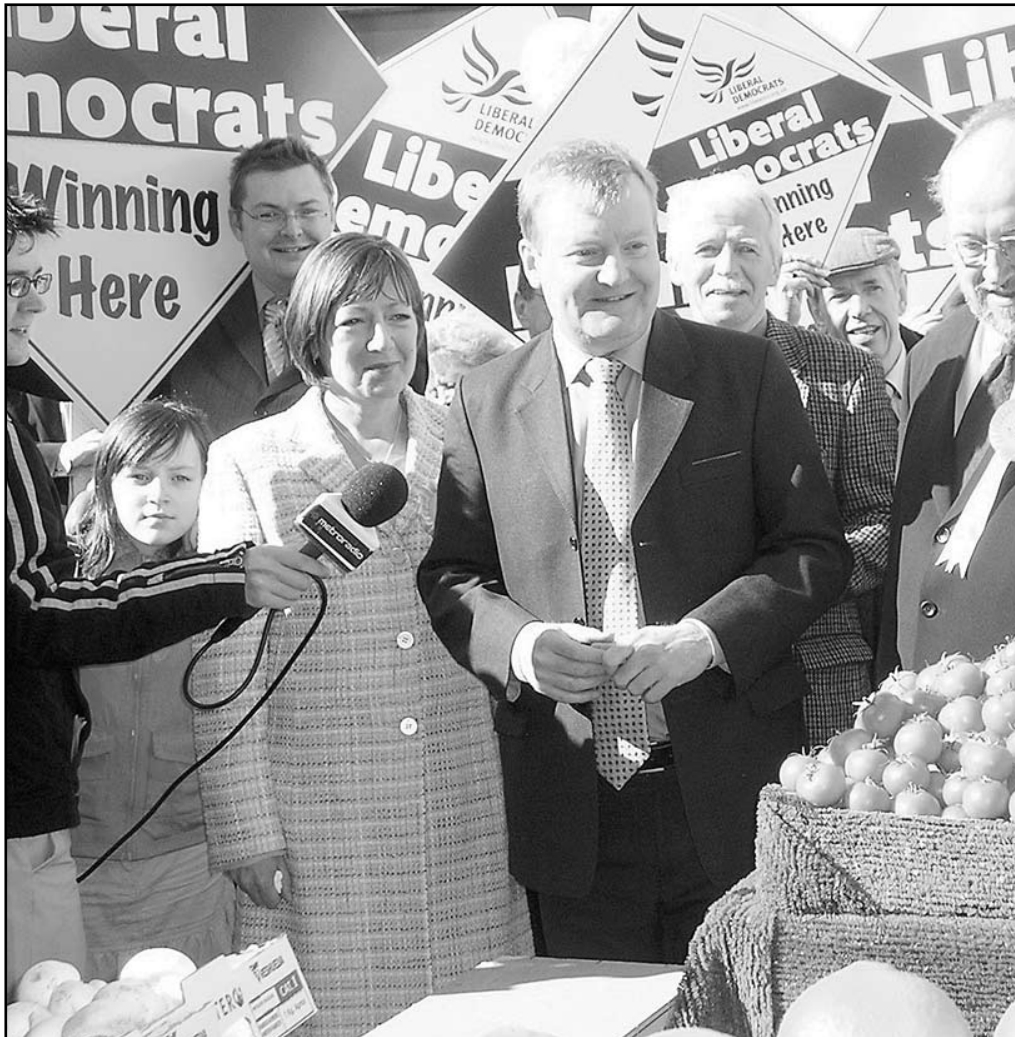


Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



2005: disappointment or bridgehead?

John Curtice

The Liberal Democrats in the 2005 election

David Dutton

Holding the balance The Liberal Party and hung parliaments

Stephen Tolleyfield

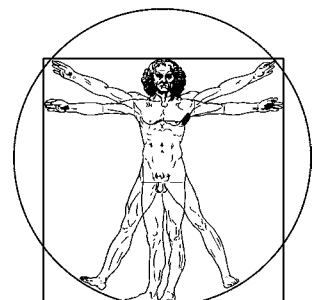
Battling Bath Liberal Alf Wills, nineteenth-century activist

Michael Wickham

Berwick-upon-Tweed A venal borough?

Jaime Reynolds

'The fighting parson' Biography of Reverend Roderick Kedward



ON RECORD!

What some Liberal Democrats really thought

by **Adrian Slade**

The *Journal of Liberal History* is now the guardian of what is already becoming a uniquely interesting party archive – a set of audio cassette tapes of in-depth interviews I conducted with many of the best-known Liberal Democrats. They include the very last media interview given by Roy Jenkins.

In the summer of 2002, when *Liberal Democrat News* and the *Journal* told me they would be interested in an interview with former Liberal leadership contender John Pardoe, I never thought that this would become merely the first in a series of full talks with other senior Liberal Democrats whose

historical perspective on the party was interesting.

Within a year I had also interviewed Shirley Williams, Eric Lubbock, Roy Jenkins, David Steel, Ludovic Kennedy, Mike Storey and Sir Trevor Jones and Bill Rodgers, not so much for their views on the current political scene as for their earlier political recollections and their reasons for being Liberals/Liberal Democrats.

As far as I knew, the party had no written or spoken record of how any of them viewed their political past, their earlier party experiences or the more dramatic events that shaped their political lives, whether as key ministers, party leaders,

council leaders, candidates, prime negotiators in the Lib/Lab Pact, the formation of the SDP and the Alliance or participants in the ultimate merger of the Liberals and Social Democrats. I was also interested to know what they felt about Liberal Democrat success to date and the party's future prospects.

As the series continued I gained further new perspectives – for example Scottish and Welsh views from Jim Wallace and Mike German; a characteristically blunt assessment from everyone's favourite guru, Tony Greaves; some shrewd observations on party campaigning, past and present, from Tim Razzall and Chris Rennard; and Tom McNally's trenchant views on working with Jim Callaghan, the SDP, David Owen, Liberals and the Liberal Democrats.

My accounts of these, and shorter interviews with Charles Kennedy and other equally interesting members of the party, have all appeared in the *Journal*, *Liberal Democrat News* or both but only I and the *Journal* have a set

of recordings of the full and unexpurgated originals.

In chronological order the full list of recorded interviews and interviewees is as follows: John Pardoe, John Lee, Shirley Williams, Eric Avebury (Lubbock), Paul Marsden, Roy Jenkins, Mike Storey and Sir Trevor Jones, Ludovic Kennedy, Bill Rodgers, David Steel, Barry Norman, Jim Wallace, Charles Kennedy, Mike German, Tim Razzall, Chris Rennard, Simon Hughes, Tony Greaves, Tom McNally and Charles Kennedy (again).

For a unique insight into the thoughts and motivations of all those listed above, enthusiasts for Liberal/Liberal Democrat history may now borrow these tapes from the *Journal*, to copy and listen to at home (*subject to certain conditions*) for a token fee of £5 per tape. If you are interested, ask for full details from the Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group, Tony Little, on tonylittle@cix.co.uk, or 62 Pennine Way, Harlington, Hayes UB3 5LP.

Email mailing list

If you would like to receive up-to-date information on the Liberal Democrat History Group's activities, including advance notice of meetings, and new History Group publications, you can sign up to our email mailing list: visit the History Group's website (www.liberalhistory.org.uk) and fill in the details on the 'Contact' page.

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The Liberal Democrat History Group is pleased to announce the availability of a new subscription service: online subscriptions.

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Online subscriptions cost £35.00 per year. Overseas (non-UK) online subscriptions are available for £40.00 per year, or £100 for three years.

Older copies of the *Journal* will continue to be available to all visitors to the site. Issues 1–24 are currently available as pdf files.

'In this day ...' volunteers needed

As part of the continued development of the Liberal Democrat History Group website (www.liberalhistory.org.uk), we are aiming to introduce an 'in this day' element, showing an event of historical Liberal importance for whatever day of the year the website is visited.

Examples might include:

- 3 March (Social & Liberal Democrats formed, 1988)
- 14 March (Orpington by-election, 1962)
- 18 May (death of Gladstone, 1898)
- 20 May (birth of John Stuart Mill, 1806)
- 6 June (meeting at Willis' Rooms, generally held to mark the foundation of the modern Liberal Party, 1859)
- 23 September (Eastbourne defence debate, 1986)
- 4 December (Campbell-Bannerman receives Royal Summons to form a government, 1905)

Volunteers willing to help us find a significant event (or more than one) for every day of the year are needed to bring this element of the website into existence. Please contact the Editor, Duncan Brack (journall@liberalhistory.org.uk) with offers of help.

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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 website at: www.liberalhistory.org.uk.

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DISAPPOINTMENT THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT

John Curtice argues that much of the apparent disappointment with their party's performance at the 2005 general election amongst Liberal Democrats is misplaced. Over the 2001 and 2005 elections the party has, for the first time ever, advanced during a period of Labour government, while in 2005 it concentrated its advance in previously relatively barren Labour territory. If these gains are held they will significantly increase the prospect of a hung parliament at future elections.



Charles Kennedy with new Liberal Democrat MPs after the 2005 election.

The Liberal Democrats' performance in the 2005 general election has been greeted with considerable disappointment. Despite facing an unpopular government and an unconvincing opposition, at 22.7 per cent its share of the vote in Great Britain was still less than the 23.1 per cent secured by the Liberal/SDP Alliance in 1987, let alone the 26.0 per cent it won in 1983. Although its tally of sixty-two seats represents the largest number of Liberal MPs to be elected since 1923, in suffering a net loss of two seats to the Con-

servatives the party did little to convince anyone that it might one day achieve the objective some had set for it of replacing the Tories as the principal opposition to Labour. Meanwhile, by the time of the next election Iraq will have been forgotten and the Conservative Party rejuvenated. Once again it seems that a golden opportunity to break the mould of British politics has slipped through the party's hands.

This, however, is a serious misreading of the Liberal Democrat result. Until now the party's performances in Westminster elections have had a decidedly

OR BRIDGEHEAD? S IN THE 2005 ELECTION

one-sided character. While the party has seemed able to profit from discontent with the Conservatives, it has never demonstrated an ability to feed on discontent with Labour. Whenever Labour was in power Liberal/Liberal Democrat support fell. And wherever Labour was the dominant electoral force the party struggled to win votes. The party's achievement in 2005 was to show that this one-sided character to its appeal is no more.

The 3.9 point increase in the party's share of the vote was certainly notable rather than dramatic. Even so, the past eight years of Labour government have been the first ever period of Labour rule in which the party has advanced rather than fallen back. Over the course of the previous four spells of Labour government the party's share of the vote fell by 11.9 points, 3.8 points, 6.6 points and 5.7 points respectively. Since Mr Blair came to power in 1997 it has advanced by 5.5 points. Indeed its 2005 performance was the first time ever that the party has won over 20 per cent of the vote after a period of Labour rule.

Not only did the party gain votes in an era of Labour government, it also won votes in Labour territory. As Table 1 shows, the biggest advances in Liberal Democrat support occurred in seats Labour was defending. The party did particularly well where

it had already snatched second place to Labour from the Conservatives – and not only simply because it managed to squeeze the Conservative vote somewhat in such seats.

Nowhere was the party's newfound ability to feed on discontent with an incumbent Labour government better demonstrated than in two particular kinds of constituency. The first comprises those constituencies with a substantial Muslim population. Many voters in these seats were unhappy with the government's decision to join in the US-led invasion of Iraq, an invasion the Liberal Democrats opposed. As Table 2 shows, on average the Liberal Democrats advanced by five points more in heavily Muslim seats than the party did in those with no more than a small Muslim population – and did so predominantly at Labour's expense. While some of the anti-war vote was garnered by the anti-war coalition Respect, there seems little doubt that the Liberal Democrats made significant advances amongst former-Labour-voting Muslim voters.

Meanwhile the party also did particularly well in 'university seats', that is constituencies with a relatively large proportion of students. The party typically did three points better in such seats than it did elsewhere, again an exceptional performance secured at Labour's expense. Indeed, such

constituencies accounted for no less than half of the record dozen seats the party captured from Labour. The party's opposition to the introduction of top-up tuition fees seems to have boosted its vote here, though it is also possible that Iraq played particularly strongly amongst the donnish communities that populate many of these constituencies too.

These advances in Labour-held territory have two important implications for the party's future prospects. The first is that it is now significantly less vulnerable to any future swing from Labour to Conservative. Because hitherto the party's best prospects have been so heavily concentrated in Conservative territory, the party stood to suffer significant net losses if there was a swing from Labour to the Conservatives, even if its own vote held steady. Now this is far less the case. After the 2001 election there were just nine constituencies where the party lay within 15 percentage points of the local Labour incumbent; now there are nineteen. As a result, even if the Conservatives were to achieve the uniform 7.5 per cent swing required for them to win an overall majority at the next election on the current boundaries (though these will in fact change before 2009), the Liberal Democrats should still have as many as fifty-five seats so long as their own vote holds up.

Not only did the party gain votes in an era of Labour government, it also won votes in Labour territory.

DISAPPOINTMENT OR BRIDGEHEAD?

In short, the Liberal Democrats not only now have a record number of MPs but the bridgehead they have established at Westminster is, in one important respect at least, less vulnerable to attack. This can but only increase the prospect that future elections will fail to deliver an overall majority, thereby potentially giving the party substantial leverage. After the 2001 election there was an eight-point range of Conservative leads in votes (from one of 3.7 points to one of 11.5 points) that was likely to deliver a hung parliament. Now that range has increased to nearly eleven points (from one point to 11.8 points). Although the forthcoming review of parliamentary boundaries in England and Wales is likely to eliminate some of the bias against the Conservatives implied by these figures (the Conservatives have to be ahead of Labour simply to deny Labour a majority) it is unlikely to reduce significantly the range

of leads that would probably produce a hung parliament.

British elections now have a new character. No longer is it the case that they are only likely to produce one of two outcomes: a Labour majority or a Conservative one. A parliament in which nobody has a majority is a perfectly feasible outcome too. It is certainly a much more likely outcome than the Liberal Democrats replacing either Labour or the Conservatives as one of the two largest parties at Westminster. It would seem curious if between now and the next election the Liberal Democrats were not considering how they might best maximise their leverage should such a circumstance arise.

There were, however, limitations to the Liberal Democrat advance into Labour territory. While the party may have been successful at winning over the Muslim and university Labour vote, it was not evidently particularly successful at winning over Labour's traditional white

working-class vote. On average the increase in the Liberal Democrat vote in the most working-class constituencies was, at 4.3 points, little different from the increase in the most middle-class ones (4.1 points). Equally, survey data published by MORI found that, at five points, the increase in the Liberal Democrat share of the vote in the market researchers' bottom DE social grade was little different from the four-point increase amongst the top AB group. As a result the party continues to perform better amongst middle-class voters than working-class ones. It still remains some way off, too, from capturing a parliamentary seat in either of the party's two big-city, northern, local-government jewels, Liverpool and Newcastle.

But did such progress as the party did make into Labour territory come at a price? Did the party's net losses to the Conservatives indicate that the party's stance that some at least characterised as being to the 'left' of Labour cost it dearly in seats where it was locked in battle with the Conservatives? Did the party lose ground in the south of England in particular because of concern amongst middle-class voters there that they would lose out from its proposal to introduce a local income tax? And do considerations such as these explain why the party lost seats to the Conservatives?

It takes no more than a glance back at Table 1 to cast considerable doubt on these propositions. Where the Liberal Democrats were locked in battle with the Conservatives, they did not perform badly because they particularly lost ground to them. What distinguished these constituencies was not the strength of the Conservative performance but rather that of the Labour one. Where Labour started off in third place to the Conservatives, its vote typically only fell by one or two points – far less than the near six-point loss of support the party was suffering across the country as a whole.

Table 1: Change in party vote share by tactical situation

1 st /2 nd 2001	Change in per cent share of vote since 2001		
	Con	Lab	Lib Dem
Con/Lab	+1.2	-6.1	+3.0
Con/LD	+1.4	-2.8	+0.5
LD/Con	+0.6	-1.1	-0.6
Lab/Con	-0.1	-7.0	+4.7
Lab/LD	-1.3	-7.1	+7.8

Table 2: Where the Liberal Democrats particularly prospered

	Change in per cent share of vote since 2001		
	Con	Lab	Lib Dem
Student seat	-0.7	-8.5	+6.7
Other seats	+0.4	-5.4	+3.5
Heavily Muslim	-1.9	-10.6	+8.8
Somewhat Muslim	-0.1	-8.1	+6.1
Other seats	+0.4	-5.2	+3.4

Student seat: more than 10 per cent of adults are students, 2001 Census.

Heavily Muslim: more than 10 per cent adults are Muslim, 2001 Census.

Somewhat Muslim: 5–10 per cent of adults are Muslim.

Glasgow North East (no Conservative or Lib Dem candidate) and Wyre Forest (no Lib Dem candidate) are excluded from this table.

The explanation appears to be relatively straightforward. In many places where Labour had slipped into third place its vote had already been heavily squeezed locally, leaving few votes that could still be captured. Indeed, in the third-place seats where there was still a Labour vote of 20 per cent or more in 2001, Labour's vote did in fact still fall substantially (on average by 4.3 points) while the Liberal Democrat vote increased (up 2.1 points). Elsewhere Labour's vote fell by only just over one point and in these circumstances the Liberal Democrat vote fell away a little too.

There is, however, one complication to this story. There was one part of the country where the Conservatives did stage something of a revival – in the south-eastern corner of England outside inner London. Here the Conservative vote actually rose on average by two points, whereas elsewhere it was mostly actually falling back slightly. But while some of this above-average performance seems to have come at the expense of the Liberal Democrats, much of it seems to have come at Labour's expense. It cannot therefore simply be accounted for by the Liberal Democrats appearing too left-wing for voters in that part of England.

Meanwhile the above-average Conservative performance was just as evident in the more working-class seats in the region as it was in the middle-class ones; so is not easy to blame it on the potential unpopularity of the Council Tax amongst middle-class voters in this part of England. It may have simply been a reaction to the relatively sluggish performance of the economy and of house prices in that part of the country since 2001.

In any event, where this pattern was coupled in a Liberal Democrat/Conservative fight with a lack of Labour vote to squeeze, the consequence was, on average, a small swing from the Liberal Democrats to the Conservatives, and the loss of Newbury and Guildford in particular.



Two important implications follow from this analysis. The Liberal Democrats were able to win over discontented Labour voters in 2005 because in the last parliament they adopted positions on issues such as Iraq and tuition fees where the government's stance had generated considerable discontent amongst some former Labour supporters. Moreover, in achieving this for the first time during the course of a Labour government, the party did not evidently lose votes to the Conservatives as a result. The electoral effectiveness of an opposition party's policy position depends not on whether it is 'right', 'left' or 'centre', but rather on whether it speaks more effectively than other opposition parties to whatever unhappiness voters have with the incumbent government. It was the party's ability to do this that appears to have underpinned its advance in 2005.

