understand.

Wallace began by comparing the political scene of the Grimond era with that of today. In those days, he argued, it was possible to be 'an enlightened amateur'. Politics then was far less intrusive and much more respectful. Television interviewers were deferential, happy to give their subjects a chance to answer at length, not prone to sharp exchanges like today. Whereas Grimond was very good with the sweep of political ideas, he may have found it hard to cope with the contemporary approach to interviewing. Wallace compared his own experiences in being a member of the Liberal Party Organisation in 1966 and his later involvement in the 1997 campaign. He was the one-man 'night team' in the party press office in 1966, whereas a large, professional party cadre ran the same shift thirty years later. Wallace recalled Grimond coming into party headquarters, then on Smith Square, the night after the election, being a bit disappointed by the small number of Liberal seats then declared and then shuffling out into the night on his own. No party leader today could act like that.

In seeking an explanation for Grimond's success, Wallace began by alluding to his physical presence. His tallness allowed him to survey the mere mortals below and he seemed to find it amusing that the people he was looking down at were taking him seriously. Wallace agreed with McManus that there was a whimsical side to Grimond and that he often refused to take himself entirely seriously. What he did greatly enjoy was to meet people who were interested in politics, perhaps a group of students, and chatting informally about the underlying ideas of politics. In this way he was able to attract and charm people to the Liberal cause and as a result made a huge difference to the future of the party. By force of personality, he was able to inspire new members, particularly young people, and was highly effective at getting them working for the party in elections and recruitment campaigns.

Behind Grimond's easygoing façade, however, Wallace identified a man who himself worked quite hard, because the party did not have the resources to employ a large staff. Mark Bonham Carter, Frank Byers and Arthur Holt were all stalwart supporters but there was not much party infrastructure behind them. Harry Cowie helped out immensely writing policy but Grimond wrote his own books and pamphlets, and his own speeches. The image of the professional gentleman and amateur politician that Grimond promoted did actually disguise great activity in making the party buzz with ideas. He pushed the party more towards an understanding of the relationship with Europe, and the key position of constitutional reform, but more importantly in Wallace's analysis, he took back the party from the economic liberals and the influence of people like Oliver Smedley and Arthur Seldon. He

backed party think-tanks like the Radical Reform Group and turned the Liberals once again into a social liberal party. The economic liberals transferred their allegiance to the Tories and eventually captured it under the influence of people like Sir Keith Joseph and Margaret Thatcher. Transforming the party as he did, and providing it with a set of new ideas for a modern era, was Grimond's abiding legacy.

Wallace identified the high point of Grimond's influence and leadership as 1959–62. The context was the failure of Labour to win the 1959 general election, its third defeat in a row; the publication of the influential paperback *Must Labour Lose?* and the creation of a situation in which Grimond could credibly argue for a realignment of the left, as Labour could not win alone.

This was the rationale Grimond provided to people who were attracted to the party – that the Liberals could be relevant again. Sadly, in 1963–64, Labour began to reassert itself. And, according to Wallace, Grimond trusted Harold Wilson more than he should have. Wilson had a working majority of three at the 1964 general election but quickly lost a by-election and was therefore down to a majority of only one. Grimond gave Liberal support to the government because he felt it right to do so but he thought he had an understanding with the Prime Minister which would help progressive government in Britain, and over the crucial first six months of 1965 helped the Labour government to survive.

As soon as the opinion poll ratings began to swing back in Labour's favour, Wilson, the consummate if unprincipled politician, made a speech to the Labour Party conference that ridiculed the Liberal Party and Jo Grimond. It was at that point that Grimond decided he had had enough – a decision confirmed by the result of the 1966 election.

Wallace concluded that what Grimond left behind was a very different party, and an entirely new generation of activists. He gave credibility to the idea that young people who were radical should join the Liberal Party rather than Labour, and in so doing he regenerated the party in a fundamental way.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Our next speaker was Tony Greaves, community politician, now a member of the House of Lords and in the Grimond era chair of the Union of Liberal Students. Greaves began his recollections by reminding the audience that Grimond was always known in the party as 'Jo'. This informality and familiarity typified Grimond's relationship with the Liberal Party but at the same time he was hero-worshipped in a way in which no subsequent leader has been, or has indeed deserved to be. Greaves referred to the fact that one of the speakers for the meeting had been delayed and turned up late, and another one had got the date wrong and did not turn up at all – saying, to affectionate laughter, that this was a great tribute to Jo.

If William Wallace, who was delayed, had been Jo Grimond, he would not have taken a taxi from the station but would still have been wandering through the streets of Brighton looking for the meeting venue. Grimond was famous for causing panic among hosts of meetings or rallies he was scheduled to attend, with perhaps hundreds of people waiting to hear him speak, by turning up late or being discovered having a cup of tea with the caretaker, having slipped in unobtrusively by the back door.

Greaves had a particular memory of Jo, passing him on the escalator at Euston Station, all alone without fuss or ceremony, heading for the night sleeper on his long journey back to his constituency. Greaves thought this typified Grimond's amateur approach to politics, which would be impossible for any modern party leader, who would be surrounded by an entourage of aides and press corps. This approach did not even survive the leadership of Jeremy Thorpe, who when he took over from Grimond instituted a rule that the leader had to be met by large cars – and it had to be a *large* car – which in Greaves' opinion, started the rot.

Surveying some of Grimond's successors as leader, Greaves thought Thorpe did not have Jo Grimond's charisma or his deep interest in ideas. He was a very good actor and political performer but had no strategy at all. David Steel certainly had a strategy but by the time of David Steel, leaders had become ordinary folk. They had reached the elevated position of leader but people could remember when they had been rank-and-file members. Jo was never an ordinary person. Paddy Ashdown again had a strategy for the party but one that caused internal disagreements and fierce battles, well documented in the Ashdown diaries.

Grimond's great policy was of course realignment of the left, although he never really defined it and deliberately kept the idea vague. When he did expound the approach he often found that people in the party disagreed with him because the implication was always that the Liberals would be forming some

kind of alliance or arrangement with a section of the Labour Party and they were not willing to compromise their Liberalism. But despite Grimond's vagueness about defining the outcome of realignment, he was clear about two things in particular.