Of course working out how to repeat this feat at the next election by identifying what discontents there might be with the Labour government in 2009 or 2010 is very difficult for anybody to predict. But two of the patterns we have uncovered suggest two possible limitations to the party's ability to profit from such discontent. The first is that if, indeed, the Conservatives' relative success in much of

Charles Kennedy and election poster.

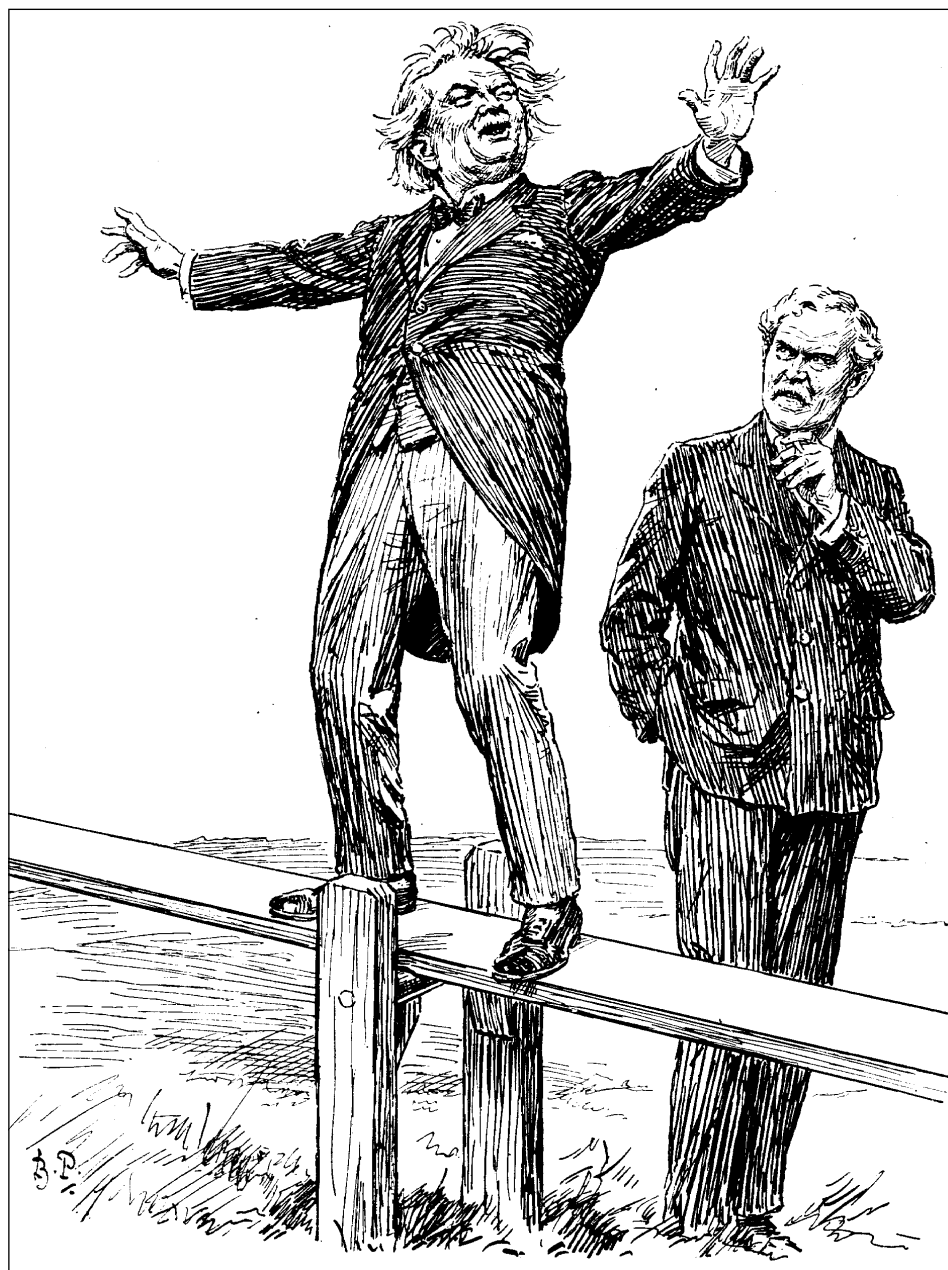
the south-eastern corner of England reflected disquiet about the economy, does this mean that the Liberal Democrats lack credibility as a party capable of handling the economy? And if the party still finds it relatively difficult to win over working-class voters does it need to reconsider the image that the party conveys to this group?

The second implication of our analysis is that, while the party may have made little progress in replacing the Conservatives as the principal opposition to Labour, they have made significant progress in denying the Conservatives the title of the only opposition to Labour. The Liberal Democrats have demonstrated a new-found ability to win Labour votes and Labour seats, and as a result the parliamentary bridgehead established by the party now looks less vulnerable to any Conservative revival. Meanwhile the Conservatives still face a Herculean task in winning an overall majority at the next election, a task that the forthcoming constituency boundary review will make only a little easier. A hung parliament clearly remains a possible prospect after the next election and is certainly one for which the party needs to be prepared.

John Curtice is Professor of Politics at Strathclyde University.

HOLDING THE THE LIBERAL PARTY AN

In Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system a third party's best hope of securing a toe-hold on power lies in holding the balance in a hung parliament. Indeed, the recent electoral strategy of the Liberal Party and Liberal Democrats has usually seen this as a necessary stage on the path to a Liberal government. The experience of the twentieth century suggests, however, that 'holding the balance' is at best a mixed blessing. By **David Dutton.**



'In the Movement'; Lloyd George and Macdonald (*Punch*, 17 October 1928)

THE BALANCE AND HUNG PARLIAMENTS

It is the lot of the third party in Britain's first-past-the-post electoral system to dream of the day when the vagaries of that system leave it holding the balance of power in the House of Commons. But it is not an outcome for which it is easy to campaign. As Roy Jenkins has argued, it 'depends largely upon accidents outside our control – the relationship which the other two parties bear to each other – and is therefore not an effective call to action'.¹ Third parties thus wait for the chance occurrence of electoral arithmetic.

Under proportional representation, of course, things would be very different. Since the arrival of the Labour Party as a political force of significance in the general election of 1906, there have been only two occasions – in 1931 and 1935 – when the winning side secured more than fifty per cent of the popular vote. Even these were in the untypical context of the National Government, when the victorious Conservatives were able to broaden their electoral appeal by association with sections of the Labour and Liberal parties. Under proportional representation, then, coalition or some other form of governmental power-sharing would be the

norm, to the enormous advantage in a three-party system of the third party.

Since the end of the First World War, when the Liberal Party was relegated to the status of the third party in the British polity, there have been just three instances when the party found itself holding the balance of power in the House of Commons.² This position was created by the general elections of 1923 and 1929 and when, as a result of by-election defeats, the Callaghan government lost its overall parliamentary majority in 1976. On each occasion the Liberal Party found itself sustaining a Labour government in office; on each occasion the party, or sections of it, believed that it was well placed to determine the course of events and use this chance happening to its own advantage. Yet it cannot be said that the Liberals derived any great benefit from these three periods of 'power' or 'proximity to power'. Each was in its own way unique, but there are sufficient similarities and parallels to justify a comparative study of the circumstances in which it arose, the resulting relationship between the Liberals and the Labour administration of the day, and the short and medium-term consequences for the Liberals of what they had done.

It cannot be said that the Liberals derived any great benefit from these three periods of 'power' or 'proximity to power'.

The result of the general election of 1923 was one of the most ambiguous of the entire twentieth century and the eventual formation of a Labour government, the first in Britain's history, was by no means the only possible outcome. The Conservatives, with 258 seats, remained the largest single party; Labour followed with 191 seats; while the recently reunited Liberals secured 159. Possible outcomes included a new Conservative government under a changed Prime Minister; a Liberal government with either Conservative or Labour support; and a non-party administration headed perhaps by a respected elder statesman with broad appeal. But the key factor was that the election had been called by the outgoing Conservative premier, Stanley Baldwin, specifically on the issue of tariffs. The result therefore represented a clear victory for free trade, even if that victory was shared between the two free-trade parties, Labour and the Liberals. There was, then, a certain logic, but by no means an inevitability, in Labour as the larger of the two free-trade parties forming the next government.

What did, however, exist was a predisposition within sections of the Liberal Party towards this possibility, or at least towards a new period of Liberal-Labour co-operation. For many this

HOLDING THE BALANCE

reflected a desire to restore the Progressive Alliance of the pre-war era which, despite considerable tension in the years 1911–14, had so successfully excluded the Conservatives (Unionists) from power for the best part of a decade, but which had disintegrated during the course of the First World War.

Despite the symbolic importance of Labour's adoption of a socialist constitution in 1918, many advanced Liberals had continued to argue that there was no real ideological barrier to renewed partnership between the two parties. Writing in 1920, Charles Masterman, one of the key architects of the New Liberalism of pre-1914, argued that Labour's programme was 'little, if at all, distinguishable from the advanced Liberal programme'. In many contemporary by-elections, he claimed, the two parties were campaigning for identical reforms.³ The Labour Party was itself 'a great storehouse of Liberalism, in which the majority of the rank and file, and many of its most honoured leaders, are by creed and conviction Liberal'.⁴

For Liberals who thought in these terms, the situation created by the 1923 general election opened up exciting possibilities. According to C. P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, it was '1906 over again as far as voting was concerned'. The electorate's verdict offered real prospects of social progress. 'Barring the wretched three-cornered business', he continued, 'we should have had a clean sweep. But it's good enough.'⁵ During the interval between the election and the reassembly of parliament, the weekly *Nation*, with its long and honourable tradition of commitment to radical causes, threw its weight behind Liberal–Labour co-operation. It was towards Labour, it insisted, that Liberals should lean. 'No real Liberal ... can find "the enemy" in this quarter ... Liberalism will fail to do its work unless it succeeds eventually in re-establishing co-operation and fundamental agreement

with the great mass of Labour opinion.'⁶ While some Liberals remained implacably opposed to dealing with 'socialists' – however that concept was understood – these appeared to be in a distinct minority.

The crucial decisions, however, inevitably rested with the party hierarchy. Immediately after the declaration of the poll, Liberal leaders met to decide upon their strategy. Asquith, supported by Sir John Simon, argued that the Conservative government should first be ejected by a Liberal–Labour combination and then, assuming that Labour managed to form a government, that too should be voted out by the joint action of Liberals and Conservatives. This, Asquith somewhat fancifully suggested, would leave the way open for a Liberal government. Lloyd George was not happy with this proposal, recognising that it would leave any resulting Liberal government entirely dependent on Conservative support. To avoid a formal decision being taken, he successfully proposed that the meeting should be adjourned to allow time for further reflection. When it resumed, Asquith had significantly modified his stance and now called for 'no truck with the Tories ... and non-committal towards Labour after it had formed a government'.⁷ He adhered to this policy at a subsequent party meeting and Lloyd George, who favoured a policy of constructive co-operation with Labour, held his tongue, fearful of opening up fresh wounds in the party. Lloyd George placed his faith in Labour's good sense. 'If Ramsay [MacDonald] were tactful and conciliatory I feel certain that the Party as a whole would support him in an advanced Radical programme.'⁸

The new Parliament met on 8 January 1924 with Baldwin still in office and, in effect, challenging the opposition parties to remove him. After a heated debate on the Address, a vote was taken on a Labour amendment on 21 January which brought the Conservative government down and effectively

installed Labour in its place. The majority of the Liberal Party supported Labour in the critical vote, but it was striking that ten MPs voted in the Conservative lobby, all of them relatively obscure survivors of the post-war coalition. Leading Liberals were, however, altogether too sanguine about their party's prospects. Writing in the *Contemporary Review*, W. M. R. Pringle suggested that, 'be the life of the new Parliament long or short, whoever is in office, the Liberal Party will be in power'.⁹ In like vein Asquith had told the parliamentary party on 18 December that a Labour government could hardly be tried under safer conditions. Granted the new administration's minority status, this was true enough, but his suggestion that 'it is we, if we understand our business, who really control the situation' was a gross exaggeration. For one thing, the parliamentary arithmetic was against the Liberals. As there were more Conservative MPs than Labour, it was not enough for the party to abstain in parliamentary divisions if Labour was going to survive. Liberals could not simply acquiesce in Labour government. They had positively to support it. Lloyd George understood the reality of the situation and realised that his preferred option of positive co-operation could only work on the basis of detailed consultation between the two parties. 'It was not merely occasional support that the Labour Government would require in divisions; the support must be continuous.'¹⁰ But even he now seemed to be overcome by the possibilities of a renewed period of progressive government. 'As to policy', he told C. P. Scott on 5 January, 'he saw no difficulty. There was an ample field common to the two parties. The danger, to his mind, was not that Labour would go too fast and far, but that it would not go fast and far enough and perish of inanition. It must be prepared to take risks and Liberalism should back it in a courageous policy.'¹¹

Despite the symbolic importance of Labour's adoption of a socialist constitution in 1918, many advanced Liberals had continued to argue that there was no real ideological barrier to renewed partnership between the two parties.

The problem was that the consultation, which Lloyd George knew to be essential, had not taken place. The Liberal Party voted Labour into government without any clear notion of what it would do thereafter and without even trying to extract commitments, such as electoral reform, of benefit to itself. Asquith might have been well advised to offer Labour a fixed period in office in return for an agreed programme of reforms. But no such bargain was struck. Not surprisingly, the months which followed witnessed mounting Liberal disillusionment. The diary of Ernest Simon, newly elected as Liberal member for the Withington division of Manchester, well charts the party's changing mood. To begin with he congratulated Labour for avoiding 'impracticable and Socialistic legislation'. Judged by its initial programme Labour merited Liberal support and it was in the latter's interests to keep the government in office. The Liberal Party:

... must be constantly on the watch against extravagance or against any action contrary to Liberal principles. Subject to this the Liberal Party should give active support to the Labour Government. They should avoid anything that could be construed into a policy of pin pricks, which would be playing the Conservative game, and should be ready to help the Government by supporting the closure to avoid unreasonable obstruction ... Liberal Members should treat the Labour Government with a considerable proportion of the regard and self-restraint which they would show to a Liberal Government. Any other policy would make the three-party system impossible, would prevent Parliament carrying out any useful and effective social legislation and would create a certain amount of sympathy amongst the electors for the Labour Party and corresponding injury to the Liberal.¹²

By the end of the Labour government, however, Simon was forced to judge the 'session as a whole ... a tragedy'.¹³ The opportunity for a constructive period of progressive government had been lost.

What had gone wrong? Part of the problem lay in the disorganisation and want of leadership in the parliamentary Liberal Party. 'So far as I can judge', recorded Simon, 'Asquith, Lloyd George and [John] Simon consult together very little, nor do the Whips take any strong line.' In such a situation any chance of an agreement on proportional representation had been lost:

There is a strong feeling among Liberals that we ought to agree at once on some policy of Electoral Reform, and make a bargain with Labour to push it through. I spoke to the Chief Whip last week. He was taking no interest in the matter as a Committee had been appointed under Pringle. I saw Pringle; he said he thought there was no agreement and did not think the Committee would take any action.¹⁴

At a time when decisive and purposeful leadership was needed, Asquith in particular revealed his worst failings:

Except on a few big points, he took no real trouble to understand the problem, his only action was inaction; a policy of masterly inactivity carried to extreme lengths. Anything further removed from 'leadership' in any true sense of the word it is difficult to conceive. His brain is excellent, probably as good as ever, if he would only apply it. It is the interest that is lacking.¹⁵

Denied a controlling hand at the top, the Liberal Party's scarcely concealed divisions re-emerged. Old Coalitionists welcomed any opportunity to vote with the Conservatives; radical Liberals tended to side with the government. On questions such as Labour's decision to discontinue the Singapore naval base, the

The Liberal Party voted Labour into government without any clear notion of what it would do thereafter and without even trying to extract commitments, such as electoral reform, of benefit to itself.

Poplar debate on municipal rates and the government's Eviction Bill, Liberals voted in both lobbies while others abstained.¹⁶ It was a sorry spectacle.

But of even greater importance in explaining the Liberals' failure in 1924 than their own deficiencies was the attitude of the Labour government itself. Gradually Liberals began to voice their resentment at the way in which their proffered hand of friendship was being rebuffed. Speaking at a party meeting on 15 April Lloyd George gave vent to the now widespread indignation that Liberals felt at being expected to file dutifully into the government lobby with nothing being offered in exchange. A week later, in a widely reported speech at Llanfairfechan, he compared Liberals to oxen whose job it was to 'drag the Labour wain over the rough roads of Parliament for two to three years, goaded along, and at the end of the journey, when there is no further use of them, they are to be slaughtered. That is the Labour idea of co-operation.'¹⁷ By July C. P. Scott recorded that 'the feeling against the Liberals was general in the [Labour] party. Social intercourse had almost ceased. J. H. Thomas was perhaps now the only man who ever asked a Liberal to tea.'¹⁸ A few weeks later the *Manchester Guardian*, while expressing its appreciation for MacDonald's conduct of foreign policy, complained that 'the Prime Minister, who can be so sweet to the foreigner from whom he differs most widely, has nothing but unconcealed dislike and exaggerated suspicion for those who in this country stand nearest to him in politics'.¹⁹

But Labour's behaviour was not just a case of political bad manners. Rather, it represented a clearly thought-out strategy which precluded the sort of co-operation with the Liberals for which Lloyd George and others hoped. On forming a government the Labour leadership, and in particular the new Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald,

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had a number of key objectives. Not the least of these was that the experience of Labour government, however brief, should have the effect of hastening the demise of the Liberal Party as a serious force in British politics. This would be done by displaying Labour's credentials as a responsible, moderate party of reform, fully capable of governing in the national interest. Any help offered by the Liberals would be gratefully, if not graciously, accepted, but the idea of in any way assisting Liberalism was outside Labour's vision. 'The first Labour government', writes Ross McKibbin, 'cannot be understood other than in these terms.'²⁰ In such circumstances Liberal hopes were bound to be thwarted. As Hugh Dalton confided to his diary in the first month of Labour government, 'I hope we shall be able to avoid giving the Liberals either Proportional Representation or Alternative Vote in this Parliament. Then they mayn't live to ask for either in the next.'²¹

The fact that moderate Labour and radical Liberalism overlapped at so many points was not, in the Labour view of things, a reason for the re-establishment of the pre-war Progressive Alliance; it merely confirmed the good sense of those Liberals who had already transferred their allegiance to Labour. 'The only kind of co-operation which is possible', MacDonald told Gilbert Murray, 'is the co-operation of men and women who come over and join us.'²² MacDonald fully understood that there was not room in the political spectrum for two parties of the progressive left and, if only one could survive, he was determined that it should be Labour. If Liberalism could be held down long enough, the built-in bias of the electoral system would eventually work against it. By contrast, the granting of proportional representation would guarantee it a solid base in parliament for the foreseeable future, while depriving Labour of any prospect of an independent Commons majority. The short-term price of this strategy



The dangers of holding the balance: *Punch*, 30 April 1924 and 23 July 1930.

might well be lengthy periods of majority Conservative government (as had existed between 1924 and 1929), but this would be a small price to pay if the longer-term achievement were to be the removal of the Liberal Party from serious contention.