First, that Liberals were on the left in politics. He established, at a time when the Liberal Party had been drifting in a backwater of old-fashioned free trade in the early 1950s, that it was a party of the left, opposed to the Conservatives and the forces of the right. In doing so, he was reclaiming the historic position of the party, which had of course been the progressive alternative to conservatism throughout the 19th century and up until the First World War.

The second point on which Grimond was clear was the distinction between the Liberal left and the socialist left, something that Greaves felt the contemporary Liberal Democrats ought to revisit. The message today from the party leadership, according to Greaves, is that the idea of the left-right political spectrum is something which has passed and is out of date and so the party's place on that spectrum should not be talked about – or, if it has not gone out of fashion, talking about it could lose the party votes.

Looking at some of the issues about which Grimond spoke and wrote more than forty years ago, they seemed to Greaves today to be very modern in terms of ideas. Greaves thought that Grimond would be at home in politics today with his ideas on the role of state, decentralisation, bureaucracy and his Liberal left interpretation of these themes. Grimond would not however be at home with the organisation and level of professionalism needed to run a modern political party. Grimond was lucky in that the small number of political organisers on whom he could call to help run the party between 1956 and 1967 were very able and were also highly talented thinkers. Grimond attracted these people to give of their talents for no real monetary reward, as the paid political jobs that exist today were not available then. Grimond drew in capable people from the universities to write a series of pamphlets and papers which created a corpus of Liberal policy which had not been seen for a long time and which defined the Liberal Party as a being on the centre-left of the British political spectrum. Looking at this work today, Greaves felt that a lot of it was really rather social democratic and perhaps in commissioning it, Grimond laid the foundations for the movements which later brought the merging of social democratic and liberal ideas and structures.

However, Greaves believed that the fact that there were disagreements in the party, or a lack of real understanding about the realignment of the left, did not really matter. There was a consensus in the party that the task was to increase the number of seats, to create a body of policy, to create a modern party under the direction of a leader who half the time gave superb inspiration and leadership and the other half of the time allowed his mind to wander across the range of political ideas and to promote his concept of realignment. This was how Grimond was and the party accepted it from him in a way that it was not prepared to do later under Steel or Ashdown when they were pushing their own realignment strategies.

THE ORATOR

Greaves then referred to Grimond's oratory and the way in which his leader's speeches became great events in the life of the party – all who heard them remembered them as inspirational. In Greaves' view no subsequent Liberal leader has been able to deliver speeches like Grimond. In fact he believed Grimond to have been the most charismatic performer and speaker in British politics since 1945, bearing comparison with the great orators of the 19th century, John Bright or Gladstone, who could speak for three hours and still keep people enthralled. This is now regarded as an obsolete skill, but Jo Grimond had that ability and it suited the politics of his time. It was one of the methods by which Grimond was able to hold the party in the palm of his hand, but he never used it to keep a grip on what the party did or to impose a view of what the party should think, because he genuinely believed in the diversity of ideas and the promotion of policy.

In finishing, Greaves referred to a party magazine called *Gunfire,* from 1967, which he used to edit. In this he wrote an editorial entitled 'The Grimond Generation'; it covered the great upsurge in Young Liberal membership and activity in the mid-late 1960s which in many ways was independent of the Liberal Party itself, a strange phenomenon in politics at the time. In that editorial, clearly written on behalf of the wider Young Liberal leadership, Greaves wrote:

> We are the Grimond generation. Whether we like it or not, most of us joined and became active in the Liberals and Young Liberals when Jo Grimond was not only the Liberal leader, to all intents and purposes he was the Liberal Party. With

> virtually no Parliamentary party, Liberal policy was whatever Jo said it was at the time. It must have been shockingly undemocratic but we were newcomers, we did not really notice. We joined because the Liberals (Jo Grimond) seemed to be bright and new and relevant and sensible. Things have changed a lot since then …[but] when we joined the Liberals it was still the party of compromise and consensus half-way between the others. The trouble was that much of what Jo Grimond said never tied up with this. Tories flopped into the party and flopped out again two or three years later. All that really interested them was electoral success. Large numbers of young people also joined the party but unlike our elders we usually listened to what Jo Grimond was saying. We were stupid enough to take him seriously. And as Bernard Greaves wrote in the previous magazine 'Everyone is shocked because we take some of the things Jo Grimond says to their logical development.' … Is it not logical to expect Jo Grimond's broadly based, left-wing party to have a vigorous and principled left wing able to express its radicalism in modern terms at the very least? Nowadays scarcely a month seems to pass without an article or speech from Jo Grimond denouncing the ethics of capitalism, the uselessness of Parliament, the breakdown of democracy, the heavy hand of bureaucracy. This analysis is incredible close to the Young Liberal analysis.

In concluding, therefore, Greaves felt that Grimond not only rescued the Liberal Party from the prospect of oblivion but also laid the foundations for a stream of radical thought within the party that survives very firmly in the Liberal Democrats today.

GRIMOND ON CAMPAIGN

The final speaker was Tom Dale, who had gamely agreed to stand in without warning at the very last moment, when one of the advertised speakers was unable to attend. Dale opened with the recollection of the first time Grimond had made any impact on his consciousness. This was in 1955, when Dale was an active member of the Young Liberals. At that time the Liberal Assembly was always held in the spring and that year, just as the conference was opening in Llandudno, the government called the general election. The then leader of the party, Clement Davies, had been ill and was recuperating on a boat in the Canary Islands. Grimond was obliged to step in and deliver the leader's speech on the first day of the Assembly, after which everyone departed for their constituencies to prepare for the election.

The first time Dale stood for Parliament was for the Harwich constituency at the general election of 1959. As leader Grimond travelled the country giving speeches at public meetings and doing radio and TV broadcasts. On one such trip Grimond had been speaking in Norwich and then had to return by train to London to get to a television studio. Grimond's train had to pass through Colchester, where it stopped for four minutes. Dale persuaded party HQ that if Grimond got off the train and said something to him and Peter Watts, the Liberal candidate for Colchester, it would be very good election publicity.

Intelligence duly arrived that Grimond would be in the second carriage, so the two candidates bought their platform tickets and went to meet the train with two local newspaper photographers. The train came in and Grimond opened the carriage door but was at first unwilling to get off the train in case it left without him. However he did get down and shook hands with both candidates for the benefit of the photographers and made two very short sentences of support. But that two or three minutes on a railway platform earned the two candidates front-page coverage in all the local newspapers. This particularly enraged the Tories who had been trying to get their leader to Colchester to boost their candidate, without success.