The first Labour government in Britain's history came to an end over the celebrated Campbell Case. The government first proposed to prosecute the editor of the *Worker's Weekly* for publishing two articles which seemed to incite members of the armed forces to disobey orders. But within a few days all charges were dropped. When Parliament reassembled after the summer recess, the Conservative opposition proposed a motion of censure on the government's handling of the case. The Liberals, anxious not to bring the government down and thereby precipitate a general election, the third in two years, which they could ill afford, tabled an amendment for the appointment of a select committee to examine the matter. This proposal offered the government a means of escape from the crisis which its own actions had created. There was no need for it to take the Liberal amendment, as opposed to the Conservative motion of censure, as a matter of confidence, but this is what it proceeded to do. By 364 votes to 198 the government came to an end.

In the subsequent election Liberals faced predictable disaster. The Conservative Party secured a landslide victory with more than 400 seats in the new House of Commons. Labour lost nearly forty seats, but its vote held up well. The real significance of this election was the damage it did to the Liberal Party, reduced now to just forty MPs. It was, thought Sidney Webb, 'the funeral of a great party'.²³ Part of the explanation for this disaster lay in the fact that, for largely financial reasons, the party had abandoned 136 seats fought in 1923 and fielded only 340 candidates. It could not, therefore, credibly present itself as a potential aspirant for power. But

MacDonald fully understood that there was not room in the political spectrum for two parties of the progressive left and, if only one could survive, he was determined that it should be Labour.

it also seems reasonable to assume that Liberalism had been damaged by its conduct during the previous Parliament. For those who had never wanted a Labour government in the first place, Liberals had committed a gross act of betrayal. The Conservatives were now seen as the only reliable bulwark against the supposed threat of socialism. On the other hand, for those who had been prepared to give Labour a chance, the late government's very moderation appeared, as Labour of course intended, to render Liberalism irrelevant. For more electors than ever before the basic political contest had become one between the Conservative and Labour parties.

Liberal comments on the experience of 'holding the balance' are instructive. Ernest Simon bemoaned a lost opportunity. 'Liberal and Labour together', he insisted, 'should have stayed in for years and carried through radical legislation.'²⁴ In like vein Lloyd George suggested that Labour could have remained in power for another three years and 'formed a working alliance with Liberalism that could have ensured a progressive administration of this country for twenty years'.²⁵ He insisted that the real mistake had been to put Labour in office without insisting upon any understanding or conditions. But 'it never occurred to me that we could be treated as we were treated. I took for granted that the relations between the two parties would be analogous to those between the Irish and Liberal parties in the Home Rule period.'²⁶ Such an imperfect understanding of what had happened did not bode well if chance should once again leave the Liberal Party holding the balance of parliamentary power.

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The situation created by the general election of 1929 was superficially similar to, but in reality significantly different from, that which had existed at the end of 1923. Labour emerged with 288 seats, the Conservatives 260 and

the Liberals 59. Once again, then, the third party held the balance, but on this occasion Labour was in a theoretically stronger position as the largest single party. Liberal support would be less crucial to the government's survival. The statistics showed how much the Liberals were now suffering from an electoral system which suited the interests of two rather than three contestants. On average there was one Liberal MP for every 91,000 votes; a Conservative for every 34,000; and a Labour member for every 28,000. 'You can imagine', wrote John Simon, 'that our Liberals feel rather sore about this.'²⁷

As in 1923, and notwithstanding the experience of the last MacDonald administration, there was a predisposition for Liberals to look sympathetically upon Labour. Ever since the general election of 1924, in which Asquith had lost his Commons seat, and more particularly since 1926 when he had stepped down from the party leadership, Lloyd George had moved the party in a distinctly more radical and anti-Conservative direction than at any time since before the First World War. Frances Stevenson, his secretary and mistress, sensed a change in the Labour Party's attitude towards him and wrote of his 'gradual conquest of Labour'. 'Now he speaks almost as the Leader of the Opposition', she recorded in April 1926, 'with the Labour and Liberal benches around him, the former hanging on his words and loud in their praises.'²⁸ She believed that Lloyd George's aim was to co-ordinate and consolidate all the country's progressive forces against Conservatism and reaction. 'Thus he will eventually get all sane Labour as well as Liberalism behind him.'²⁹

Lloyd George discussed the possibility of a renewed Liberal-Labour partnership in the next Parliament over dinner with C. P. Scott in December 1928. He seemed determined to take a tougher line than Asquith had done five years earlier. MacDonald 'must not imagine he could have Liberal support for the asking'.

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Nonetheless he believed that, in the end, Labour would have to come to terms. Otherwise the Liberal Party, despite its diminished status, was still strong enough to deny Labour any chance of a clear parliamentary majority for a generation to come.³⁰

To a large extent, then, Lloyd George's thinking had not changed. But neither for that matter had Ramsay MacDonald's. Despite giving Scott the fleeting impression that Labour might be interested in a formal coalition in the event of the next general election producing a similar parliamentary situation to that of 1923, his basic strategy of destroying the Liberal Party remained intact. A diary entry for November 1928 summed up the Labour leader's thinking. 'If the three-party system is to remain', he noted, 'it is obvious that the question of coalition in some shape or form has to be faced.' Therefore 'our immediate duty is to place every obstacle we can in the way of the survival of the three-party system'.³¹ Unless the course of events moved MacDonald from this position, it would not be easy for the Liberals to derive any benefit from again holding the parliamentary balance.

For the time being Liberals seemed determined to present a united front and to avoid the damaging splits which had characterised the Parliament of 1924. At the first party meeting after the election John Simon 'smote his breast and declared that except on matters which could only be fitly decided in the sacred court of conscience – or words to that effect – no matter of opinion would induce him to do other than follow the crack of the whip'.³² But those who still dreamt of a recreated Progressive Alliance were worried by Lloyd George's hard-line attitude. 'It seemed to me', recorded Ernest Simon, 'that the general tone of his speech was threatening, rather than looking forward to legislation on the fruitful field which is common to both parties.'³³ This firm attitude was still apparent in

the debate on the King's Speech when Herbert Samuel reminded the House of the Liberal Party's long-standing commitment to electoral reform and asked for a definite assurance from the government that the issue would be addressed. But there was an element of bluff in this Liberal stance. The state of the party organisation and the morale of its workers were such that it could not risk pulling the rug from under the government and precipitating another general election. 'Their marriage of convenience with the Labour Government thus rested on a constantly maintained but utterly unreal threat of imminent divorce.'³⁴

It was not long before the first fissures began to appear in the façade of Liberal unity. On the second reading of the government's Coal Mines Bill in December, forty-four Liberals went into the opposition lobby, two voted with the government and six abstained. But this anti-Labour demonstration was only authorised after it had been ascertained that sufficient Conservatives were absent to ensure that the government was not defeated.³⁵ A year later the intra-party divisions were becoming more apparent. The key factor was the performance of the Labour government itself. In the face of the mounting scourge of unemployment, Labour appeared beset by intellectual bankruptcy. In late October 1930, just before the opening of the new parliamentary session, John Simon wrote to Lloyd George about his current feelings on relations with the Labour government. Simon argued that, after seventeen months in power, the government had proved a total failure in almost all respects. As a result, while Liberals derived no benefit from keeping Labour in power, they exposed themselves to the charge that they were only interested in saving their own skins by avoiding another general election. Simon gave notice that, should the government try to repeal the trade union legislation of the last Baldwin

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administration, he would not be able to support it and would join with the Conservatives in any subsequent vote of confidence. 'We are in danger', he concluded, 'of carrying offers of assistance to the point of subservience and I do not believe that this is the way in which Liberalism is likely to become a more effective force in national and imperial affairs.'³⁶ The extent of the Liberal Party's disarray became evident when the Conservatives put down a critical motion on the King's Speech. The official Liberal line was to abstain, but five Liberals including, incredibly enough, the Chief Whip, voted with the Tories, while four others backed the government. Such three-way voting splits now became increasingly the norm.

John Simon was clearly ready to bring the government down should the opportunity arise. By contrast, Lloyd George continued to insist that it be kept in office. The key to his thinking was the belief that Labour could be persuaded to move on the question of electoral reform. A three-party conference on the subject had been set up in early December 1929, but it had reached no agreement and it collapsed the following summer. In September 1930, however, MacDonald held talks with Lloyd George and Samuel at which the Liberals demanded electoral reform in return for their continued support. The Cabinet agreed only to undertake further investigations into the Alternative Vote. This was not proportional representation but was seen as a step in the right direction or, as the *Manchester Guardian* put it, 'a good starting off point for more comprehensive reforms'.³⁷ MacDonald tried to persuade Lloyd George that the Alternative Vote would result in significant Liberal gains at the expense of the Conservatives.³⁸ Yet Labour's sincerity is open to question. Any change to the voting system would take at least two years to implement; but the government would have its life extended by Liberal support during this period.

Gradually, two rival Liberal factions began to coalesce around Lloyd George and Simon. Within a year this division over how to deal with holding the balance of power would split Liberalism apart, a split which, unlike that of 1916, would never be repaired, but which, arguably, would be of equal importance in the story of the party's decline. On 20 November Lloyd George put forward a plan to his senior colleagues for a formal pact with Labour to last for two years. Simon was fundamentally opposed, arguing that the Labour government was already discredited and that nothing was to be gained by putting Liberal assets into a bankrupt concern. At a subsequent general election no Liberal candidate could effectively oppose a Labour candidate, having so recently sustained his party in power.³⁹ At a second meeting a week later Simon, supported now by Lord Reading, countered Lloyd George's revised plan for a pact for a shorter period. An arrangement for one year would inevitably be extended to two, since after twelve months it would be said that more time was still needed to secure concessions from the government.⁴⁰

Though the formal breach was repeatedly delayed, the two factions were now ready to go their separate ways. While Simon began negotiations with the Conservative opposition, Lloyd George argued that 'the great majority of our party are in accord with yours [Labour] in the general line of advance for the next ten years. The differences are not vital and can easily be adjusted.'⁴¹ Such was the desperation of the government, beset as it was by political and economic crises, that MacDonald may even have taken Lloyd George's approach seriously, notwithstanding his long-term commitment to the destruction of the Liberal Party. The government did agree to the introduction of the Alternative Vote, but the necessary legislation was delayed in the House of Lords and lost when the government fell. Though the evidence is

Above all, the election seemed to confirm that the Conservative-Labour contest was now the only one that really mattered in British politics.

somewhat sketchy, Lloyd George seems, by the summer of 1931, to have been pondering a formal coalition and even speculating upon the possible distribution of offices. 'Ramsay would be Prime Minister,' recorded Frances Stevenson, 'Lloyd George would be Leader [of the House] at the Foreign Office or the Treasury.'⁴²

But it was the Simonite faction which made the decisive move. On 26 June 1931 Simon, accompanied by Ernest Brown and the former Chief Whip, Robert Hutchison, formally resigned the Liberal whip. The occasion of the breach – the government's moderate land tax proposals – scarcely justified Simon's scathing comment that the parliamentary Liberal Party had reached a 'lower depth of humiliation than any into which it had yet been led'.⁴³ But this event merely set the seal on a process which had been long developing. Thus, when the government fell in August, to be replaced, to general surprise, by a National administration still headed by MacDonald, the Liberal Party was effectively already divided into two. On 23 September twenty-nine Liberals joined Simon in a memorial to MacDonald supporting any measures which the new Cabinet might think necessary to deal with the trade imbalance – a declaration which, by its implicit acceptance of tariffs, created a further deep breach in the Liberal ranks. Simon soon accepted the invitation of more than two dozen Liberal MPs to lead the so-called Liberal National group and on 5 October this group formed a separate organisation for the specific purpose of fighting the next election in alliance with the Conservatives and with MacDonald's small band of National Labour followers.⁴⁴

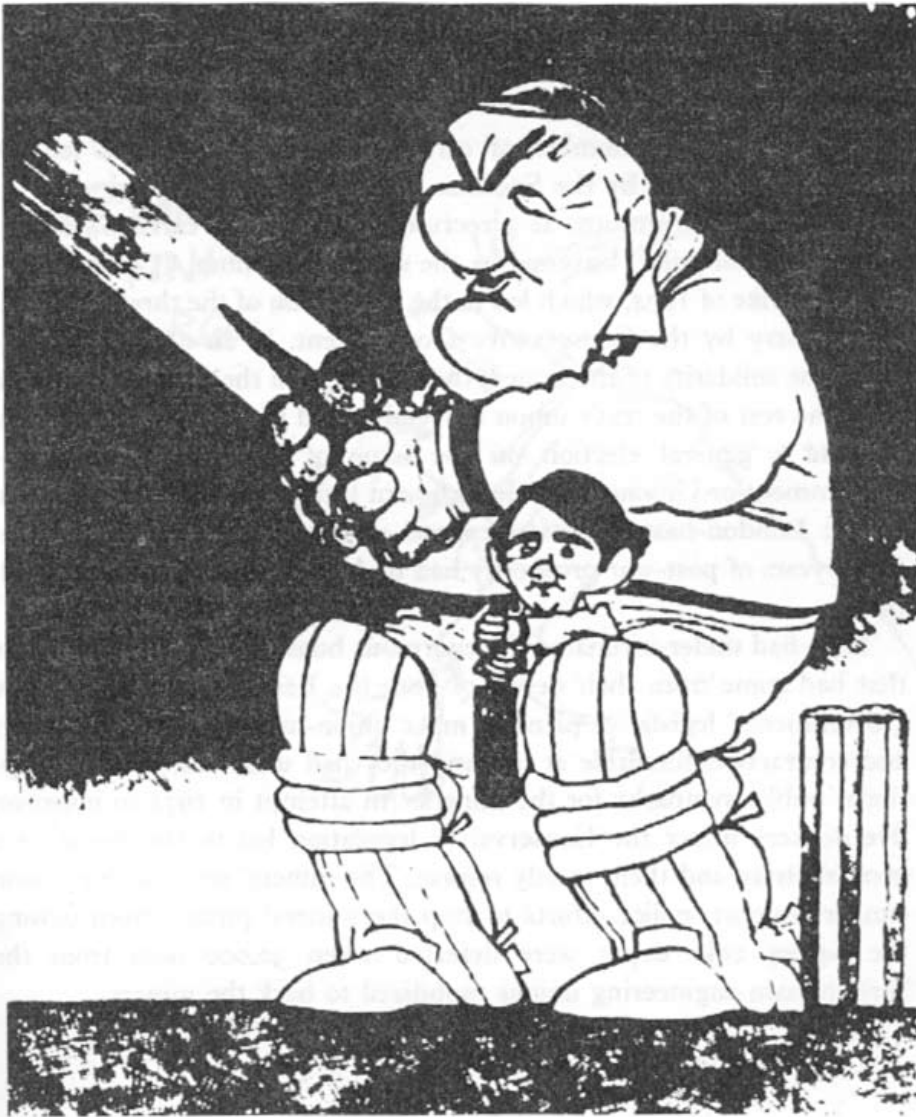
The peculiar circumstances surrounding the general election of October 1931 make it difficult to assess accurately the impact on the Liberal Party of 'holding the balance' over the previous two years. What is beyond dispute is that the by-election history of the Labour government suggests

a steady erosion of Liberal support. The party contested only a minority of the thirty-four contests between 1929 and 1931 and invariably performed disastrously. And there are many clear pointers in the general election itself. The Liberal optimism present in 1929 had almost completely evaporated. Though the number of Liberal MPs went up overall – thirty-three for the mainstream party, now led by Herbert Samuel, thirty-five Simonite Liberal Nationals and a third group of four Lloyd Georgeites who had opposed the holding of an election – the party's vote had dropped dramatically, largely because of a reduction in the number of seats contested. Strikingly, only ten Liberals were victorious in the face of Conservative opposition. Above all, the election seemed to confirm that the Conservative-Labour contest was now the only one that really mattered in British politics.

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Unlike the situations of 1924 and 1929, that of 1977 was not the direct creation of a general election. It is true that the Labour government elected in February 1974 lacked an overall parliamentary majority, but the Liberals alone, with just fourteen MPs, were not on their own strong enough to hold the balance. Prime Minister Harold Wilson went to the country again in October and secured a slender overall majority of three seats. By the end of 1976, however, by-election losses at Workington and Walsall North had reduced Labour once more to minority status. The crisis came in March of the following year when the Conservative opposition under Margaret Thatcher announced its intention of tabling a confidence motion which appeared likely to bring the government down. In this situation, and after some preliminary soundings involving Bill Rodgers, Labour's Transport Secretary, and Peter Jenkins of the *Guardian*, Prime Minister James Callaghan and Liberal leader

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JIM'S PROTECTOR



The Unpaid Piper

David Steel hammered out an agreement which would save the government from defeat.

The Lib-Lab Pact was very much the creation of the two men. There was no discussion with the parliamentary Liberal Party about the precise terms of the pact and no vote on those terms. Still less was there consultation with the wider party in the country. The parliamentary party acquiesced in what Steel had done with varying degrees of enthusiasm and in some cases a complete absence of it, the former leader Jo Grimond being perhaps the most sceptical. Similarly, a meeting of the Labour Cabinet was held on 23 March, the morning before the 'no confidence' motion, and with the pact having already been initialled by the two party leaders the previous night. Callaghan experienced fewer difficulties with the Cabinet than might have been expected because he had been careful to carry Michael Foot, the standard-bearer of the left, along with him. In the event only four ministers voted against the pact and none of these took the matter as far as resignation. Most agreed with the Chancellor, Denis Healey, that the government had no alternative: 'You can't rely on the minorities - the Nats and the nutters will want to bring us down.'⁴⁵

A variety of motives was involved. The one thing that the two parties had in common was a desire to avoid an election at this time with its almost inevitable consequence of a large Conservative majority. The Labour government was deeply unpopular following the financial crisis of the previous year and the humiliation of IMF intervention to bail out a failing economy. The pact offered, as Bernard Donoghue argued in an analysis later

How journalists saw the Pact: 'Jim's protector' (Trog, *Observer*, 19 June 1977); and 'The unpaid piper' (Gibbard, *Guardian*, 13 December 1977).

drawn up for the Prime Minister, a moment of opportunity which might give time for an economic recovery and the electoral advantage which this would bring.⁴⁶ The Liberals were equally wary of an early general election, suffering heavily from the impact of the scandal involving the former party leader, Jeremy Thorpe, and his alleged involvement in a plot to murder the male model, Norman Scott. At two recent by-elections in Walsall North and Stetchford Liberal candidates had finished behind the National Front.

But Steel's motivation was more complex and reflected his fundamental attitude towards the party leadership. A disciple of Jo Grimond, he believed that the Liberal way forward lay in a realignment of the left in British politics. If the opportunity arose, Liberals should seize it and join with others for the more effective promotion of Liberal values. His parliamentary experience, notably his sponsorship of a reform of the law on abortion in 1967, had already convinced him that much could be achieved on cross-party lines. The party's disappointing electoral performance in 1970 had shown, he believed, the futility of the long-haul approach to Liberal revival. It made no sense for the party to 'plod on as before, spending the next ten years building back up to a dozen MPs only to face near annihilation again on a sudden swing of the pendulum'.⁴⁷

Both in his campaign for the party leadership in 1976 and in his first pronouncements as leader, Steel made no secret of the direction in which he intended to go. Interviewed by the *Guardian* within weeks of becoming leader, Steel suggested that Liberals had to 'start by getting a toe-hold on power which *must* mean some form of coalition'.⁴⁸ His enthusiasm for the Lib-Lab Pact must be seen in this context. Having a share in power, however small, was more important than the details of policy set out in the pact. Indeed, there is some evidence that Steel may have been seduced by the

suggestion that he might himself at some point become a Cabinet minister.⁴⁹

Considering the government's precarious parliamentary situation, it cannot be said that the Liberal leader drove a hard bargain. Indeed, there were always critics who argued that he had been outgunned by the Prime Minister's experience and guile. The pact contained four main points. There would be a consultative committee of the two main parties to which major bills would be referred. There would be regular meetings between Healey and his Liberal shadow, John Pardoe. There would be direct elections to the European Parliament, with a free vote on the voting system to be adopted and the government 'taking account' of the Liberal preference for proportional representation. And there would be a renewed effort to enact devolution for Wales and Scotland. In return, the Liberals would ensure that the government would not face defeat on a matter of substance in the House of Commons.

Understandably enough, Steel sought to present the pact in more heroic terms than it probably merited. The Liberal Party was paraded as a force for moderation, standing in the way of Labour's socialism on the one hand and Thatcherite Conservatism on the other. His public statement was unequivocal. 'Either the Government now proceeds on the basis of agreed measures in the national interest for the next two years, in which case we would be willing to consider supporting such a programme, or else we have a general election.'⁵⁰ But neither then, nor at other moments of crisis in the pact's lifetime, did the government take seriously the Liberal leader's declared readiness to face the electorate. The parallels with 1924 and 1929 are only too clear. Steel's later claim that the pact had the effect of blocking further left-wing legislation is difficult to sustain. The high tide of socialism had already passed before Callaghan became Prime Minister and a government headed by himself

Considering the government's precarious parliamentary situation, it cannot be said that the Liberal leader drove a hard bargain.

and Healey was never likely to veer too far in the direction of the Labour left. Tony Benn's fears – 'that the Liberals will be in a dominant position in discussions with the Government; we shall, in effect be unable to do anything without their approval' – were considerably wide of the mark.⁵¹ In practice, Callaghan had not given away very much. Consultation was not the same thing as a veto. Liberals could claim little more than 'the seductive whiff of marginal participation in government ... after sixty-two years of isolation'.⁵²

The Lib-Lab Pact lasted for eighteen months. In practical terms it worked more smoothly than might have been anticipated. Callaghan and Steel developed a mutual respect for one another, but Healey and Pardoe had a 'talent for rubbing each other up the wrong way'. After one bruising encounter Healey's deputy, Joel Barnett, suggested that he and Steel should attend future meetings between the two men, 'if only to hold the coats'.⁵³ The pact's achievements were more obvious from the point of view of the government than of the Liberal Party. 'We took them to the cleaners' was the somewhat exaggerated assessment of one of the Prime Minister's aides on the balance of advantage derived by the two parties.⁵⁴ Labour continued in office without the ever-present threat of parliamentary defeat and, during this period, made some progress in stabilising the economy and, for the time being at least, bringing down the rate of inflation. It could even have led to a further Labour victory at the subsequent general election had Callaghan not delayed going to the country until 1979, by which time the so-called 'Winter of Discontent' had left its indelible impression upon the mind of the electorate.

But the pact's impact upon the Liberals was of questionable value. As even David Steel came to recognise, the major problem was that 'we were lambasted for simply keeping in office a government

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which had outstayed its welcome'.⁵⁵ This was a fact which the Conservatives were only too ready to recall to the public mind at the time of the 1979 general election. The loss of Liberal support in the country was evident as early as the local elections of May 1977, when the party lost three-quarters of its county councillors. In ten parliamentary by-elections between the creation of the pact and the announcement of its termination, Liberals saw their share of the vote drop by an average of 9.5 per cent. Nor was it easy to argue that the government was being forced into a conspicuously 'liberal' direction by the constraints of the pact. Steel tried to squeeze as much credit as he could from the introduction of tax relief for profit-sharing schemes, but it was relatively small beer. The failure in November 1977 to secure proportional representation for European elections left many in the party feeling bitter and let down. Steel was personally prepared to extend the pact into the autumn session of 1978, but realised that renewal would be impossible if he failed to extract a major concession from the government. When Callaghan ruled out a referendum on proportional representation, the pact was effectively dead in the water and formal notice of its termination was given on 25 May 1978.

In all the circumstances the Liberal Party probably emerged less badly from the general election of May 1979 than might have been feared. Steel performed well as leader and had the satisfaction of seeing his party's rating increase in the course of the campaign. Even so, the party lost a million votes compared with October 1974 and saw its share of the vote drop from 18.3 to 13.8 per cent. As in 1924 and 1931, the electorate appeared not to have rewarded the party for its proximity to power. Arguably, however, Steel could take some credit for having demonstrated that parties could work together, a lesson which would be developed during the era of the Alliance in the 1980s and, tentatively, in the

Blair–Ashdown 'project' of the 1990s.

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What conclusions may be drawn? The history of the twentieth century does not suggest that the Liberal Party has drawn any great benefit from the superficially attractive position of holding the parliamentary balance. Most obviously, the discredit of an unpopular government easily transfers to those who sustain it, while the credit for success is usually retained. At the very least, the need to extract a generous package of concessions prior to any commitment being entered into is surely apparent. That package should almost certainly include proportional representation. At a time when the Liberal Democrats, by distancing themselves from the tarnished edifice of New Labour, seem to have put to one side the goal of sharing power with another party, it may be that these historical lessons have been learnt. It is instructive to conclude with the words of Paddy Ashdown, a leader whose strategy seemed in many ways to be based on securing a hung parliament. Considering such a future prospect in the summer of 1991, he recorded:

The most difficult option turns out to be ... Labour refusing to talk to us and putting down a Queen's Speech which has most of the things we want in it (e.g. Scottish Parliament with PR, PR for local government, PR for Europe), but not PR in Westminster ... A hung parliament would not be a dream. It would be a nightmare.⁵⁶

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1. Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, 'Learning the Lessons of History: Hung Parliaments and Coalition Governments',

The Lloyd George Lecture, 8 September 1991, p. 15.

2. I have excluded the experience of the mid 1990s when John Major's government lost its parliamentary majority, as on that occasion several smaller parties could be said to have 'held the balance' and there was no serious question of the Liberal Democrats entering into a pact to ensure the government's survival.
3. C. F. G. Masterman, *The New Liberalism* (London, 1920), p. 191.
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28. A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson* (London, 1971), p. 244.
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32. University of Newcastle, Runciman MSS 221, note by D. Maclean 14 June 1929.

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36. Bodleian Library, J. Simon MSS 249, Simon to Lloyd George 25 October 1930.
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54. A. Michie and S. Hoggart, *The Pact* (London, 1978), p. 183.
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56. P. Ashdown, *The Ashdown Diaries 1988–1997* (London, 2000), p. 120.

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 3) for inclusion here.

Aneurin Williams and Liberal internationalism and pacificism, 1900–22. A study of this radical and pacifist MP (Plymouth 1910; North West Durham/Consett 1914–22) who was actively involved in League of Nations Movement, Armenian nationalism, international co-operation, pro-Boer etc. Any information relating to him and location of any papers/correspondence welcome. *Barry Dackombe*, 32 Ashburnham Road, Ampthill, Beds, MK45 2RH; dackombe@tesco.net.

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.

Hubert Beaumont MP. After pursuing candidatures in his native Northumberland southward, Beaumont finally fought and won Eastbourne in 1906 as a 'Radical' (not a Liberal). How many Liberals in the election fought under this label and did they work as a group afterwards? *Lord Beaumont of Whitley*, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW; beaumontt@parliament.uk.

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. Focusing particularly on Liberal anti-appeasers. *Michael Kelly*, 12 Collinbridge Road, Whitewell, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT36 7SN; mmjkelly@msn.com.

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 Maunders (Sinclair's PPS) particularly welcome. *Ian Hunter*, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DL; ian.hunter@curtishunter.co.uk.

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

Liberal politics in Sussex, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight 1900–14. The study of electoral progress and subsequent disappointment. Research includes comparisons of localised political trends, issues and preferred interests as against national trends. Any information,

specifically on Liberal candidates in the area in the two general elections of 1910, would be most welcome. Family papers especially appreciated. *Ian Ivatt*, 84 High Street, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3JT; ianjivatt@tinyonline.co.uk.

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

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.

SDP in Central Essex. Contact with anyone who had dealings with the area, and in particular as many former SDP members of the area as possible, with a view to asking them to take part in a short questionnaire. Official documents from merger onwards regarding the demise of the local SDP branches and integration with the Liberals would also be appreciated. *Elizabeth Wood*, The Seasons, Park Wood, Doddinghurst, Brentwood, Essex CM15 0SN; Lizawsea@aol.com.

Student radicalism at Warwick University. Particular the files affair in 1970. Interested in talking to anybody who has information about Liberal Students at Warwick in the period 1965–70 and their role in campus politics. *Ian Bradshaw*, History Department, University of Warwick, CV4 7AL; I.Bradshaw@warwick.ac.uk

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.

BATTLING BATH LIBERAL

The story of a Liberal activist in Bath in the late nineteenth century, in his own words. **Stephen Tollyfield** introduces the reminiscences of his great-grandfather, Alf Wills, as part of his ongoing efforts to restore Wills' position as a formidable figure in Bath's political history.



As an old man, living on Bathwick Hill, Bath, my great-grandfather A. W. Wills (1872–1949) started writing an account of his life. He never finished it and it remains in my mother's possession. However, it contains his account of his early political experiences in a knockabout way that, quite literally, pulls no punches.

Alfred started life as a plumber and builder, working for his father, also Alfred Wills. His father, who was with good reason concerned for his business, advised his son against displaying his politics too openly. Young Alfred, however, could not be restrained for long. His stories paint an enjoyable picture of early Liberal politics in Bath –

My father was an advanced Radical with a definite leaning to Republicanism. It is astonishing to look back and remember how many were only waiting for the opportunity to declare a Republic. Many people think

**Alfred Wills
(1872–1949)**

of 'Victoria the Good'. All I can say is the memories of my early youth leave the impression that the democracy thought of her in other terms. Probably Gladstone's extension of the Franchise, which was bitterly opposed in the early 1880s, had a good deal of effect and the fact that Edward, Prince of Wales, was declared to be a friend of Gladstone and a Liberal helped to keep the Peace.

Election times were times of turbulence. My earliest memory is my father going to Bristol on business, during an election, taking a blue and a red scarf with him so as to display either, in case he met a procession. At election meetings it was not uncommon to have free fights and all the chairs, or nearly all, smashed. Gangs were organised to disturb opponents and parade the streets, seeking for a fight. A torchlight parade with hundreds taking part, carrying lighted torches, was always organised by the Liberals at least. But we dared not openly display our politics. If

we did, we lost jobs, patronage, everything and incurred bitter hatred. Right up till the time of the Great War, I was persecuted for my Politics and my Religion.

The Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884 increased the total electorate to over five million. The introduction of secret ballots in 1872 freed working men from voting deferentially. At the time of the Great Reform Act of 1832 and of municipal reform in 1835, Bath increased its constituency from 30 to over 3,000 voters with a quarter drawn from the working class.¹ By October 1900 there were 7,346 voters on the register. Alfred writes of how he acquired his first vote:

When I was 18 (I looked years older) I thought I ought to have the vote, though the law said I must not. Votes were obtained by making claims through Party Agents and the Revising Barrister; who held an annual enquiry to decide between claims and objections. One Party made a

BATTLING BATH LIBERAL

claim; the other side made all possible investigations to raise an objection. If there were no objection it was agreed that the claim was good and was allowed. To prevent frivolous objections the Barrister could allow 'time and expenses'. This tended to keep things in proper proportion.

I went to see Sam Hayward the Conservative Agent and laid my claim. He was delighted to see me and asked no questions. All he said was, 'But your father was always a Liberal.'

I countered with, 'But it doesn't follow that a son shares his father's political views does it? He does not know of my visit here and I want you to keep it quiet.'

This was sufficient. Father did not know, but the Liberal Agent did. My father had proudly commenced to trade as 'A Wills & Son'. I took advantage of this; it being presumed that I was a partner, of age, and therefore a joint tenant of the business premises. I got my vote and used it two or three times before I was legally qualified to do so.

Bath had seven wards, which included Bathwick and Walcot. Each ward elected six councillors to Bath City Council.

A year or two after I was 21 I came out into the open and was made Chairman of the Liberal Ward Committee for Bathwick. Though we had not the slightest chance in the Ward I was able sufficiently to impress the other side that they would consult me as to a Candidate for the City Council, to avoid a contest. More than once I found an alternative Conservative candidate to the proposed official one.

I can find only one instance of my great-grandfather nominating anyone in Bathwick. This was William Adams, the proprietor of the Fernley Hotel, in the Municipal Elections of 2 November 1903.

What fun we used to have! Every year there was a Ward Meeting at which members rendered account to their constituents. We attended to ask questions. We always found the disgruntled members and asked their questions for them – if they would not do it. It was better than pantomime!

I remember one incident in a Municipal election at Walcot. Oliver (Conservative) was fighting our man Baggs. We knew that it was going to be the closest possible contest and every vote of special value. In the middle of the afternoon, three of us, Trude Young and myself were standing in the street, near the polling station. A lady came along in a pony wheelchair – openly carrying Oliver's polling card – and asked us where she had to vote for Oliver.

Trude steps forward, raises his hat and says, 'Beg pardon lady, but are you over 70?'

'What has that to do with the question?' she asks.

'Don't you know lady, that ladies over 70 can't vote now?' says Trude.

'Oh dear dear. I didn't want to come and they've been worrying me all day. Take me home Mr —.'

Mr —, one of our ardent supporters, was happy to do so. We won by only 3 votes!

Alfred's recollection in this respect was defective. The result as recorded by the *Bath and Cheltenham Gazette* of 26 April 1893 was as follows:

M Baggs	677
C B Oliver	665
Majority	12

The paper goes on to record that Oliver gave a speech from the steps of the Guildhall saying how amicable the fight had been. They had nothing to reproach themselves for and neither had the other side!

Alfred clearly felt that the additional resources of the Tories justified a little skulduggery –

The Tories always had a multiplicity of conveyances, carriages and pairs galore, but the poor radicals could hardly ever get half enough ponies and traps. So in every ward where there were invalidated stalwarts, they were instructed to suggest that they were going to vote Tory 'this time'. They were polled in carriages and pairs, but we knew how they really voted.

Alfred had an enemy in the Rector of Bathwick, George Tugwell. Rev. Tugwell had been Rector whilst Alfred had been at the Parish Church School and there was evidently no love lost

The following PERSONS have been duly NOMINATED
as Candidates for the office of Councillor for Walcot Ward in
the CITY OF BATH.

The ELECTION to be held on the 20th day of April, 1893.

Person Nominated.				Persons subscribing the respective Nomination Papers.	
Surname.	Other Names.	Abode.	Description.	Proposer.	Seconder.
Baggs	Mark	York Villa Stendington Bath	Gentleman	Edw. H. Hunt Thomas Head Belville P. Penley Caroline Usher	William H. Mortimer Aaron Moor Francis Miles Hannah Challenor
Oliver	Charles Bryan	Assembly Rooms Bath.	Architect	Richard Harbord Charles David Ingham R. V. Fowler James William Britten	Charles Clement D. M. Walters Richard J. St. Scott James P. Osborne

Dated the *13th* day of *April*, 1893.

[Signature]
Town Clerk.

BATTLING BATH LIBERAL

between them. The Rector had refused to allow Alfred to tender for the work of building a wall at the cemetery, on the grounds of his Nonconformist religion and Radical politics. This was despite the fact that the architect – also a Tory and Anglican – wanted A. Wills & Son included in the firms invited for tender. Alfred was, however, to have his revenge, as he relates in the next election story:

During a General Election at which Home Rule was the issue and feelings were running high, I was Party Agent inside the Polling Booth. Each side had an Agent to ensure fair play. In the middle of the afternoon the

General election results in Bath, 1880–1900

1880 April		
Hayter	Lib	2712
Wodehouse	Lib	2700
Hardy	Con	2359
Smyth	Con	2241
1885 November		
Blaine	Con	3208
Wodehouse	Lib	2990
Laurie	Con	2971
Hayter	Lib	2953
1886 July		
Wodehouse	Lib Unionist	3309
Laurie	Con	3244
Hayter	Gladstonite	2588
Verney	Gladstonite	2529
1892 July		
Murray	Con	3198
Wodehouse	Lib Unionist	3177
Baptie	Gladstonite	2981
Adye	Gladstonite	2941
1895 July		
Murray	Con	3445
Wodehouse	Lib Unionist	3358
Conway	Lib	2917
Fuller	Lib	2865
1900 October		
Murray	Con	3486
Wodehouse	Lib Unionist	3439
Maclean	Lib	2605
Fuller	Lib	2549

Liberals wheeled in a poor man who could not write or speak properly following a stroke. It was therefore necessary for the Booth to be cleared of all but sworn men whilst the Presiding Officer got from the voter his directions as to his vote. The Bathwick School was being used, as always.

As I was closing the door at the direction of the Presiding Officer I saw Rev. Tugwell pompously walking along the long path towards the school. In a minute or two the Rector was knocking on the door. Getting no answer he increased his knocking, shook the door and then kicked it violently.

The Presiding Officer asked me to see who it was, but on no account to let anyone in. Pulling the bolt back gently but keeping my foot against the door I opened it slightly. I was met with a tornado of words from a man who was almost in an apoplectic state. 'How dare you keep me out of my school!' he said, trying to push in.

Using my flat hand I pushed him so hard that he staggered back four yards and fell backwards over the step. Fortunately another gentleman had just arrived and rushed to brake his fall. I at once rebolted the door and informed the P.O. that it was the Rector. In a minute the kicking and rattling resumed, but shortly ceased.