After that election, Dale then worked for the next five years or so for the party at the House of Commons and used to sit in on the weekly meeting of MPs under Grimond's chairmanship. While Grimond could be persuaded to support different party events, and turn up at by-elections to campaign, he was very reluctant to go to international Liberal meetings, as he never felt he properly connected. Dale was working with Liberal International and managed to get Grimond to take part briefly in meetings with leaders of overseas Liberal parties and then to go to South America on a tour. Colombia was a dangerous place then, as now, but Grimond insisted on walking around the town – much to the terror of his hosts – such was his naïveté.

In coming to the end of his talk, Dale referred to the previous speakers' recollections of Grimond as a prolific ideas man and writer of pamphlets and policy papers. He said he once asked Grimond's secretary, Catherine Fisher, how Grimond ever found the time to write all these pamphlets. She answered that they used to spend awful lot of hours travelling to and from Orkney & Shetland and London by train or air – in fact it was quicker to get to Norway from London than get to Shetland – and dictating papers was an efficient way of filling the time. It is interesting to speculate if Grimond would have left such a wonderful legacy of ideas and policy if he had been MP for a London constituency.

Graham Lippiatt is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

1 'Leaders Good and Bad' (result of the Best and Worst Leaders poll), *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 27: Summer 2000.
2 ' Obituaries and Great Men', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 21: Winter 1998–99.

Young Liberal history

Liberal Democrat Youth and Students (LDYS) are aiming to produce a book to celebrate A Century of Young Liberals / Ten Years of LDYS (working title!).

If anyone has any anecdotes, information and/or literature relating to the Young Liberals/LDYS or any of its predecessors, over the last 100 years (especially from the early part of the twentieth century), LDYS would like to hear from you.

They would also like to hear from anyone who would like to get involved with a working group which will be putting together the book and other events throughout 2003.

Please contact the LDYS Office: tel: 020 7227 1387 / 7227 1388; email: ldysadmin@libdems.org.uk.

ARCHIVES

Bodleian Library, University of Oxford

by **Helen Langley, Elizabeth Turner** and **Samuel Hyde**

The Bodleian Library's Department of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts holds a large number of modern political collections dating from 1840 to the present day, including many generated by leading figures of the Liberal Party. Principal among these are the private papers of the 4th Earl of Clarendon (1800–70) and his wife, Katherine, Lady Clarendon (d. 1874), Lord Kimberley (1826–1902), Lord Bryce (1838–1922), Sir William Harcourt (1827–1904) and his son Lewis (later Lord) Harcourt (1863–1922) and the papers of John (later) Lord Morley (1838–1923). This last collection is one of our recent acquisitions.

The papers of Liberal politician and man of letters, John Morley, 1st Viscount of Blackburn (1838–1923), provide valuable insight into the career of arguably one of the last great Liberals of the Gladstone era. Morley held deep reservations about his papers being used for future academic purpose. Their preservation can largely be attributed to liberal scholar and economist, F.W. Hirst, whose papers are also held in the Library.

The collection focuses largely on Morley's political career, as well as his later literary work, such as his authoritative *Life of Gladstone* (1903). Morley's diaries, 1882–96, throw light on his years as Liberal MP for Newcastle-on-Tyne (alongside Joseph Cowen) and more crucially Morley's time as Chief Secretary of State for Ireland (1886, 1892–95). Most notable alongside his surviving general correspondence, *c.*1865–1921, are correspondence and subject files concerning Ireland and his tenure as Secretary of State for India (1905–10). Also of particular interest are papers relating to Morley's resignation (whilst Lord President of the Council) from the cabinet of the last Liberal government under Asquith in August 1914, over Britain's entry into World War One.

Moving further into the twentieth century, there are the private papers of Augustine Birrell (1850–1933), the Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith, later 1st Earl of Oxford and Asquith (1852–1928), his second wife Margot Asquith, Countess of Oxford and Asquith (for electronic catalogues see www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/elecres.html); Asquith's elder daughter, Lady Violet Bonham Carter, a leading Liberal figure in her own right, and a fellow member of the Liberal Party organisation, the journalist Honor Balfour (1912–2001) member of the Liberal Party ginger group and opponent of the wartime truce who contested Darwen in the 1943 by-election and again in the 1945 general election.

Asquith's large archive is overwhelmingly concerned with his political career (he destroyed most of his private correspondence) but fortunately both the letters he wrote to Venetia Stanley (later Mrs Montagu) from 1910 to 1915 – key years in his premiership – and those he wrote to her sister Sylvia, the future Mrs Henley, from 1915 to 1919, were kept by their recipients and are now also part of the Library's collections.

The papers of Lady Violet Bonham Carter, Baroness Asquith of Yarnbury (1887–1969) provide an overview of a committed lifelong member of the Liberal Party. As H.H. Asquith's elder daughter, family life put her right at the very heart of politics during the first quarter of the twentieth century, and she continued to work for the party until her death in 1969. From an early age she spoke on the election platform for her father, most notably at the Paisley by-election in 1920, and she herself stood as the unsuccessful candidate for Wells in 1945 and Colne Valley in 1951. Her elder son Mark won the Torrington by-election in 1958. The papers in the Bodleian Library reflect these events, together with draft notes for most of the speeches and broadcasts that she made. Lady Violet's general and family correspondence sheds light on many topics of the day and includes, among others, letters from her son-in-law Jo Grimond, leader of the Liberal Party 1956–67. There is also an interesting sequence of scrapbooks containing both political and personal ephemera. The collection contains further papers of H.H. Asquith with correspondence and papers relating to Liberal Party Central Office, 1917–26.

Among other holdings are the papers of two academic figures who were prominent in national political life: Gilbert Murray (1866–1957), and H.A.L. Fisher (1865–1940) whose tenure as President of the Board of Education saw the introduction of the 1918 Education Act. Murray's vast collection (microfilmed for preservation reasons) includes some material on the Liberal Party but much larger amounts describe his involvement with the League of Nations organisations and the United Nations, especially UNESCO. His stand on the Suez issue is well documented. Also active in public life around this time were Sir John (later Lord) Simon (1873–1954) – his papers were enhanced a few years ago by a further donation of material which sheds new light on his early years .Unlike Simon, Sir Donald Maclean (1864–1932) left relatively few papers but this small collection, which dates from 1906 to 1932, includes material concerning not only the Liberal Party but also Ireland, Irish Home Rule and British foreign policy.

Several of the Bodleian's manuscript catalogues now appear online. Details may be found at www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/elecres.html. Information relating specifically to the modern political collections is at www.bodley.ox.ac.uk.depts/scwmss/modpol.

Readers wishing to consult the collections must have a valid reader's card entitling them to use manuscript material. Application forms for admission are available from the Admissions Office, The Bodleian Library, Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3BG. Further details are available at www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/modpol/access.htm. Readers are advised to contact the Modern Papers Reading Room ahead of their visit (01865 277048 or email: modern.papers@bodley.ox.ac.uk).

REVIEWS

The great chain which connects

David Cannadine: *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Penguin 2002)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

'Either the brute is a king, or he is a common-or-garden nigger; and if the latter, what's he doing here?'

British Liberals have always had trouble with the Empire. Indeed the Whig component of the party was partly defined by the support it gave to the American colonists in their disputes with George III in the eighteenth century. Nineteenth-century radicals such as Bright helped to build their reputation by criticising the affairs of the East India Company while even apparently belligerent Whigs like Palmerston were unenthusiastic about the expansion of Empire. Gladstone's plan for home rule in Ireland was seen as a first step in the dismantling of Empire, while Lloyd George was vilified as a traitor for his campaign against the Boer War. And yet it was Liberals who were the most conscious of the responsibilities of Empire when leaders such as Thorpe and Ashdown argued that the home country should honour its obligations to those who lived and worked under its rule.

Britain's Empire should perhaps be seen as more the consequence of European power struggles than a conscious plan of acquisition, at least up to the point of the final race for Africa and the Middle Eastern mandates which followed the First World War. Since the Empire was never planned, it follows that there was never a complete blueprint for its control and operation. The question asked by the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) of the Crown Prince of Germany, quoted at the top of this review, was posed to settle a question of precedence at a party for the King of Hawaii given by Lady Spencer. It ripely, if repugnantly, repudiates the simplistic view that the British Empire was about white men exploiting black (of both sexes) or the rich (in military technology) exploiting the poor.

Cannadine suggests that Britain's unusual approach to running the Empire was an amalgam of three disparate factors. Firstly, governments of all parties determined not to repeat the mistakes made in America under George III. Secondly, Britain sought to build on its own experience whereby regional and local government was in the hands of 'natural leaders' drawn from the local aristocracy and land-owning gentry. Thirdly, the British had to overcome the wide range of differences between the colonial nations – otherness – by building on what they knew and understood of their metropolitan area. The British governmental elite saw its own community as a multi-faceted and multi-layered hierarchy and projected this on to the colonies. Cannadine identifies this concept of hierarchy as the secret of the Empire – the way Britain was able to exert effective control with so few of its own manpower resources.

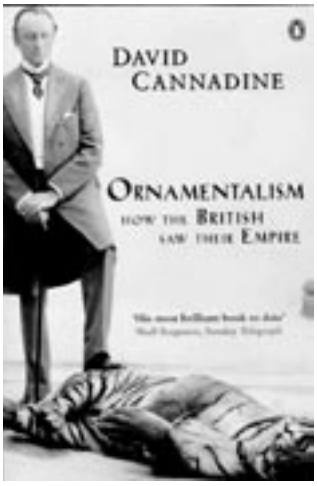
The hierarchical model itself developed in three stages. In the settlement colonies of America, Australia and New Zealand, metropolitan social structures and attitudes were naturally transported to the new lands. Lessons were learnt from America and a system of social rewards and a vice-regal presence were established with aristocrats being found to take up the roles of leadership. Where true British aristocrats were unavailable, a local if sometimes phoney equivalent was encouraged. It was in these colonies that the indigenous populations suffered, sometimes grievously, but the indigenous people were relatively sparsely distributed and insufficiently numerous to offer adequate resistance to the new settlers.

In India the story was very different. The East India Company conquered India but grew beyond its trading ambitions and gradually became more and more an arm of government. The metropolitan government was more conscious of the 'otherness' of India and for a time, under Whigs such as Macaulay, it saw its mission to be one of modernising and 'civilising' the country.

The Indian Mutiny demonstrated the flaws of the hybrid government/entrepreneurial model and the East India Company vanished from the scene. The replacement model focused on 'sameness', seeing the nawabs and maharajahs as equivalent to the British monarchy and aristocracy, with the caste system as approximately equivalent to the complex English class system. The nawabs were given responsibility and were rewarded by being integrated into the English class system. Such collaborators were subject to the advice and direction of the representatives of the British government but within this constraint they were encouraged to rule and were rewarded under the same system of honours that the crown applied to its own servants.

It was in this context that Disraeli created the title 'Empress of India' for Queen Victoria, reinforcing her position at the tip of the hierarchy. It brought the Empire to the attention of the metropolis but also made Victoria much more of a presence in India, a country she never visited. Ceremonies such as Durbars were used not only to impress the Indian multitudes with Britain's power and riches but also to show that the native rulers were an important element of Britain's ruling elite.

The Indian model formed the rough blueprint for most other colonies. A suitable group of local rulers were co-opted and given the backing of British military power, subject to British advice – advice it was unwise if not impossible to ignore. Sometimes the local tribal structure bore this burden easily, but from time to time the British had to create an artificial aristo-



cratic tradition and impose it on the colony. By the time of the Middle-Eastern mandates, which followed the 1914–18 war, the routine was so well established that the British government felt confident in creating several new monarchies out of the ruins of the Turkish Empire. One, in Jordan, still survives.

Contrary to the hesitations of leaders so diverse as Palmerston and Gladstone, Liberals of the next generation, whether as orthodox as Rosebery or as radical as Chamberlain, were enthusiasts for Empire. The Empire did not lack for Liberal proconsuls or civilisers assuming the 'white man's burden'. But even by the time that Lloyd George's government inherited the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, the sun had begun to set on the British Empire. As it did so, the flaws of the ornamental system became clear and the difficulties inherent in empire for Liberals become explicable.