The Sworn Room lasted 20 minutes, because of the condition of the voter, who died 2 days later. When the door was opened and the voter wheeled out, a Policeman who had now arrived held the Rector back. 2 or 3 other voters had also arrived in the interim. The Rector stamped into the Polling Booth calling upon the Policeman to follow and take me in charge for assault.

The Polling Officer did not know what to do. I stood laughing while he tried to calm the Rector. Suddenly I turned to

the P.O. and said quietly, but as clearly as possible, 'Mr Presiding Officer I call upon you in the Queen's Name to do your duty and have this person removed or prosecuted for brawling in a Polling Booth. I call upon you to so instruct the Police Officer.'

The complete collapse of the Rector was the best reward I could ever have.

Alfred was sanguine at the bribery and corruption that occurred during elections. He accepted it as inevitable. The problem for the Liberals was that they simply could not afford it. They were not averse to paying for votes, but needed to be sure they were getting value for money:

The Tories paid over their half sovereigns on the promise to vote – probably two or three days before the election. Our men only ever paid after the man had polled as an illiterate. This meant that an agent took the man right into the Polling Booth. The man would declare that he could not read or write and so in a Sworn Room the voter would openly declare for whom he voted. No half crowns for nothing was our slogan.

Bath at the time elected two MPs to parliament. Voters could vote for up to two candidates. The table shows the spread of voting from 1880 with the top two being elected.

I got a fair intuition into political methods. The year Donald Maclean lost I told him at 11 a.m. on Polling Day, 'You are going to lose.'

He asked me how I could be such a pessimist – the only one in Bath. I replied, 'The Publicans are quiet ... and confident.'

Years later, when I saw Maclean in the House of Commons, he reminded me of the incident.

Sir Donald Maclean KBE (1864–1932) became the Liberal MP

for Bath in the Liberal landslide of 1906. Maclean's total vote was 4,102 and his fellow Liberal Gooch received 4,069. The two Tories mustered 3,123 and 3,088 respectively. The last time Bath had elected two Liberals was in 1880 (see chart). In 1910 he left Bath and became MP for Peebles and Selkirk. He was chairman of the Liberal Party from 1919 to 1922. He was also the father of the other Donald Maclean, the infamous spy.

My great-grandfather records an incident in that election of 1906:

I was outside the Old Herald Office watching the results of the polling come in. There was an immense crowd reaching from St Michael's, Bridge Street, to the top of New Bond Street; excited, pushing and swaying. Of course it was mostly a Liberal crowd. Standing by my side was a little man, named Barnes, a photographer. He was absolutely dumb with astonishment as the Balfour figures were put out.

Arthur James Balfour, the Tory Prime Minister from 1902 to 1905, lost his seat for the constituency of East Manchester in the 1906 general election. The memoirs continue:

I did not know him well enough to carry out any sort of conversation. But there he stood with a blue Conservative handkerchief tucked well down inside his breast pocket. But as he was so small even I could see it by looking down into his pocket, which slightly gaped open.

Suddenly a gang of Avon Street hooligans forced themselves through the crowd, pushing and shoving by way of diversion. As they passed Barnes, one of them saw his handkerchief and without hesitation bashed Barnes' hat over the eyes.

In a moment my fist had contacted with the hooligan's jaw and he went sprawling. His pals were at me like panthers.

Suddenly I heard a voice, far away at first and then, 'That's Alf's voice! Hold on Alf I'm coming!'

In a moment I was fighting side by side with my old colleague O'Leary. The best of which was O'Leary had left A Wills & Son and set himself up in competition to us. I had not seen him for three or four years. It was a famous victory.

One last vignette perhaps conveys the rather more colourful character of politics at the time:

There were two brothers who both owned home brew public houses. Enoch Tutton in Bathwick Street was a Radical. Robert Tutton in Walcot was a Tory. They were both successful men but absolutely divided on their politics. Both owned high stepping horses and dogcarts.

At election times one of the sights was to see these brothers driving round Bath with harness, whip, horses, dogcarts and themselves decorated with their party colours. It looked like a competition for the best-dressed dogcart.

How they glowered at each other as they passed, but never spoke!

Alfred was persuaded to stand in the Bath City Council elections of 1908 as a Liberal candidate in Walcot. This was in place of Mr W. Tonkin who retired from the Council through ill health. Despite being an employer himself, his Radical credentials nevertheless made him acceptable to the working man. If he were not an employer himself, he announced, he would be a trade unionist. He went on to become Mayor of Bath in 1918. He was also food controller for Bath during the Great War. He suffered a nervous breakdown in 1919 following the national rail strike, which greatly disrupted food distribution. His conflicts had moved beyond the robust physical confrontations of

his early politics, for which he clearly felt a singular degree of nostalgia.

Stephen Tollyfield is a Principal Legal Adviser for the South Derbyshire Magistrates' Court. He is married with two children and now lives in Swanwick, Derbyshire.

1 Graham Davis, 'Sir Jerome Murch and the 'civic gospel' in Victorian Bath', *Journal of Liberal History* 37, p. 14

Form 6.

DECLARATION TO THE RETURNING OFFICER OF NAME AND ADDRESS OF ELECTION AGENT.

1890

Parliamentary Election for the _____ Division of the _____
City of Bath

I, Donald Maclean of 19 The Parade Curdiffe a Candidate at the above-named Election, do hereby give you notice that pursuant to the provisions of the 46th and 47th Victoria, Cap. 51, Sec. 24, I have appointed Seymour Williams of Northgate Chambers Bath to be my Election Agent for the said Election; and that the address of his office or place to which all claims, writs, summons, and documents with regard to the said Election, addressed to the said Seymour Williams may be sent is Northgate Chambers Bath

Dated this 25th day of September 1890

(Signed) Donald Maclean

To the Returning Officer.

Printed by the South Gloucester Press Ltd, 16, Wine Office Quay, Bristol, B.C.1, 4 & 11, High Street, Lanes.

**Special Instructions to Presiding Officers
 POLLING AGENTS**

NOT MORE THAN 4 POLLING AGENTS (WHOSE NAMES ARE ON THE ACCOMPANYING LIST) ARE ENTITLED TO ATTEND IN THE STATION FOR THE PURPOSE OF DETECTING PERSONATION.

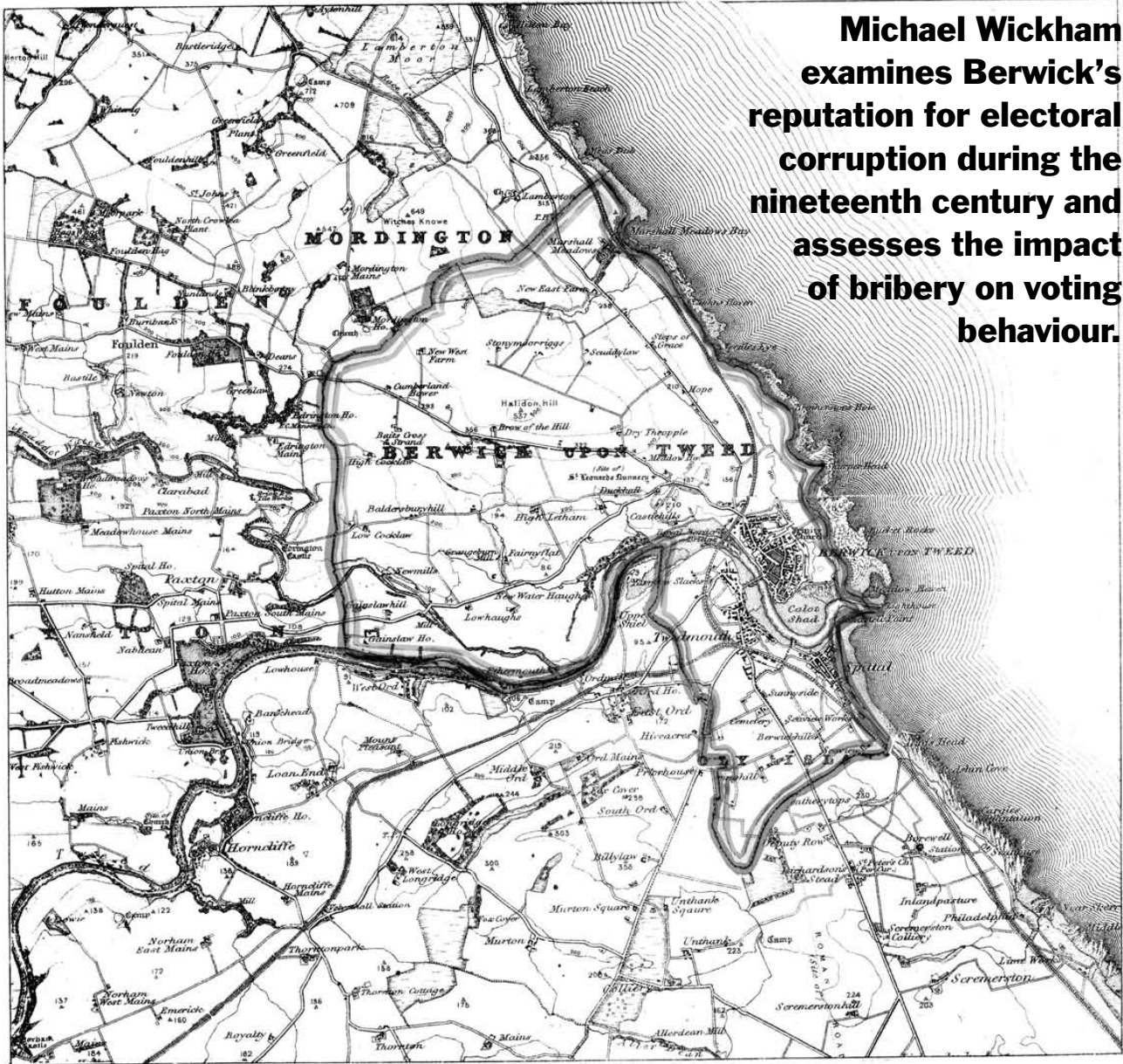
IT HAS ALSO BEEN ARRANGED WITH THE CANDIDATES AND THEIR AGENTS THAT NOT MORE THAN 2 OF SUCH POLLING AGENTS FOR EACH SIDE SHALL REMAIN IN THE STATION AT THE SAME TIME AND THAT THE AGENT WHO TAKES THE REGISTER WILL NOT BE CHANGED.

SPECIAL ADMISSION TICKETS HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO THE POLLING AGENTS AND OTHERS ENTITLED TO ATTEND.

Note: Undated instruction document from Bath City Archives.

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED

Michael Wickham examines Berwick's reputation for electoral corruption during the nineteenth century and assesses the impact of bribery on voting behaviour.



Scale of One Inch to a Statute Mile



REFERENCE

- Exposed Parliamentary Boundary 1868* [thick solid line]
- Parliamentary Boundary 1832* [double solid line]
- Municipal Boundary* [dashed line]
- Parish and Township Boundaries* [thin solid line]

*Henry James,
Colonel Royal Engineer*

Zincographed at the Ordnance Survey Office Southampton under the superintendance of Capt. R.M. Parsons F.R.S. Col. Sir H. James R.E. F.R.S. &c. Director

D: A VENAL BOROUGH?

When the English electoral system was reformed in 1832, it was hoped that the bribery and corruption that had characterised the old system would become a thing of the past. However, such hopes were soon dashed as many of the old practices continued unabated. Indeed, in some boroughs the situation was even worse than it had been before the 1832 Reform Act. In Berwick-upon-Tweed, for instance, a series of election scandals resulted in the appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate the alleged venality of the electors of England's most northerly parliamentary borough, which, until the Liberal victory of 1852, saw its representation shared by the two major political parties, except during the 1830s, when first the Whigs and then the Conservatives were briefly dominant.

In 1817 the Reverend Thomas Johnstone, minister of the Low Meeting House, Berwick, wrote:

It is not uncommon for the Burgesses of Berwick to promise their vote to a favourite Member of Parliament, several years before an election takes place; and, much to their honour, they have seldom been known to break this promise. Hence the Borough is often canvassed, and secured, long before a dissolution of Parliament, and the Representative who is fortunate enough to obtain the promise of a vote, has no doubt of its being literally fulfilled.¹

Unfortunately, this glowing assessment of the political integrity of the Berwick electorate was not one that was widely shared

during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The electors' ingratitude towards the Whig member John Delaval, who had spent thousands of pounds on them during the 1760s, prompted Captain Nethercott to refer to them as 'a herd of swine that the Devil possesses'.² Similar sentiments were expressed by J. Lambert, Esq. when he informed Earl Grey in 1832 that:

... the Berwick electors are such a venal pack that I fear there can be little hope entertained of their supporting even so straightforward and uncompromising a reformer as Sir F [Francis Blake] upon the principle of political feeling only ... corruption has become so much a habit at Berwick that I think no candidate could rely on success, if opposed, unless he was prepared to spend something.³

Indeed, it was a well-known fact that electioneering at Berwick was a costly business. Even the *Berwick Advertiser* acknowledged this when, in 1831, it declared, 'The expensiveness of the election for this borough are sufficiently known, to terrify any prudent person from engaging in a contest for it.'⁴ Similarly, another local newspaper, the *Kelso Mail*, observed on the eve of the 1832 general election, 'Unless a pretty considerable REFORM has actually taken place, the purses of the honourable candidates may undergo a fearful change.'⁵ Berwick's notoriety spread far beyond the locality. In January 1833 the *Weekly Despatch* referred to the town as 'This once most corrupt and close Tory borough'.⁶

Not surprisingly, such attacks were deeply resented by the

people of Berwick, who believed that the case against them had been somewhat overstated. Thus, in January 1833, the *Advertiser*, referring to the conduct of the town's electors on former occasions, warily observed:

We are far from believing that they were all guiltless, – yet the borough has been more sinned against than sinning, and why should six or seven hundred good men bear the odium attached to the sins of fifty or perhaps sixty who desecrate the privileges which they enjoy?⁷

The newspaper was highly conscious of the borough's reputation for venality and was determined that such notoriety should be laid to rest along with the old electoral system. With this object in mind, it constantly urged the electorate to pursue a more honest course. For instance, on 15 September 1832 it beseeched the electors:

Will you permit the name of your native place to be obnoxious to the very nostrils of honest men? – Will you have it written in corruption, and hackneyed round the land as a standing and evil jest with Gatton and Grampound?⁸

Such exhortations fell upon deaf ears, however, and the electors of Berwick continued with their venal practices. Consequently it was reported that, in 1832, both Whig and Tory candidates gave money to the electors, especially towards the close of the poll on the second day, when 'large sums were asked and given for votes'.⁹ Likewise, in 1835, Sir Rufane Shaw Donkin (Liberal) spent 'immense sums', James

In Berwick-upon-Tweed a series of election scandals resulted in the appointment of a Royal Commission to investigate the alleged venality of the electors of England's most northerly parliamentary borough.

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Bradshaw (Tory) 'pulled out' a small amount, while Sir Francis Blake (Liberal), who later had the audacity to blame his defeat on bribery, was 'cleaned out'.¹⁰ As a result of this high expenditure, no candidate could be found to represent the Conservative interest at the by-election four months later, although it was reported that William Holmes was prepared to stand provided he could be assured of 'one hundred volunteer votes' before the commencement of his canvass.^k His failure to contest the seat suggests that such an assurance was not forthcoming.

Rather than erase its tarnished image under the new electoral system, Berwick's notoriety seems to have increased in the years after 1832. Following the election petition of 1852, which resulted in the election of that year being declared void, Thomas Phinn, the Liberal member for Bath, said in the Commons that it was the opinion of people acquainted with elections in Berwick that 'It is of no use going down to Berwick unless you are prepared to pay the freemen all round.'¹² He also said he believed that the corruption of Berwick was quite as notorious as that of Sudbury and St. Albans, two towns which had been disfranchised after a Royal Commission had found evidence of gross bribery and corruption.¹³ Indeed, seven years after Phinn's damning pronouncement Berwick itself became the subject of a similar investigation.

The aim of this article is to consider two important questions. First, did Berwick deserve its reputation for venality? And, second, what effect, if any, did corruption have on voting behaviour in the borough?

Any attempt to answer the first of these questions will inevitably rely heavily upon the report of the 1861 Royal Commission appointed to inquire into the existence of bribery at the Berwick elections of 1859. Although there were four successful election petitions between the Electoral Reform Act of 1832 and the Redistribution Act of 1885,

none of these produced an investigation as thorough as that of the Commissioners.

The first successful petition was in 1852 and it resulted in a void election after the Select Committee had determined that John Stapleton (Liberal) was, by his agents, guilty of treating (i.e. entertaining the electors with food and drink at the candidate's expense) and that Matthew Forster (Liberal) was, by his agents, guilty of bribery.¹⁴ The second was in 1860 and it led to a recommendation for a Royal Commission to investigate the borough after the Committee discovered that bribery extensively prevailed at the by-election in August 1859.¹⁵ The third was in 1863 and it culminated in the conclusions that no case of bribery was proved, and that it was not proved that corrupt practices extensively prevailed at the election.¹⁶ The fourth successful petition was in 1880 and it produced the ruling that corrupt practices had not prevailed on either side.¹⁷

The 1861 Commission sat daily in Berwick (except for an adjournment for one week) from 30 July to 1 September, and afterwards six times in London. Since the Commissioners found no suspicion of corruption attached to the 1853 election, they did not enter into the details of that or of any previous election. However, they did receive 'general information as to the previous political reputation of the borough'.¹⁸ Of particular significance is the fact that the freemen were generally presented as 'the most accessible to the influence of bribery'.¹⁹ Thomas Bogue, the mayor, for instance, told the Commissioners that before 1853 'bribery was reported to have extensively prevailed, principally among the freemen'; while John Graham, a resident of Berwick for fourteen years, said that 'since he came to Berwick the opinion has always prevailed that the freemen will not vote unless they are paid for their votes', but he added to this his opinion 'that the householders are as bad as the freemen'.

(Before 1832 the electorate consisted exclusively of the freemen of the borough – thereafter, it included only those freemen who lived within a seven-mile radius of the borough, as well as the ten-pound householders of the town.) Another witness, Mr Jeffrey, a solicitor from Jedburgh, who was sent to Berwick in 1859 to collect evidence in support of the prosecutions initiated by the Northern Reform Union against some of the electors for bribery, told the Commissioners that he had heard in the town itself that 'an election never took place without extensive bribery on both sides'. And Matthew Forster, the Liberal member from 1841 to 1852, stated that, although it was difficult to ascertain what number of electors were bribable, his own impression was that, while he sat for the borough, 'two-thirds of the freemen and some portion of the householders were corrupt'.²⁰ This would mean that in 1852, for example, about 235 freemen were bribable.

Collating this evidence of general reputation with the fact that large amounts were spent by the various candidates at the elections of 1837, 1841 and 1852, and with the fact that the two successful candidates were unseated in 1852, the Commissioners concluded that 'we could feel no doubt that the parliamentary elections at Berwick down to the year 1853 were attended with very considerable corruption'.²¹

In contrast, the 1853 by-election was characterised by its integrity, although, as the Commissioners observed, 'As that election followed immediately on the avoidance for bribery of the return of the members elected in 1852, its purity has been reasonably attributed to the fear of ulterior consequences induced by the recent exposure'.²² In other words, the election was pure only because the electors were afraid that another inquiry might lead to their disfranchisement.

However, the main task of the 1861 Royal Commission was to investigate the elections of 1857

Thomas Phinn, the Liberal member for Bath, said in the Commons that it was the opinion of people acquainted with elections in Berwick that 'It is of no use going down to Berwick unless you are prepared to pay the freemen all round'.

Table 1: Result of the general election at Berwick, 28 March 1857

John STAPLETON (Lib)	339
Dudley Coutts MARJORIBANKS (Lib)	271
Captain Charles William Gordon (Con)	269
Matthew Forster (Lib)	250

and 1859. In the event, it was an investigation fraught with difficulty. As the Commissioners observed in the introduction of their report:

In the investigation which we were charged to conduct, the difficulty experienced by us in obtaining any reliable information upon which to shape our inquiries soon gave ground for believing that nothing would be disclosed which could be withheld. During the inquiry itself the majority of the witnesses displayed a mental reservation through which it was difficult to break; while not a few prevaricated and perjured themselves with the utmost hardened effrontery.²³

The Commissioners attributed this pervasive dishonesty partly to an apprehension that a truthful disclosure would result in either personal or general disfranchisement, and partly to 'a perverted notion of duty' which made some of the witnesses reluctant to betray those who had bribed them.²⁴

Yet, despite this general reticence on the part of the witnesses, the Commissioners were able to paint a fairly comprehensive picture of the 1857 and 1859 elections. In 1857, for instance, there had been some suspicion that the Conservative Charles Gordon's position on the poll had been achieved by illegitimate means. As a stranger who came to Berwick only ten days before the election, he was not expected to do very well. His canvass was not a favourable one, and he confessed to one of his opponents, the Liberal D. C. Marjoribanks, that he had no more than a hundred pledges. Indeed, his chances of success looked so slim that he retired to

Edinburgh on the morning of the nomination. However, John Renton Dunlop, the chairman of his committee, and the Reverend George Hans Hamilton were more sanguine, and Gordon was persuaded to return to the borough, where he was defeated by only two votes. The Liberals were certainly surprised by the unexpected support he had received. Marjoribanks, for example, said he thought that Gordon's position was due to the promises he had made about what he would do for the town after the election (Gordon had said that if he was elected he might give money for some public building for the benefit of the whole town).²⁵ On the other hand, Hamilton argued that the presence of three Liberal candidates, each trying to get as many single votes as possible, had given Gordon a chance of success. After considering the testimony of all concerned, the Commissioners decided that 'nothing was adduced in evidence to warrant us in concluding that Captain Gordon's election was not, so far as he was personally concerned, legitimately conducted'.²⁶ However, it was established that others, such as the erstwhile Conservative member for Berwick, Richard Hodgson, were especially active in furthering the cause of the Conservative candidate 'by treating electors in public houses'.²⁷ It is little wonder that Dunlop and Hamilton were more optimistic than Gordon about his election prospects (see Table 1).

If Gordon had been a political novice in 1857, he certainly learned how to curry favour with the Berwick electors in time for his next foray into electoral politics. Not only did he donate over £2,000 for the building of a church, but he made regular trips to Berwick in 1858–59, visiting the sick and giving them money.²⁸ He also employed Hamilton to dispense his charities. These included the distribution of coals, the payment of occasional sums to the poor and subscriptions to charitable societies. In all, Gordon had resolved to spend about £200

a year at Berwick. However, this was not the limit of his largesse. He also retained William McGall as his agent, by a fee of £50, for the purpose of cultivating the Conservative interest in the borough, and gave him money to distribute among the poor. Gordon's motives were perfectly clear:

I gave McGall the money with a sort of mixed object; one was, no doubt, to keep up my influence in the place; it had also reference to the peculiar poverty of the place, which had struck me very much. I instructed McGall not to exclude voters; he was to give money in all cases where there was poverty; but then he was not to exclude voters, because a great many of the voters were more needy than many of the paupers. I gave him a general discretionary power. He saw that it had reference to the election, that I was charitably disposed, and that I wished to help the people. There were no details gone into.²⁹

In all, McGall spent £540 in the advancement of Gordon's object. It was distributed by him 'to some hundreds of individuals, of whom a large proportion were freemen'.³⁰ A further £100 was spent by McGall within a few days of the poll. Indeed, according to Johnson How Pattison, who was himself bribed, McGall paid sixty or seventy voters from £1 to £3 in his house, popularly known as the 'gull-hole', the night before the election.³¹

So confident of a Conservative victory was Gordon that he invited R. A. Earle, Disraeli's private secretary, to stand with him at Berwick in 1859. Gordon assured Earle that his election would be inexpensive, since he was certain to benefit from Gordon's popularity in the borough. And indeed he did, coming second in the poll behind Gordon. The Commissioners were in no doubt that Earle's election owed much to 'the potent monetary influences which had been discreetly employed by McGall for the promotion of the Conservative interest in the town'.³²

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Table 2: Result of the general election at Berwick, 30 April 1859

Captain Charles William GORDON (Con)	366
Ralph Anstruther EARLE (Con)	348
Dudley Coutts Marjoribanks (Lib)	330
John Stapleton (Lib)	257

Table 3: Result of the by-election at Berwick, 20 August 1859

Dudley Coutts MARJORIBANKS (Lib)	305
Richard Hodgson (Con)	304

Gordon himself concurred with this view, although he was inclined to believe that other factors played a part:

It is only natural to suppose that the money distributed through McGall had a considerable influence in securing the election, although I believe that people voted according to their predilections, and on other grounds as well.³³

This may well have been the case. However, the return of two Conservatives in 1859 was very much against expectations. Since their landslide victories in 1852 and 1853 the Liberals had dominated Berwick politics; and although there was always enough Conservative support in the borough to allow for the possibility of returning one Conservative candidate, the likelihood of achieving a double victory by legitimate means was fairly remote. It certainly did not happen again, although Richard Hodgson only narrowly failed to become Berwick's second Conservative member at the 1859 by-election. However, this election too was far from pure (see Table 2).

The 1859 by-election was brought about by the resignation of the Conservative member R. A. Earle. A compromise had been reached between Marjoribanks, Gordon and Earle, whereby the latter would retire following the withdrawal of Marjoribanks' petition against the two Conservative members; in return, Marjoribanks would be allowed to stand unopposed. However,

this did not prevent the Berwick Conservatives from mounting a challenge at the August election. As in April, corruption played a prominent part in the contest. The Commissioners reported that bribery was committed on both sides by individual supporters of the two candidates, but that they were unable to determine the exact extent to which it was carried on. They entirely absolved Marjoribanks from the suspicion that he either directly or indirectly supplied money for the purpose of corruptly influencing the constituency. Although they failed to discover the existence of any organisation for the purpose of bribery on the Liberal side, they did find that on polling day three individuals were 'actively engaged in endeavouring to promote Mr. Marjoribanks' election by corrupt payments and offers'.³⁴ Yet this was nothing compared to the bribery practised by the Conservatives, which the Commissioners described as 'more systematic, and almost wholly performed by the agency of William McGall'.³⁵ McGall had been very active on polling day, visiting the 'George' and the 'Woolpack' public houses, where he had bribed a number of electors to vote for Hodgson with money which was believed to have been provided by Hodgson for that express purpose (see Table 3).³⁶

In their report the Commissioners named four individuals, including Gordon and McGall, who were guilty of bribery in April 1859 by corruptly giving or promising money for votes; and fifteen who were guilty of bribery by receiving money for their votes. In addition, they named twelve individuals, including Hodgson and McGall, who were guilty of bribery in August 1859 by giving or promising money for votes; and twelve who were guilty of bribery by receiving money.³⁷

The damning conclusions of the 1861 Royal Commission are supported by Robert Mathison's account of corruption in the borough. In a letter to Richard Reed, the secretary of the North-

ern Reform Union, Mathison describes the bribery and treating that occurred at Berwick between 1832 and 1859, drawing particular attention to the 'Capital election' of 1852 and the 'bribery election' of 1859.³⁸ According to Mathison, after the 1859 election he heard 'a Gentleman who did "business" for the Whigs at many elections' say that there 'are two hundred voters who will not poll without money'. Mathison told Reed that he believed this to be true.³⁹

If this evaluation of the corruptibility of the Berwick electorate is accurate, it would mean that of the 703 electors who were entitled to vote in 1859, just over 28 per cent of them were bribed to do so. On the other hand, if Forster's estimate of the number of corrupt electors is taken into consideration, the figure rises to above 35 per cent. Either way, this is bribery on a large scale. It would place Berwick on a par with boroughs like Yarmouth, where 33 per cent of the electors were proved to have given or received bribes,⁴⁰ and Beverley, where 37 per cent of the electorate were open to bribery;⁴¹ but behind the most venal boroughs of the period, such as Reigate, where the proportion of the electorate affected by bribery was nearly 50 per cent,⁴² St. Albans, where almost 64 per cent of the electors habitually took money,⁴³ Lancaster and Totnes, where corruption involved about 66 per cent of the electorate,⁴⁴ and the incorrigible Bridgwater, where 75 per cent of the constituency were 'hopelessly addicted' to giving or receiving bribes.⁴⁵ Since all of these boroughs were disfranchised for corruption, Berwick can count itself lucky to have escaped a similar fate.

With such a high proportion of the electorate susceptible to bribery, it would be easy to assume that the outcome of an election would be determined by the amount of money that found its way into the pockets of the voters. However, there is compelling evidence to suggest that this was not the case. In his

study of electoral politics in mid-nineteenth century Lancashire, M. A. Manai has shown that poll-book evidence casts doubt on the alleged importance of corruption on the outcome of elections. By tracing a number of voters over a period of time, he discovered that they did not change their political allegiances and were not swayed by money. Other factors, such as occupation, age, location and religion, were much more significant determinants of voting behaviour than money. 'Bribery', argues Manai, 'may have confirmed rather than changed political views'.⁴⁶

Other historians have also questioned the importance of bribery in determining election results. For instance, in his analysis of 3,716 electors during four Colchester elections, Andrew Phillips found that their voting behaviour appeared consistent and partisan.⁴⁷ He concludes, 'If Colchester voters were venal, they were consistently so: only 1% of four-time voters switched party twice'.⁴⁸ Likewise, J. R. Vincent has shown that in constituencies throughout the country there was a strong correlation between occupation and political affiliation, suggesting that corruption had a limited impact upon voting behaviour. As he observes:

... though the relative will and power of each party to buy votes varied enormously from election to election and from candidate, the patterns of occupational preference remain relatively stable from year to year and from one place to another. Croesus fought many elections, but he never made shoemakers into good Tories, or butchers into good Liberals.⁴⁹

This view is endorsed by T. J. Nossiter, who, in his study of voting behaviour in the north-east of England, points out that, even if the case is not conclusive, 'there are good grounds for believing opinion to have had a continuous relationship to occupation from 1832 onwards,

not only in the north east, but in other large towns as well'.⁵⁰ Notwithstanding all the evidence of extensive bribery and treating unearthed by Election Committees and Royal Commissions, Nossiter warns that, 'it would be perhaps unwise to assume that a voter necessarily accepted money from a party he would not have supported anyway'.⁵¹

Such a cautious approach to the relationship between money and voting behaviour would appear to be justified by evidence from this investigation. Using the reports of the 1852 Election Committee and the 1861 Royal Commission in conjunction with existing poll books (which record the way electors voted), it was possible to trace the voting behaviour over a series of elections of the twenty-eight voters who took bribes at the general elections of 1852 and 1859 and at the by-election of 1859. As all of these voters are known to have been corruptible, they are amongst those most likely to have allowed their voting behaviour to be influenced by money. Yet an analysis of their voting record, which in some cases spans as many as eight elections, produces an overall impression, not of a group of electors who were constantly changing their political allegiance, but rather of a group which was consistently loyal to one particular party. Such a picture of partisan voting would appear to confirm Manai's assertion that money confirmed rather than determined the voting preferences of those who took bribes at elections.

Of course, there were always electors to whom this rule did not apply. At Beverley, for instance, it was reported that out of the 1,000 voters who were open to bribery in 1868, a good third (over 12 per cent of the electorate) were known as 'rolling stock'. In other words, an adequate bribe would make them roll to the other side.⁵² No doubt most constituencies had their share of these voters. It was alleged that Donkin lost at Berwick in 1837, 'because the men who took his money

— sold again to the Tories and thus did him in two ways at once'.⁵³ Similarly, in 1865 it was said that many of those electors who were charged in Alexander Mitchell's (Liberal) petition with having received bribes in 1863 had broken their pledges to William Cargill (Conservative) and voted for Mitchell.⁵⁴ If such claims are true, the number of voters who sold out to the highest bidder must have been small. This is confirmed by the author's own investigation of voting consistency at Berwick elections during the period 1832–72.⁵⁵ It is further supported by Manai's analysis of individual voting behaviour at Lancaster, which suggests that 'the majority of voters remained loyal to specific parties rather than changing their political allegiances in line with whichever party offered them monetary incentives'.⁵⁶

Taking into consideration the poll-book evidence of Berwick and of other constituencies, it is difficult not to concur with John Phillips' conclusion that:

Nossiter warns that, 'it would be perhaps unwise to assume that a voter necessarily accepted money from a party he would not have supported anyway'.

The survival of bribery and other undue influences notwithstanding, most electors after 1832 chose to give their support to one of the parliamentary parties ... Moreover, once an elector had chosen a party and cast his votes for it, he was likely to continue to support that party for the rest of his parliamentary voting career. If bribery was an active force at these elections, it seems to have been notably ineffectual.⁵⁷

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- 3 J. Lambert to 3rd Earl Grey, 13 May 1832, 3rd Earl Grey MSS., Box 113, file 2.
- 4 *Berwick Advertiser*, 7 May 1831, p. 4.
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- 8 *Berwick Advertiser*, 15 September 1832, p. 4. See also, for example, the *Berwick Advertiser*, 28 July 1832, p. 4.
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- 10 Ibid.
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- 12 Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd Series, Vol. CXXVI, 1853, 1129.
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- 17 Bean, *Parliamentary Representation*, p. 63.
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- 20 Ibid., p. vi.
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- 24 Ibid.
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- 34 Ibid., p. xiv.
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- 43 W. B. Gwyn, *Democracy and the Cost of Politics in Britain*, p. 65.
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- 47 A. Phillips, ‘Four Colchester Elections: Voting Behaviour in a Victorian Market Town’, p. 205.
- 48 Ibid., p. 206.
- 49 J. R. Vincent, *Pollbooks: How Victorians Voted*, p. 11.
- 50 T. J. Nossiter, *Influence, Opinion and Political Idioms in Reformed England*, p. 170.
- 51 T. J. Nossiter, ‘Aspects of Electoral Behavior in English Constituencies, 1832–1868’, p. 161.
- 52 O’Leary, *The Elimination of Corrupt Practices*, p. 52.
- 53 Mathison to Reed, 29 September 1859, MSS. Account Berwick Elections, 1832–59.
- 54 *Berwick Warder*, 14 July 1865, p. 4.
- 55 M. J. Wickham, ‘Electoral Politics in Berwick-Upon-Tweed, 1832–1885’, pp. 116–120.
- 56 M. A. Manai, ‘Influence, Corruption and Electoral Behaviour in the Mid Nineteenth Century’, p. 161.
- 57 John A. Phillips, ‘Unintended Consequences: Parliamentary Blueprints in the Hands of Provincial Builders’, p. 97.

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CONRAD RUSSELL

Memorial service, 14 June 2005

Address by Sally Hamwee

In February 2002 an amendment was tabled to delete the term 'etc' from the State Pension Credit Bill by peers who just wanted to know what on earth it meant in the context. Conrad Russell contributed to the discussion:

My Lords, if I were to be given one of those word-association tests and offered the word 'etc', I do not believe that the first word that would come back would be precision. On one famous occasion in 1640 the Convocation of Canterbury required people to take an oath to the government of the Church, by archbishops, bishops, deans, 'etc'. Many people believed, or affected to believe, that 'etc' meant the Pope.

One London preacher maintained that 'etc' was the curled lock of the Antichrist. I do not need to express agreement with that preacher to say that the Government might be wise to chose a word a little more precisely defined.

Anyone who worked with Conrad would not be surprised at that example: a historical reference, often preceded by 'It reminds me of ...' – the seventeenth century as vivid to him as the twentieth – and the assumption that all the rest of us knew exactly what he was talking about. I have to say that, sitting alongside him in the Lords, I realised that ministers opposite were often bemused, but some were better at disguising it.

Conrad paid all of us the compliment of assuming we were his intellectual equals, and I never knew whether I fooled him – my laughter often had to take its cue from his own. An intellectual aristocrat he may have been, but his respect for other people was not dependent on their attainment.

It was his intellectual integrity that meant that he respected – and said so – people with whose views he may have profoundly disagreed, if those views were coherent. Though, for instance, he took such a different view of the notorious Section 28 from Janet Young, he quite clearly held her personally in high regard. But then, as he once muttered to me on the bench during an exchange on zero tolerance, 'One should have zero tolerance only of zero tolerance itself'.

That love of liberty drove him, and his love of language enabled him to express it. He spoke in beautifully honed paragraphs, both in private and in public – from sparse notes, just a few lines in capitals, some of them very deliberately in red (I never worked out the colour code), in an exercise book to which he rarely referred once he was on his feet. When names for his new granddaughter were being considered he said 'Liberty would be a good name, but you can't say to a three year old: "Liberty, don't do that".'

Along with liberty, his values were justice and liberalism rooted firmly in the belief that power of all sorts should be dispersed and accountable. He wrote: 'As far back as I can remember, I assumed the purpose of politics was to fight injustice, poverty and oppression; what else could be worth all that sweat?'

And in doggedly pursuing in Parliament the causes of student poverty and the treatment of asylum seekers, he pioneered ways of drawing attention to unimportant-looking regulations which were likely to have a devastating effect on the lives of vulnerable people, without flouting the conventions which govern the Lords' relationship with the Commons.

He was an assiduous writer of letters to the papers. When Tony Blair claimed he never gave money to beggars, in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* Conrad suggested that:

He should remember that need may happen to anyone. Belisarius in his day was the best general in the Roman Empire, but ended up at the gates of Rome chanting 'Give a ha'penny to Belisarius'. If, after Mr Blair has reformed the welfare state and gone out of office at the moment his pension fund goes broke, I find him at King's Cross chanting 'Give a tenner to Tony', I will give it to him, even if my gorge rises at it.