The weft and warp of ornamentalism were static and rural societies of an essentially Conservative mythology. Ornamentalism did not provide well for the ambitions of modernising urban middle classes, the constituencies from which Liberalism drew its strength in the metropolitan homeland. It was these same constituencies that Macaulay and other civilisers had sought to create in the colonies. Ornamentalism aimed to recreate the idyllic paternalist rural community that was fast decaying in England. As Cannadine puts it, 'Sir Edward Lutyens noted with pleasure and recognition, going out into "India like Africa" made him feel "very Tory and pre-Tory Feudal".' Cannadine is not primarily concerned with arguing a party case but the evidence he presents highlights a fundamental difference between British parties of the left and right on a subject which dominated government for roughly two centuries.

It will come as no surprise to students of British history that Ireland never fully accepted ornamentalism. The full panoply of monarch's representatives, peerage, decoration and receptions was employed but never won the hearts of the majority. The dispersion of Irish and other rebels that was facilitated by the Empire's efficient communications had the effect of transferring their dissension into the settler colonies. Moreover, the success of the Irish rebellion of 1916–22 provided both a model for budding nationalist movements in the colonies and a warning to their rulers. The British like to think of the period after the Second World War as not so much the decline of Empire as the growth of Commonwealth, but Cannadine demonstrates that the Empire was not relinquished voluntarily and that the British regularly deserted their collaborators to leave the newly independent states in the hands of the modernisers who had resented ornamentalism and its beneficiaries.

The case presented by Cannadine is a useful response to the views of those who see the British Empire entirely in terms of exploitation by an overbearing racist military caste. He reminds us that the reality is more complex and that the British co-opted as well as exploited, and provided opportunities for some while repressing others. Empire brought benefits to the conquered as well as the conquerors. The book is well written and a pleasure to read but, as the section on the decline of Empire reveals, ornamentalism is only part of the story, a part that is in danger of being lost but which is neither a complete explanation of British success nor the inevitable flaw in its design. Rather, a co-optive hierarchy was one of the tools by which a small offshore European nation was able, for a while, to maintain an Empire on which the sun never set.

Tony Little is chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

'Parliament has never granted any important reform without being bullied'

Martin Pugh: *The Pankhursts* (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2001; 537 pp)

Reviewed by **Sam Crooks**

Early on in this sympathetic but dispassionate biography Martin Pugh remarks that none of the Pankhursts remained long in an organisation that they did not themselves control. Emmeline was the daughter of a well-known Manchester Liberal family; her husband stood twice as a Liberal candidate. She was herself an early member of the Women's Liberal Federation, but joined the Independent Labour Party only to resign five years later; she died a Conservative candidate.

Her eldest, and favourite, daughter, Christabel, was also a member of the ILP before fighting the 1918 election as a Coupon candidate, adopting Adventism and becoming an apologist for Mussolini. Banished to Australia following a family split, Christabel's youngest sister Adela had moved across the political spectrum from the communist party to the fascist Australia First by the time of her death. Only Sylvia, a friend and lover of Keir Hardie, remained consistently on the left, rejecting the ILP in favour of a branch of the Communist Party. All four died in straitened circumstances, dependent on the largesse of others, and only Emmeline in Britain.

Pugh covers the century from Emmeline's birth in 1858 to Sylvia's death in 1960. But the heart of his book is concerned with the thirteen years from the foundation of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903 to the report of Speaker Lowther's conference in 1916 that recommended the granting of votes for women. Originating in 1867 with the National Society for Women's Suffrage, certain women had already been permitted to vote in local elections, and by 1900 the House of Commons had voted in favour of national reform on a number of occasions. But there were disputes over the exact nature of the female franchise to be granted, and in any case government time was lacking. The WSPU was born of the Pankhursts' belief that only militancy would force the government's hand.

The WSPU's early life was inauspicious – by 1905 it had only thirty members. What was to give it oxygen

was Christabel Pankhurst's realisation that for militancy to succeed it had to be newsworthy. Thus the period from 1906 to 1908 saw a number of WSPU-inspired incidents, including demonstrations, the storming of the House of Commons, and disruption of political meetings. On the one hand this worked – the WSPU's income from fundraising increased ten-fold (by 1909 it was double that of the Labour Party) and the number of its local branches overtook those of the older 'constitutional' suffrage movements.

On the other it significantly alienated the Liberal Party. The Pankhursts ignored the very creditable role of the Women's Liberal Federation which had, for example, named, and refused to canvass for, anti-suffrage candidates. The WSPU under-estimated the energy and parliamentary time required to carry other of the new government's reforms such as unemployment benefit and pensions. They concentrated on the need for government legislation in the House of Commons, neglecting the requirement that it also be passed in the Lords, a much more difficult challenge. In meetings they targeted Liberal MPs indiscriminately, regardless of their views. And in by-elections they were prepared to support anti-suffrage Tory candidates over pro-suffrage Liberals.

Pugh describes Asquith's accession to the premiership in 1908 as 'changing everything'. He was to be the WSPU's most stubborn opponent yet, for a mixture of emotional and practical reasons. In particular he was uncertain that any extension of the female franchise would work to the advantage of the Liberal Party – a view shared by Lloyd George who, although sympathetic, believed that it could only be managed alongside an extension of the male franchise. The WSPU responded by stepping up their militancy to include damage to property such as window-breaking and the destruction of mail in letterboxes, initiatives that attracted prison sentences rather than fines. By 1909 the suffragettes were demanding the status of political prisoner and, on it being refused, embarking on hunger strikes.

The consequent adoption of forced feeding resulted in a propaganda triumph for the WSPU, and a tactical retreat by the government. Days after the January 1910 general election Emmeline Pankhurst announced that militancy would cease, to allow the government time to formulate a new approach to women's suffrage in the light of changed political circumstances. Liberal support was given to an all-party private member's initiative, the Conciliation Committee, that was to draft a compromise bill. A couple of months later Churchill, the new Home Secretary, announced that suffragettes would be accorded political prisoner status, thus easing the severe conditions in which they had been held. But the truce was not to last. Although the Conciliation Bill passed the Commons in July with a comfortable majority, the government refused to allow it any more time, announcing only that they would grant facilities in the next Parliament.