He was not one for small talk, and as for recreations he listed 'uxoriousness' in *Who's Who*. His speeches were full of mentions of Elizabeth, always to make a wider point.

He may have looked the caricature of a scatty academic, with his hair standing to attention (or sometimes less disciplined) and his portable filing system of Waitrose carrier bags, but he loved nothing more than a good gossip, and better still a good plot. Many of us will have had late-night phone calls (we knew never ever to call him early in the morning) which began 'Conrad here'.

The party loved him and he loved the party. During a late night, when the Liberal Democrats were voting alone – one of our principled futile gestures on an issue of liberalism – we went through the lobby singing traditional songs; Conrad's refrain was 'Lloyd George *jailed* my father'.

It was entirely consistent that he gave huge support personally to individuals. He supported his students, in his teaching and pastorally. He encouraged individuals within the party – his foreword to his book *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Liberalism* thanked, 'for reactions at party functions which have been constructive, informative and helpful', a list

That love of liberty drove him, and his love of language enabled him to express it. He spoke in beautifully honed paragraphs, both in private and in public.

concluded on page 52

Jaime Reynolds

examines the life of the Liberal Member of Parliament for Bermondsey 1923–24 and Ashford 1929–31, and a leader in the ‘tithe war’ of the 1930s: Reverend Roderick Kedward (1881–1937).

‘THE FIGHT



FIGHTING PARSON'

In December 2002 Simon Hughes unveiled a plaque at Bermondsey Underground Station in tribute to Dr Alfred Salter, a much-respected radical Member of Parliament and tireless campaigner for health and social improvement in the borough in the early decades of the twentieth century. Less remembered is Salter's chief political adversary in the early 1920s, the man who defeated him at the general election of 1923: the Reverend Roderick Kedward. Yet Kedward also dedicated his life to combating social deprivation in south London and was a hugely popular local figure, whose funeral cortege through the streets of Bermondsey in 1937 was attended by a crowd of thousands. And while Salter was a left-wing socialist, Kedward was a Liberal, the last to be elected in this area until Simon Hughes's victory in 1983.

Kedward's achievements in Bermondsey are not the only reason for remembering his contribution to Liberal history. He was a charismatic and colourful figure who typified two important strands of the inter-war Liberal cause: urban social Liberalism, and rural nonconformist protest. In 1929 in Ashford, Kent, he pulled off one of the most stunning wins scored by a Liberal at any general election. During the 1930s he was the leading figure in the rural revolt against payment of tithes, a campaign of civil disobedience and demonstrations

in which Liberals played a prominent part.

Roderick Morris Kedward was born at Beachbrook Farm, Westwell in Kent, a stone's throw from the present-day Eurostar station at Ashford, on 14 September 1881, one of fourteen children of William Wesley Kedward and Eliza (née Morris), originally from Herefordshire, who moved to Kent in the 1870s and continued farming there. The family farm of 129 acres seems to have provided a good living, sufficient to have the children privately educated. This was a heavily agricultural area, one of the best hop-growing areas in the country.

The Church of England and the Tory party dominated the rural areas, but in the Wealden parishes nonconformity and Liberalism were strong.¹ The Kedwards were firm Methodists and Liberals and four of their sons were to become Wesleyan ministers. Roderick became a Sunday-school teacher and local preacher while still in his teens, and spent some time at the Mission Home in Rochdale, a headquarters of the Methodist evangelist movement led by Thomas Champness.² Kedward himself soon became a travelling evangelist. He caused a furore when, after refusing to stop preaching illegally on a village green, he was briefly imprisoned in Worcester gaol, charged with obstruction and refusal to pay a fine. After protests by the local Methodists the governor asked him to leave voluntarily, but he

refused to do so until the Home Office had issued a warrant ordering his release and declaring him innocent of any offence. He became a minister in 1903 after training at Richmond College and served at Lydd, Kent, for four years while continuing to tour the country, recruiting converts to Methodism under the auspices of the Connexional Home Mission Committee. These were years of revival in the Methodist church, fuelled in part by the nonconformist opposition to the 1902 Education Act and the revival of the movement in Wales.³

Kedward married Daisy Annie Fedrick in 1906. They had three sons and three daughters. In the 1920s messages to the voters from Daisy Kedward featured prominently in her husband's election literature.

In 1908 Kedward was appointed as minister of three Wesleyan congregations in the slum area of Sculcoates in Hull, a Methodist stronghold. It was there that he gained the title of 'the Fighting Parson', after beating off a drunken, wife-battering docker. It was said that 'ever afterwards Mr Kedward was treated with the greatest respect in that part of the city'. His 'muscular Christianity' also extended, it seems, to intervening to prevent bailiffs evicting his parishioners. One of Kedward's main tasks in Hull was to whip up support for the construction of a new Methodist Central Hall. This was opened as the King's Hall in October 1910,

Picture: Kedward (holding placard) and his daughter at a tithe protest at Beechbrooke Farm, 1935.

'THE FIGHTING PARSON'

with a weekly congregation of some two thousand people, and one of the largest Sunday schools in the country. The establishment of such 'Central Halls' in urban centres, acting as a focus for both religious and social welfare activity, formed a key element in the attempts by the Methodists to reverse the decline in their support that started before the First World War.

Kedward involved himself in local government in Hull as a member of the Board of Guardians, where he campaigned against the practice of forcing vagrants to work at stone-breaking when they were given shelter in local Poor Law shelters. To expose this scandal, Kedward disguised himself as a tramp and spent a day in the workhouse, returning later to show his bruised and blistered hands, and shame the authorities into ceasing the practice.⁴ According to his later election propaganda, he was also twice selected to represent the 'artisans' of Hull in industrial disputes.

Despite his Protestantism, Kedward was a vociferous advocate of Irish Home Rule. On one occasion, when due to speak for the cause in Londonderry, the house where he was staying was attacked by an 'Orange mob' who broke several windows. Nevertheless Kedward went ahead with the meeting where, according to his later election propaganda, 'his invincible courage quelled even the most violent of his antagonists and there, right in the heart of Orangedom, he delivered a powerful speech in support of Irish freedom'.⁵

He became a popular figure in Hull and soon after the outbreak of the First World War the soldiers of the East Yorkshire Regiment petitioned the War Office for Kedward to become the chaplain of one of the Hull 'Pals' battalions formed in 1914 and attached to the 31st Division in June 1915. This unusual request was granted. In December 1915 he was stationed with the division in Egypt where it was defending the Suez Canal. In March 1916 the division

Kedward continued this tradition of Methodist social and Liberal political activism after succeeding Lidgett as superintendent of the Mission at the end of the First World War.

was transferred back to the Western Front where it suffered horrendous casualties in the assault on Serre at the start of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916.⁶ Kedward's health broke down soon afterwards, doubtless aggravated by the horrors of war that he later admitted to having experienced. He spent three months in a field hospital before being invalided out of the army in October 1916 with trench fever. He remained a highly popular personality with the troops and served as president of the ex-Soldiers and ex-Sailors Federation for three years after the war. His empathy with the trials of the front-line soldiers was evident in his later attacks on the Labour government for failing to live up to its promises to abolish the death penalty and introduce appeals for court-martialled 'deserters'.⁷

Kedward's first attempt to enter Parliament, as Liberal candidate for Hull Central in the 'coupon' election of December 1918, was a failure. He lost to a couponed Conservative by a mile in a seat that the Liberals were to capture at a by-election a few months later and hold into the early 1920s.⁸

By that time Kedward had taken up the post of minister at the South London Methodist Mission based at the Bermondsey Central Hall on Tower Bridge Road. The South London Mission had been founded in 1889 to propagate Wesleyan Methodism in the slums of Bermondsey and the surrounding areas of Southwark and Camberwell. In 1900 a vast Central Hall was opened with room for congregations of two thousand worshippers. It also served as a welfare, cultural and educational centre for the district. The superintendent from 1909 to 1918 was Reverend Dr John Scott Lidgett (1854–1953), regarded by some as the greatest Methodist preacher since Wesley, who went on to serve as the first president of the unified Methodist Conference in 1932. Scott Lidgett was an exponent of the Methodist Forward movement

that justified Methodists taking up social concerns on theological grounds and, as an active Liberal, also served as an alderman on Bermondsey Borough Council and from 1905 to 1928 as a member and alderman of the London County Council, where he led the Progressive group from 1918 to 1928.⁹

Kedward continued this tradition of Methodist social and Liberal political activism after succeeding Lidgett as superintendent of the Mission at the end of the First World War. He was a member of Bermondsey Borough Council from 1920–25, serving as Chairman of the Finance Committee, and also sat on the Board of Guardians.

Bermondsey was one of the poorest and most deprived boroughs in London, with large stretches of old and dilapidated Victorian cottages and ill-lit and unsanitary tenements. It contained some of the worst overcrowding and highest mortality rates in the capital. It was overwhelmingly working class, with an estimated middle-class population of only 2.4 per cent and not a single middle-class street in the entire borough. The main sources of employment were the Surrey Docks, Thames riverside work of various kinds, the centuries-old tanning and leather-dressing industry, street trading, and, for women, domestic service, charring and making clothes. Health problems, alcoholism (only Shoreditch had a higher number of pubs per capita) and extreme poverty were rife.¹⁰

In the 1920s and even into the 1930s, the political battle in such deprived areas of south and east London was generally between the ascendant, and locally usually leftist, Labour Party and socially progressive Liberals, often with significant nonconformist or sometimes Jewish backing.¹¹ Before the First World War Bermondsey had mostly been a solidly Liberal seat with only occasional Tory victories. The new Bermondsey West seat was a rare Asquithian Liberal victory in the 1918 general

election when the sitting MP, H. J. Glanville, held the seat comfortably against a Lloyd George Coalition Liberal and Dr Alfred Salter, the Labour candidate.¹² Glanville retired in 1922 and Kedward was selected as Liberal candidate in his place. This was the first of three tough contests between Kedward and Salter.

The saintly Salter was a formidable opponent. A prize-winning medical student, he had dedicated himself to practice in the Bermondsey slums where, after serving as a Progressive (Liberal) on the LCC and Bermondsey Borough Council, he helped form the Bermondsey Independent Labour Party in 1908 and stood as an ILP candidate in a parliamentary by-election in 1909. He was a Quaker, pacifist, republican and prohibitionist. During the First World War he had been a conscientious objector. His wife Ada was also a Labour pioneer, serving as Mayor of Bermondsey in 1922, the first woman Labour mayor in the country.

Salter's appeal to the voters captured well the millenarian vision of the Labour Party's radicalism in the 1920s. He declared that 'frankly I am in politics to abolish the existing system'. The Labour Party's aim was to win a parliamentary majority 'so that peacefully, constitutionally and in the orderly British fashion we may effect the transition from the tottering, crumbling, worn-out capitalist state to a juster and better Social Order'. He was not backward in identifying the Labour Party with God's work:

I derive my politics from my religion. I believe that Jesus Christ came here to tell men ... how the Kingdom of Heaven might be established on earth. Jesus Christ ... taught us certain principles, which if applied to our personal, social and collective life, will make a new world, and will redeem mankind from the present hell which the ignorance, folly and wickedness of statesmen and peoples have created. I believe that the Labour Party is

essentially endeavouring to put these principles into practice ...'

Compared with this, the Reverend Kedward's appeals to religion were moderate.¹³

In 1922 Salter more than trebled the Labour vote to win the seat against a divided opposition. Kedward, standing as an Asquithian Liberal against a Lloyd Georgeite, gathered up the majority of the Liberal vote, and an unofficial Conservative came in fourth.¹⁴

Salter's victory prompted the anti-Labour forces to unite behind Kedward for the 1923 general election. As a Liberal-Labour straight fight the issue of free trade versus protection that dominated the election elsewhere was less of a litmus test in Bermondsey West. Kedward stood for free trade, but declared that it was 'not enough in itself', and called for a constructive social programme of housing and infrastructure investment, training and education, extension of health and unemployment insurance and wider old-age pensions. Salter's attitude to the tariff issue was: 'We know how bad things are today under Free Trade. Under Protection they would be worse.'

It was a rowdy campaign. The Liberals put out a leaflet claiming that two of their meetings had been broken up by Labour supporters. Labour retorted with leaflets accusing the Liberals of lying and Kedward of 'whining and snivelling about interruptions'.¹⁵ Despite a small further increase in the Labour vote, Kedward won the seat for the Liberals.¹⁶ The Salter camp attributed their defeat to personal attacks and the 'Turkey vote': during the campaign the South London Mission had distributed 3,628 Christmas turkeys 'with Mr Kedward's compliments', compared with only half that number the previous December.¹⁷

In the 1924 Parliament Kedward spoke a few times, mainly on constituency and ex-servicemen issues, and he also seems to have taken a firm Gladstonian line



Roderick Kedward, 'The Fighting Parson'; scenes from the Tithe War protests; Kedward election logo.

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on sound public finance. He was one of thirteen Liberal rebels to vote with Conservatives in protest at the Labour government's decision to cancel the order preventing George Lansbury's Poplar Board of Guardians from exceeding the cap on outdoor relief.¹⁸

The pact with the Tories and loud anti-communist propaganda directed against the Labour Party were not enough to save Kedward in the Liberal debacle at the 1924 general election. Salter won back the seat with a swing of nearly 10 per cent as the Labour vote surged by over 3,000, drawing in both new and ex-Liberal voters.¹⁹ The assault on Labour over the Russian loan and the Zinoviev letter appeared to have had little impact, perhaps because of the lack of middle-class voters in the constituency. The Liberals put out a leaflet blaming their defeat on the wealth of the Labour machine, its continuous 'Socialistic propaganda' and its control of the local council and relief committees and claimed that Kedward had been subjected to false allegations, personal abuse and intimidation.²⁰

It was true that the local Labour organisation was crushing the Liberals. By 1925 Labour had established the monopoly of power in Bermondsey that was to last for over fifty years.²¹ The 1929 election confirmed Bermondsey West as a safe Labour seat with over 60 per cent of the vote, while the Liberals fell back to just over 20 per cent, a little ahead of the Conservatives. Salter managed to hold his seat in the Labour collapse of 1931 (one of only five London Labour MPs to do so) and remained an MP until his death in 1945. By the late 1930s Labour had some 3,150 members in West Bermondsey – 25 per cent of their voters. Between 1945 and 1964 Bermondsey was a virtual 'one-party state'. As one pro-Labour observer later wrote: 'with the exception of the Communist Party, and the short-lived and unstable tenants' associations organised in private tenements, there were no other community organisations, tenants'

organisations, amenity groups or pressure groups outside the Labour Party.²² The independent Liberal cause was extinguished to revive only in the 1980s when Simon Hughes won his famous by-election victory.²³

Kedward evidently understood that West Bermondsey was unlikely to return him to Westminster after 1924. Perhaps he felt too, after his bruising fights with Salter, that to continue high-profile political activity would compromise his religious and social work in the borough. He transferred his political attention to his home town of Ashford in Kent. On the face of it this was even less promising territory for a Liberal. Ashford had been solidly Tory since the constituency was formed in 1885 and had stayed Conservative even in the Liberal landslide of 1906. The Liberals had not contested the seat between 1910 and 1924, when their candidate came in a distant runner-up with 22 per cent of the votes, 38 per cent behind the Conservative.²⁴

Nevertheless, Kedward won the seat at in 1929 in perhaps the biggest upset of that general election with a swing of over 20 per cent.²⁵ None of the other Kent seats showed anything like this Liberal surge. Doubtless Kedward's local connections, popularity and campaigning flair were important factors in his victory. His granddaughter recalled that 'as a child attending worship in the various country chapels, my grandfather's reputation was such, that I basked in a kind of warm glow every time our connection was mentioned! People genuinely loved him.'²⁶ His Bermondsey election battles, during which he produced a range of leaflets and letters to the voters, a very professional local newsheet and eye-catching publicity material, showed him as being every bit as effective as modern Liberal 'community politicians'. He also benefited from the fact that Ashford was one of the hotbeds of the growing protest movement against the payment of tithes, a

cause he energetically took up. It was to become the focus of the latter years of his political career.

The ancient but declining practice of collecting tithes in the form of a proportion of crops harvested was converted by the Tithe Act of 1836 into fixed cash payments that were effectively a tax on land rather than produce. The revenues went mainly to the Church of England to pay for the upkeep of the rural clergy, although some went to secular recipients such as certain Oxford colleges. The burden of tithes was unevenly distributed, with some land free of tithes, and land traditionally used to grow corn or hops subject to higher rates. The tithe was naturally a bone of contention with nonconformist farmers, whose grievance was taken up by the Liberal Party. In the 1880s a 'tithe war' in Wales had helped to bring the young Lloyd George to prominence and fuelled the calls for the disestablishment of the Welsh Church that were finally enacted in 1919.

The conflict subsided between 1891, when landlords were made liable for the payment of the tithe, and 1920–21, when farmers again became liable at the same time as wartime production subsidies were removed and the agricultural depression of the inter-war period began. Many small farmers who had bought farms in the short-lived boom after 1918 not only now faced collapsing food and land prices but also, to their surprise, found themselves liable to pay tithes. The penalty for non-payment was distraint of goods, in other words the seizure and auction of crops or farm animals. The burden of the tithe was felt particularly in south-east England, and especially in the corn- and hop-growing areas of Kent and East Anglia.