Not to have made a firmer promise than this was undoubtedly a lost opportunity. But Pugh does not blame Asquith alone for the decision. Lloyd Gorge and Churchill also voted against the Conciliation Bill. Although the January 1910 election returned the Liberals to office fairly comfortably in terms of seats it had left the Conservatives with over 46% of the popular vote compared with 51% for Liberals and Labour combined. The Conciliation Bill had proposed a vote for female heads of household and occupiers of property worth £10 annually. This would have helped the Conservatives who were known to benefit from middle-class female financial and organisational support. It would also have permitted wealthy men to endow their spouses with small gifts of property to permit their vote – so enhancing the incidence of plural voting that the Liberals were committed to eradicating.

In the event the Bill was re-presented to Parliament in May 1911 and carried overwhelmingly. Asquith promised a week of government time the following year, sufficient to pass the Bill through all its stages, and 40,000 suffragettes marched through London in celebration. But their joy was to be short-lived. Still convinced that the Bill would aid only the Conservative Party, Lloyd George worked hard to persuade his colleagues that the franchise must be extended to include working-class women without property as well, *and* that it must enfranchise some four million men currently excluded from voting. Thus in November 1911 Asquith announced that the government would present its own bill in 1912 for a much wider extension of the franchise than originally envisaged. This would both be more democratic and reduce the impact of the property qualification and plural voting. Given that eventual success in the Lords could be guaranteed through the operation of the new Parliament Act there was no reason to compromise on a system based on wealth and privilege.

Pugh is unstinting in his praise for the breadth of this measure and does not hesitate to blame personal pique for the Pankhursts' rejection of it. He surmises that they had invested too much in the Conciliation Bill. A wider measure involving men as well as women would deprive them of the glory associated with a women-only measure. In fairness, the Pankhursts were not alone. However unsure their political touch, they had estimated correctly the sense of betrayal in the suffragette movement as a whole. When militancy was formally resumed a fortnight after Asquith's announcement it was with the acclamation of the whole of the WSPU.

From this point onwards, Pugh links the violence of the suffragettes with the wider problems of 1912 to 1914, particularly with events in Ireland, and with the advent of a new Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna. Government decisions had to have regard to the views of Irish Nationalist MPs. The growth of unionist and nationalist private armies in Ulster had the potential to marginalise the less violent WSPU militancy. And – a telling point – the government was taking no action to prosecute Conservative leaders such as F. E. Smith and Bonar Law, whose language and actions

in the north of Ireland were considerably more seditious than anything ever argued by the suffragettes. McKenna astutely connived at Christabel's self-enforced exile in France (to avoid further imprisonment) and acted to reduce the WSPU's income by threatening prosecution of donors.

The stakes were steadily raised on both sides. The government's new Bill had to be withdrawn for technical reasons early in 1913. WSPU militancy moved into full-scale arson (including an attack on Lloyd George's house) and rudimentary bombs. The government introduced the 'Cat and Mouse' Act which allowed prisoners to be released under licence if hunger striking was endangering their health, and then rearrested when they had recovered. Emmeline Pankhurst was sentenced to three years' penal servitude, a significantly more severe sentence than anything handed down before. Asquith, now under regular police protection, was taunted in the House of Commons: 'You will go down in history as the man who tortured innocent women. You should be driven from public life.'

Martin Pugh believes that these levels of militancy eventually became self-defeating. He demonstrates the fall in WSPU membership and income in the last years before the First World War. He also traces the mounting criticism of the Pankhursts from within the movement. Christabel, in Paris, was seen as too remote and unable to compromise. With her mother she expelled Sylvia and Adela, which was seen as indicative of their autocratic methods. There were concerns about the use of WSPU funds for their personal needs. And many members were simply worn out by the endless round of arrest, prison, hunger strike and forced feeding. When McKenna offered the opportunity of absolute release in exchange for a promise of good behaviour it was widely, if discreetly, accepted. By 1914 Asquith was also sounding more conciliatory, aware of the need to hold a general election before the end of 1915 and anxious not to be outflanked by Labour and Conservative commitments to women's suffrage.

This was the state of affairs when war broke out. The government offered an immediate 'truce' which the WSPU – by now aware of its possible disintegration – were pleased to accept without loss of face. Emmeline and Christabel joined the war effort to promote industrial peace, and Sylvia to alleviate suffering in the East End of London. Meanwhile the recommendations of a Speaker's Conference at the end of 1916 enfranchised all men over the age of twenty-one and all women over thirty, subject to conditions including residence, possession of a local government vote or marriage to a local government voter. At a stroke 8.4 million women were enfranchised. In the Commons MPs voted through the changes by a majority of 330. In the Lords Curzon recommended that the Conservative peers abstain, thus assuring the Bill's passage before the election that would follow the war.

By then however the WSPU had been dissolved. Emmeline and Christabel had formed a new Women's Party as a vehicle for the latter's Parliamentary ambitions as a Coupon candidate in 1918. But the Pankhursts' hour of glory was over. Christabel was defeated and although as individuals their actions were to command headlines for years to come they would never again aspire to their prewar effectiveness nor to so compelling a cause.

The Pankhursts left few records but Martin Pugh's meticulous research has painted a more rounded picture of the family than have previous biographers, including a greater awareness of Adela's role prior to her departure for Australia. He has addressed sensitively issues such as the relationship of WSPU members to women's movements more generally, and the nature of the very close friendships, sometimes physical, between a number of the leading protagonists. He portrays convincingly the intensity with which the Pankhursts pursued their various causes even to each other's detriment. Disappointingly, however, he does not attempt to analyse the extent to which the suffragettes *per se* achieved the vote for women, or whether this would have been achieved in any case through constitutional means. The Liberal Party does not come out well from his story. He understands the party political considerations that so influenced Lloyd George but criticises Asquith's failure of leadership when it was needed and his preparedness to connive at measures that were basically illiberal.

Pugh has not been well-served by his editors. There is some repetition of events as he moves from sister to sister. Minor characters enter and leave the narrative without explanation. And the index is not worthy of a serious publisher. But this is not to detract from a fine biography of a dysfunctional family which, whatever its faults, succeeded in keeping women's suffrage on the agenda of a government that had chosen to follow other priorities.

Sam Crooks is Reviews Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.

A writer and pragmatist at the Liberal High Table

John Powell (ed.): *Liberal by Principle: The Politics of John Wodehouse, 1st Earl of Kimberley, 1843–1902* (The Historians Press, 1996; 323 pp.)

Reviewed by **David Cloke**

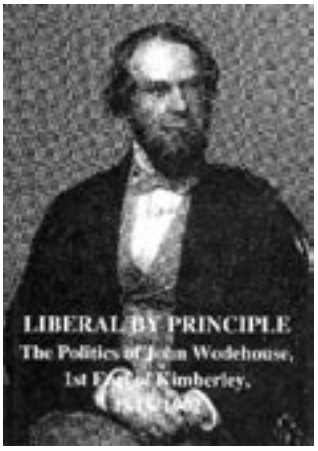
Perhaps the first thought that springs to mind on reading the title of this book is 'Who and why?' Although an earlier book on Kimberley has been reviewed in these pages *(Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 23: Summer 1999*)* his is not a name normally associated with the great Liberal figures of the second half of the nineteenth century. It is fair to say, however, that Powell largely succeeds in tackling these initially rather sceptical thoughts.

Whilst it is unclear from the title, this is not a biography of Kimberley. It is a collection of 274 documents including 251 letters (both from and to Kimberley),

fourteen political memoranda and three addresses. Hence the rather confusing starting date of 1843, when in fact Kimberley was born in 1826. Powell's purpose is to provide a 'study in the political personality of an individual and a party'. For this reason he has largely omitted papers dealing with Kimberley's family, religion (although an early letter from Rome reveals him to be strongly anti-Catholic), estate management and Norfolk society. Whilst these omissions may be no great loss to the readers of this journal, Powell acknowledges their importance to Kimberley and the need for a complete biography of the man.

Powell has clearly mastered a vast amount of material. Kimberley produced thousands of letters, despatches and memoranda during his long life. What Powell has sought to do is to arrange the key texts to two ends – firstly to outline the nature of Kimberley's liberalism, both in theory and practice, and secondly to place him in his historical context.

The book sensibly begins with a portrait gallery of the key figures in Kimberley's life; a useful reversal of normal practice. Powell follows these with a lengthy introduction outlining his case for the significance of Kimberley's political life. This could possibly have followed the letters as it would have enabled us to draw our own conclusions before reading Powell's. Nonetheless, the introduction does usefully place Kimberley's life in its historical and political context, although Powell sometimes requires quite a high level of prior knowledge. For example, he mentions the Marriage Law Amendment Bill and Kimberley's reaction to its opponents, without stating what the bill proposed and hence showing what Kimberley's views were on the matter. The structure of the introduction, whereby Powell looks at Kimberley's life from various vantage points, also means that there is a certain amount of duplication. He mentions that Kimberley was fluent in French on at least four occasions! Conversely other important events, such as his time in St Petersburg, are skated over, which can sometimes cause confusion.



Possibly the most significant events of Kimberley's life predate the first letter in the collection. Between December 1833 and February 1835 his father, great-grandfather and two sisters died. A brother was born posthumously and was, thereafter, doted on by their mother. Not surprisingly, therefore, Kimberley grew up a rather serious young man, but also a hard-working one. A complete biography might usefully delve more deeply into these events. Another consequence of his father's early death was that Kimberley became the heir to the Wodehouse peerage, to which he duly succeeded in May 1846 on the death of his grandfather. This thrust him into the heart of political life from a very early age. He made his maiden speech in the House of Lords in 1850 and was appointed Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in December 1852. As Powell says, 'he was routinely privy to confidential information about the gravest matters from all parts of the world'. Apart from two years as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, he spent his career devoted to foreign and colonial affairs. His private thoughts on these issues are to be found in some of the letters quoted and are a valuable source of information to those interested in or who are studying British foreign and colonial policy of the time.

Even before his appointment in 1852, Kimberley found himself at the heart of foreign affairs during his honeymoon in Italy in 1848. Just as he was travelling through northern Italy the revolt against Austrian rule broke out. A lengthy letter to his mother describes his experiences. Whilst his rather formal English is a little dry, something of the excitement of the events is conveyed. Interestingly, shortly afterwards Kimberley began reading about the French Revolution, and his more considered thoughts on such events are also contained in this collection. Indeed, a combination of voracious reading, research and drawing from practical experience seems to have been a feature of his character throughout his life. He took a rational approach to the proposals before him, asking 'Is it useful?' and 'Will it work?'

He comes across, therefore, as a serious but committed man. He was clearly ambitious and, even in the more fluid politics of the 1850s, quite party political. For example, towards the end of the Crimean War he wrote to Major-General Windham in the Crimea, seeking his agreement to becoming a Liberal candidate in Norfolk at the next general election. In his early career he assiduously cultivated men of influence. This was entirely necessary for one coming from outside the normal political circles. The book is quite revealing, therefore, about how politics was conducted in this period, particularly the importance of personal political relationships. For Powell, Kimberley's cultivation of these personal relationships makes him a valuable mediator in inter- and intra-party conflicts. His sheer longevity and experience made him a cornerstone of the Liberal Party in parliament by the 1880s. Indeed, he was a member of every Liberal cabinet from 1868 to 1895 and remained as Liberal Leader in the Lords until his death.

His presence at the Liberal high table for so long should by itself make his letters and papers invaluable. It is clear that he was a valued and trusted colleague of Gladstone and other key Liberal figures, and not just on foreign affairs: his experience in Ireland continued to be drawn on. His conduct of cabinet government would seem to be a model – while he was a keen critic round the cabinet table, he was an effective defender of the government's position beyond it. His imperialism may seem to make his brand of Liberalism rather distant to us, while his support for colonial autonomy may connect him to more recent Liberal thinking. His 'belief in the potential for progress through administration' is heart-warming for any civil servant.

David Cloke is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group Executive and works for the British Medical Association

RESEARCH

Five Hundred Years of Representative Politics

The History of Parliament Project

by **Paul Seaward**

The History of Parliament is a research project which is building up a comprehensive account of the working of parliamentary politics in England, then Britain, from their origins in the thirteenth century up to – for the moment – the Reform Act of 1832. Unparalleled in the comprehensiveness of its treatment, the History has been generally regarded as one of the most ambitious, authoritative and well-researched projects in British history: reviews of our most recent publications have stressed the scale and enterprise of the project – on a scale and in a level of detail none other has been able to match – and the depth and quality of its scholarship.

Each of the History's publications so far consists of detailed studies of elections and electoral politics in each constituency, and of closely-researched accounts of the lives of everyone who was elected to Parliament within the period, together with surveys drawing out the themes and discoveries of the research and adding information on the operation of Parliament as an institution.

Twenty-eight volumes covering eight periods have already been published. They deal with 1386–1421, 1509–1558, 1558–1603, 1660–1690, 1690–1715, 1715–1754, 1754–1790, and 1790–1820: in all, about 20 million words, 20,000 pages, 17,000 biographies, covering 281 years of parliamentary history. The History's staff of professional historians is currently researching the House of Commons in four more periods: 1422–1504, 1604–1629, 1640–1660 and 1820–1832. When these are complete, the History will provide a continuous and authoritative account of the House of Commons and electoral politics over four hundred and fifty years, from 1386 to the Reform Act of 1832. The History has recently also begun to research the House of Lords in the period from 1660–1832, and is developing a new approach for the different type of institution this represents.

The History owes its existence to the concerted enthusiasms of two figures of exceptional energy: Colonel, later Lord, Wedgwood, originally a Liberal, but later a Labour Member of Parliament, Minister in the Ramsay Macdonald government of 1924, and local historian; and Sir Lewis Namier, an adoptive Briton of Russian parentage, and the most prominent historian of his generation.

Wedgwood became passionately interested in his forebears as Members of Parliament in Staffordshire, wrote a book on the subject, and began in the 1920s to canvass his colleagues and the government for a full-scale project to write memoirs of all of the individuals who had ever been Members of the House of Commons. His interests were explicitly linked to a profoundly romantic interest in parliament and parliamentary institutions which he was coming to see as under threat across Europe. 'York or Lancaster, Protestant or Catholic, Court or Country, Roundhead or Cavalier, Whig or Tory, Liberal or Conservative, Labour or Unionist, they all fit into that long pageant that no other country in the world can show. And they one and all pass on the same inextinguishable torch – burning brightly or flickering – to the next man in the race, while freedom and experience ever grow. These men who have gone by, who have had the glimmer of the torch on them for a little time, are those whose memories I want to rescue'.[1]

At the same time Namier was developing a historiography of eighteenth-century British politics based on an analysis of the family alliances and personal interests of individual politicians, stressing the significance not just of the major figures, but also of the countless backbenchers. Namier's belief was that the work as a whole would become a sort of gigantic social history of England: 'From the analysis of the House through the ages will emerge a social and economic history of the nation such as has never yet been attempted … The individual biographies when strung together will supply a pattern of the history of families and classes; of their rise and decline'.[2]

Namier and Wedgwood joined forces – they were already friends and political allies through a shared interest in the Zionist cause. Wedgwood succeeded in getting sufficient Parliamentary interest in his proposal to set up a Committee which reported on the scale of and justification for the task, but became bogged down in differences between the professional historians and the enthusiastic amateurs on the nature of the project. In the end Wedgwood began work on the project himself, with a band of fellow amateurs, and published two volumes before the war. The project went into abeyance with the war and with Wedgwood's death in 1940; but it was revived in 1951, finally achieving the public funding for which Wedgwood had argued so strongly. Since 1995 the History has been principally funded by the two Houses of Parliament. It is governed by a body of Trustees who are mainly drawn from Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords, and has an editorial board of academic historians who are responsible for the scholarly quality of the enterprise. It is based close to the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London, on whose collections it heavily relies.

Some have argued that the History's prosopographical approach fails to capture completely the life and work of the institution of Parliament. Certainly, the History has not been a conventional account of the body; yet Parliament is far from an ordinary institution. Unlike a government department, a university or a company, there is no clear single purpose which Parliament is intended to achieve; its functions might

A Liberal Democrat History Group Fringe Meeting

LIBERAL HEROINES

Some of the Liberal Democrat History Group's earliest conference fringe meetings explored the theme of 'Old Heroes for a New Party'. Leading party figures nominated their favourite hero (Liberal or non-Liberal) and discussed what they found inspirational about the heroes' actions and thoughts.

Now we repeat the idea, with a difference. **Sandra Gidley MP, Baroness Emma Nicholson MEP** and **Baroness Liz Barker** nominate the women from history who have inspired them most, and explain why.

8.00 p.m., Friday 14 March
Cavendish Room, Grand Hotel, Torquay

Five hundred years of representative politics / concluded

be summarised as to provide a forum in which individuals advance the arguments and defend the interests of those who put them there, and try to persuade others to share their own moral or intellectual convictions. Its history includes many different histories: of communities, economic and social interests, ideologies and the body itself. The History of Parliament's biographies form the best way of linking all of these various histories to one another, of showing how national, local, political and personal histories are so closely intertwined.

Ending with 1832, the History does not, at present, deal with the days of the Liberal Party, although its work on the early nineteenth century is already unearthing much about the prehistory of the party and of many of its Members: the 1820–32 section is dealing with the early days of reformed Irish politics, for example, with its impact on the Whigs. The History certainly does plan to move on to the period beyond 1832 when resources permit, although this is unlikely to be in the short term. Further information about the History of Parliament is available from our website at www.histparl.ac.uk/hop or the Director, Paul Seaward, at The History of Parliament, 15 Woburn Square, London WC1H 0NS, Tel: 020 7862 8800; Fax: 020 7862 1442; email: pseaward@histparl.ac.uk.

The History's publications are available to readers of the *Journal of Liberal History* at specially discounted rates: please contact Paul Seaward for details at the above address.

1 J.C. Wedgwood *History of Parliament: Biographies of the Members of the Commons House 1439–1509,* London 1936, p. lii.
2 Julia Namier, *Lewis Namier: a Biography,* London 1971, p. 290, quoted in Linda Colley, *Namier,* London 1989, p. 83.

Liberal Democrat History Group on the web
www.liberalhistory.org.uk

The History Group's website is steadily being developed as a resource for subscribers to the *Journal of Liberal History* and to students of Liberal history everywhere. Complete listings of back numbers and past meetings are already available, and in the next few months the first twenty issues of the *Journal* will become available for free download (as pdf files).

The site's 'resources' section currently contains listings of party leaders, chief whips, cabinet ministers, and so on. We aim to expand this section extensively in the coming months and years.

The site also gives you access to a new email mailing list, which we will use to send out details of forthcoming meetings and new publications to anyone who wishes to sign up (whether or not they are a member of the Group). This will be your fastest way of finding out about meeting dates and details.

If you would like to join the list, log on to the site and click on 'want to join our mailing list?' in the navigation bar.