From the mid 1920s a movement of protest and passive resistance to the tithe gathered strength, led by the National Tithe-payers Association (NTA). Although non-party and non-sectarian, the NTA attracted significant support from nonconformist Liberals. In

Kedward won the seat at in 1929 in perhaps the biggest upset of that general election with a swing of over 20 per cent.

the 1920s the Liberals remained a force in many rural areas and at the 1923 election, and to a lesser extent in 1929, were the main beneficiary of the protest vote in the countryside. Kedward became the leading spokesman for the NTA in Parliament, and in 1931 unsuccessfully attempted to introduce a Tithe Remission Bill.²⁷

In the 1931 Liberal split Kedward sided with Sir John Simon and defended Ashford as a Liberal National. He had never been an ardent free trader and no doubt recognised that he stood little hope of holding his seat without Conservative support. He was one of a number of radical non-conformists whose social Liberal outlook was no barrier to their choosing the Liberal National camp. However, Kedward was too radical for the Ashford Tories, who objected to his record of frequent voting for the Labour government, and above all his identification with the anti-tithe campaign. The critics were led by Sir Auckland Geddes, a former minister under Lloyd George, and Edward Hardy, chairman of the Ashford Conservative Association, who attacked Kedward's support for 'lawless attempts' to defeat payment of tithes. In the absence of a Labour candidate, the Tories decided to stand against Kedward, who was thus one of only three Liberal National MPs to face Conservative opposition. The tithe issue seems to have counted against Kedward who was defeated by a wide margin.²⁸ Paradoxically the anti-tithe campaign included Conservatives amongst its prominent supporters, including later the chairman of the neighbouring Canterbury Conservative Association.²⁹

Following his defeat Kedward threw himself single-mindedly into the anti-tithe movement. In 1932 he became president of the NTA, remaining in that post until his death in 1937. He resumed his youthful career as a 'peripatetic agitator', touring the country whipping up resistance. As Carol Twinch, the historian of the 'tithe

war' puts it, 'during the years 1931 to 1935 the tithepayers' mood generally was one of angry defiance against the Church such as had not been witnessed in rural Britain for a very long time'.³⁰ Kedward's flair for publicity was evident in the NTA's passive obstruction of distraint raids on farms. One such confrontation took place in 1935 when Kedward's farm in Kent was raided for non-payment of tithes to Merton College. Twenty-one pigs, eight cows and two calves were seized, but no bids received in the subsequent auction. An effigy of the Archbishop of Canterbury was burnt and a pig sold by the Tithepayers Association for £20.³¹

Both wings of the Liberal Party stood formally aloof from the campaign, but it received loud support from Lloyd George and individual support from Simonite MPs, in particular Edgar Granville, J. Morris Jones and Viscount Elmley. The *Liberal News Chronicle* and *The Star* also backed the protests. Kedward returned to the Liberals and stood as candidate in a by-election in Ashford in March 1933. Lloyd George came to speak for him and was given a tumultuous reception. However the Liberals again lost,³² a defeat that Lloyd George, in a letter to Kedward, attributed to the failings of Herbert Samuel's leadership:

The result of the election must have been a great disappointment to you as it was to all of us, but I am convinced that no one else could have done nearly as well as you did. You put up a first-rate fight. You are the only man who would have polled 11,000 votes for Liberalism in a Kentish constituency. I am afraid that it means that for the time being Liberalism is down and out in the English constituencies. Its fortunes have been mishandled very badly during the last two years. We rallied 5,300,000 voters to our flag in 1929. I doubt now whether we could gather together one-third of that number. There is, of course, a reaction in the world against Liberal principles. That is

**Kedward
threw him-
self single-
mindedly
into the
anti-tithe
movement
... he
resumed
his youth-
ful career
as a 'peri-
patetic
agitator',
touring the
country
whipping
up resist-
ance.**

what always happens in a panic. People everywhere are frightened and are calling for dictatorships.³³

However it was clear that the anti-tithe cause was only a limited vote-winner for the Liberals, even with Kedward as candidate. This was largely because of its all-party character. Even Mosley's British Union of Fascists tried to jump on the bandwagon and nineteen blackshirts were arrested in an extended 'siege' at Wrotham in Suffolk in 1934. Its appeal was also limited to farmers. The farm-workers' trade union, linked with Labour, was lukewarm.

Following a Royal Commission, a new Tithe Act in 1936 converted the tithe into an annuity redemption payment, integrated into the tax system, which would phase out the tithe altogether over sixty years. Kedward and the NTA opposed this and 130 MPs, including almost all the Liberal MPs, voted against.

Kedward died following a sudden illness (a duodenal ulcer) on 3 March 1937. The tithe movement subsided soon afterwards. His pivotal role was commemorated in the Tithe Memorial, erected by the A20, just outside his home village of Hothfield:

In memory of Roderick Morris Kedward, President of the National Tithepayers Association 1931-37, MP for Ashford 1929-31. Born 1881. Died 1937. This stone is a token of gratitude for the splendid service he rendered in the tithepayers' cause and of admiration of his character. This site forms part of Beachbrook Farm where he was born and where he suffered repeated distraints of tithe.³⁴

Dr Jaime Reynolds studied at the London School of Economics and works in international environmental policy.

- 1 See P. Harris, *Forty Years in and out of Parliament* (London, 1947), p. 31 for a description of the constituency before 1914. Harris was candidate for Ashford in 1906.
- 2 Thomas Champness (1832-1905), a

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- leading nineteenth-century Methodist evangelist preacher and founder of *Joyful News*.
- 3 C. Twinch, 'Roderick Morris Kedward (1881–1937)', *Bygone Kent*, Vol. 24, no. 11 (November 2003), pp. 642–51.
 - 4 *Methodist Recorder*, 20 October 1960
 - 5 1922 election leaflet, 'R. M. Kedward – By One of his Admirers' Southwark Local Studies Library
 - 6 <http://www.1914-18.net/31div.htm>. See also the novel *Covenant with Death* by J. Harris (1961) which describes the raising and slaughter of the 31st Division.
 - 7 *Bermondsey Election News 1924: How the Labour Party deserted*. Southwark Local Studies Library
 - 8 Result: Sykes (Coalition Conservative) 13,805 (80.1 per cent); Kedward (L) 3,434 (19.9 per cent), turnout 54.9 per cent, C majority 10,371 (60.2 per cent).
 - 9 John D. Beasley, *The Bitter Cry Heard and Heeded – The Story of the South London Mission 1889–1989* (South London Mission, London, 1990); Rev. W. Spencer, *Glory in the Garret* (Epworth, London, 1932); A. Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett – the Archbishop of British Methodism?* (Epworth Press, Peterborough, 2003). The main Central Hall was demolished in 1967.
 - 10 Sir H. Llewellyn Smith et al., *New Survey of London Life and Labour Vol iii Social Survey 1 – Eastern Area* (P. S. King, London, 1932) p. 357 60.
 - 11 Other working-class Liberal strongholds in the 1920s and 1930s included Lambeth North, Southwark North, Bethnal Green South-west and North-east, Shoreditch and Whitechapel.
 - 12 Result: Glanville (L) 4,260 (40.6 per cent), Scriven (CoL) 2,998 (28.5 per cent), Salter (Lab) 1,956 (18.6 per cent), Becker (Ind) 1,294 (12.3 per cent), turnout 48.5 per cent, L majority 1,262 (12.1 per cent).
 - 13 *Election Address of Dr Alfred Salter, 6 December 1923; and leaflet: 'Back to Sanity: Vote for Kedward, A Worker for the Workers', 1923*, Southwark Local Studies Library
 - 14 Result: Salter (Lab) 7,550 (44.6 per cent), Kedward (L) 5,225 (30.9 per cent), Scriven (Nat L) 2,814 (16.6 per cent), Nordon (Ind C) 1,328 (7.9 per cent), turnout 64.6 per cent, Lab majority 2,325 (13.7 per cent). Scriven received official Conservative endorsement.
 - 15 Liberal leaflet: *Fair Play* and Labour leaflets *Foul Play versus Fair Play* and *Foul Play: that is a lie*. Southwark Local Studies Library
 - 16 Result: Kedward (L) 9,186 (52.5 per cent), Salter (Lab) 8,298 (47.5 per cent), turnout 66.1 per cent, L majority 888 (5.0 per cent). There was a definite Liberal–Conservative pact, see C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment – Electoral Politics in Britain 1922–1929* (Macmillan London 1975), p. 160.
 - 17 F. Brockway, *Bermondsey Story – the Life of Alfred Salter* (Geo Allen & Unwin, London, 1949), p. 118.
 - 18 C. Cook, *The Age of Alignment*, p. 235–6.
 - 19 Result: Salter (Lab) 11,578 (57.2 per cent), Kedward (L) 8,676 (42.8 per cent), turnout 75.0 per cent, Lab majority 2,902 (14.4 per cent).
 - 20 SLSL, *Bermondsey Liberal Association leaflet*, November 1924.
 - 21 They held the Parliamentary and London County Council seats and dominated Bermondsey Borough Council and the Board of Guardians. The composition of Bermondsey Borough Council over the decade was as follows:
- | 19-- | 19 | 22 | 25 | 28 |
|--|----|----|----|----|
| Labour | 24 | 35 | 48 | 48 |
| Progressive (Liberal) | 27 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Electoral Association (anti-Socialist) | 0 | 10 | 6 | 6 |
| Independent | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
- 22 S. Goss, *Local Labour and Local Government – A study of changing interests, politics and policy in Southwark from 1919–1982* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 41.
 - 23 Salter held the seat in 1931 by ninety-one votes against a Conservative and a Communist. Labour had very comfortable victories over Liberal Nationals in 1935 and 1945 and a Liberal also stood in 1945 winning just 8 per cent of the vote.
 - 24 Result: Steel (Con) 15,159 (60.4 per cent), Humphrey (L) 5,487 (21.8 per cent), Noble (Lab) 4,473 (17.8 per cent), Con majority 9,672 (38.6 per cent), turnout 70.4 per cent.
 - 25 Result: Kedward (L) 15,753 (46.0 per cent), Steel (Con) 14,579 (42.6 per cent), Follick (Lab) 3,885 (11.4 per cent), L majority 1,174 (3.4 per cent), turnout 75.3 per cent.
 - 26 Letter from Georgia Reed to the author, 16 June 2004. I am grateful for Georgia Reed and Prof. H. Roderick Kedward for sharing information with me on their grandfather. They have confirmed that apart from a few photographs, press cuttings and the quoted letter from Lloyd George, none of their grandfather's political papers have survived – 'he was rather secretive about his later life and didn't keep any biographical material'.
 - 27 On the tithe war see further: C. Twinch, *Tithe War 1918–1939 – The Countryside in Revolt* (Media, Norwich, 2001); and on the historical background see E. J. Evans, *The Contentious Tithe – the Tithe Problem and English Agriculture 1750–1850* (London 1976).
 - 28 A. Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991), p. 175. Result: Knatchbull (Con) 20,891 (58.7 per cent), Kedward (L Nat) 14,681 (41.3 per cent), Con majority 6,210 (17.4 per cent), turnout 75.9 per cent.
 - 29 The president of the NTA in 1931 was Viscount Lymington, a Tory MP. Other Tory supporters included R. A. Butler.
 - 30 Twinch, *Tythe War*, p. 81.
 - 31 *The Star*, 5 March 1937.
 - 32 Result: Spens (Con) 16,051 (47.7 per cent), Kedward (L) 11,423 (33.9 per cent), Beck (Lab) 6,178 (18.4 per cent), Con majority 4,628 (13.8 per cent), turnout 70.9 per cent.
 - 33 Twinch, *Tythe War*, p. 126.
 - 34 http://www.historic-kent.co.uk/vill_h.htm. It was moved to the new Ashford cattle market in the 1990s.

REPORTS

Liberals and organised labour

Fringe meeting, March 2005, Harrogate, with David Powell and Keith Laybourn
Report by **Chris Gurney**

With the 2005 general election not too far in the future, Liberal Democrats gathered in a packed-out Charter Suite in the conference

hotel in Harrogate for a scintillating discussion from two academics about the relationship between the Liberal Party and organised labour. The loss of support from

organised labour during the late Victorian and Edwardian period was clearly a central element in the decline of the Liberal Party as a significant electoral and political force. Once this confidence in the party was gone, the Liberals never got it back and trade union and labour issues have never since had the same high priority in Liberal politics. Our two speakers, whilst coming from very differing perspectives and with differing motivations, sought to examine why and how it was that organised labour broke away from the Liberal Party and the impact this had on the Liberal vote.

David Powell (Head of the History Programme, York St John College, and author of *British Politics and the Labour Question: 1868–1990*) began the session by explaining that the brief that he had been given, the history of Liberals and organised labour since the nineteenth century, was both rather vague and too broad for the time allotted to him. He stressed that the relationship between the Liberal Party and organised labour was not static and that its dynamism reflected the evolution of both in changing contexts. He therefore hoped that by focusing on the organisational and intellectual elements of the relationship between the Liberal Party and organised labour he could elucidate three distinctive periods that serve to demonstrate the dynamism of a gradually distancing and disintegrating relationship and also to prompt some interesting questions in the present context.

The earliest period that Dr Powell wished to focus on was in the mid-nineteenth century and saw the origins of both the Liberal Party and labour organisation. This period was when relations between the two groups were at their best, partly, he argued because of the strong relationship between Gladstonians and skilled labour. Many members of both groups believed in the ‘common interests’ of capital and labour in society and this helped to sustain the alliance

into the late nineteenth century, despite evident tensions in areas such as trade-union reform. Many of the first working men elected to the House of Commons were members of the Liberal–labour alliance, helping to provide further cross-fertilisation and co-operation between the two groups. For many, Liberals and organised labour were ‘natural allies’ and they saw no reason for this to change.

The second period that was important in the Liberal–labour alliance began in the mid 1880s. In comparison to the earlier period of co-operation, this was one of challenge and contest within the relationship. The changing context of industrial relations, characterised by the increasing numbers and militancy of disputes and increasing hostility from both employers and the courts towards organised labour, meant that the assumption by many of harmony between the interests of the ‘two halves’ of industry was becoming more difficult to sustain. Some organisations, such as the Social Democratic Federation and militant union groups, sought to challenge the ‘closeness’ of the relationship and the very ‘naturalness’ that had been taken for granted in the earlier period, seeking to develop organisations and alliances that would represent the workers themselves.

This increasing confrontation did not mean that co-operation was impossible, and at the 1892 general election twenty candidates stood on a Lib–Lab platform demonstrating the strength of the alliance in many areas. Liberal Party support for many union reforms had secured continuing loyalty from many sections of labour. This was not to the satisfaction of all, however, and the Independent Labour Party was set up in 1893 seeking to provide an ‘independent’ (from Liberals) voice for organised labour in the House of Commons.

This challenge to the alliance was to have interesting ideological consequences. The late nineteenth

The loss of support from organised labour during the late Victorian and Edwardian period was clearly a central element in the decline of the Liberal Party as a significant electoral and political force.

century was to see the rise of a ‘New Liberalism’ that sought to respond to both unionism and Marxism and to demonstrate the continuing relevance of Liberalism for the next century. Hobhouse’s 1893 text *The Labour Movement* argued for the positive and progressive role that could be played by trade unions as well as more traditional liberal concerns such as the importance of organised self-interest and competition for the good of all. Things were not quite this simple, however. Hobson, writing in 1899, warned of the dangers that an over-powerful trade union might have. He saw that the possibilities of a conflict between trade-union interests (whether directly those of workers or indirectly those generated by bureaucratic organisations) and the wider ‘social good’ meant that there remained a vital role for the state in regulating union activities and preventing them from becoming too powerful.

The years either side of the First World War provided the third of the periods that Dr Powell argued was essential for understanding the relationship between the Liberal Party and organised labour. This period saw the final dissolution of the relationship between the two groups. Whilst the early twentieth century’s Liberal governments adopted many trade unions reforms and legislative proposals that found support in the labour movement, the trend was by no means unidirectional. Many in the labour movement, for example, considered Churchill’s policy of labour exchanges to be, in fact, a source of non-unionised labour, the ‘industrial reserve army’ that Marx had prophesied, revealing Liberals as being in league with capital. Whilst on the other side trade union demands for freedom from liability revealed them to be the anti-individualist organisations that many Liberals had always said they were.

Increasing industrial unrest placed the Liberal government in a difficult position. Traditional Liberal attitudes suggested that the state’s role as mediator would

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place it in a perfect position to act as 'referee' between the interests of labour and capital. However, use of the army to quell industrial unrest only served to create greater distance between the Liberal Party and organised labour. To many this was sufficient evidence that the Liberal state, far from being an impartial referee (as it and Liberals claimed it was), was actually firmly in the pocket of capital. The Miners Federation was the first union formally to affiliate to the new Labour Party. By 1913 union ballots for political funds were donating most of their resources to the Labour Party, and, worst of all, local election arrangements for a progressive alliance to keep out the Conservatives had broken down.

If the situation was not already bad, the First World War only worsened it. The splits in the Liberal Party over entry into the war meant that the focus of much Liberal attention was directed at reuniting the Liberal 'family' rather than seeking to maintain an even more complicated alliance with organised labour. The Liberal Party was slowly pushed into the political wilderness. Despite positive attempts to 'rethink' Liberalism (such as *The Yellow Book* in 1928), in the new context of 'industrial politics' the Liberal Party remained politically unpopular as the Labour Party became the new 'natural' home of organised labour.

Dr Powell closed his remarks by bringing us back to the present day. He suggested that the relationship between the Liberal Party and organised labour had to be seen in the light of the changing content and context of the labour question. This raises questions for us in the present. Thatcher's reforms in the 1980s have created a different and shifting industrial context. We have seen the decline of union membership and the destruction of Britain's manufacturing and extractive industries, the traditional backbone of the union movement. There has also been a commensurate increase in the

number of skilled workers in the labour market. These factors, combined with weakening institutional links between the trade union movement and the Labour Party, suggests that there may now be 'something of an opportunity for a renewal' of links between Liberals and organised labour. The breakdown of 'class,' the rise of the multiple interests of labour combined with increasing focus on both political and economic citizenship mean that Liberals, always the ones to exalt the individual and their interests, may be in an ideal opportunity to exploit this new position.

The focus of our second speaker, Professor Laybourn (Professor of History, Huddersfield University, and author of *Liberalism and the Rise of Labour, 1890–1918*), was somewhat different from that of Dr Powell. Rather than focus on organisational and ideological changes in the relationship between the Liberal Party and organised labour, he sought to provide a case study on relations between Liberals and labour in the textile district of West Riding between 1880 and the eve of the First World War. This had traditionally been a Liberal heartland (in 1886 nineteen of the twenty-three MPs from West Riding were Liberals) but by 1914 the Independent Labour Party had seriously challenged this hegemony and by 1929 only one Liberal MP remained. Professor Laybourn sought to explain why this situation had developed, such that by 1913 the *Huddersfield Herald* was able to declare the 'passing of Liberalism.'

The first factor that Professor Laybourn focused on was a strong sense of anti-Liberalism among trade unions and the labour movement. It was felt by many that the Liberal Party was insensitive to the needs of the labour movement, and the trade unions were to play a central role in capturing working-class support from the Liberal Party. These views were reinforced by the fact that local employers seen as exploiting workers (such as Alfred Illingworth and Sir James Kitson)

were active in local Liberal associations. Not only this but the refusal of many Liberals to support the adoption of trade-union-friendly candidates further served to drive people away from the Liberal Party. 'Illingworthism' (attempts to subsume union demands under the Liberal banner) gradually gave way to 'Hardieism,' which pushed for the democratic involvement of the trade union movement in political activity.

Liberal Party responses to industrial unrest in the West Riding in the 1880s and 1890s provided further impetus for the breakdown of relations between Liberals and organised labour. In the Huddersfield textile strikes in 1883, Liberals came down on the side of the employers against labour. The Manningham mill strikes of 1890–91, which lasted six months, saw 5,000 people on strike, acts of violence and the reading of the Riot Act. Local Liberals dominated the 'watch committee' and tried to stop union meetings that sought to discuss strike action. They also supported the use of troops against strikers. Given the importance that was often placed on strikes as a form of political activity by those in the labour movement it was hardly surprising that using the army would drive more support away from the Liberal Party. All this added further credence to the idea that both Liberals and Conservatives were 'capitalists first' and only 'politicians second'. Trade unionists began to appreciate that 'you cannot give political support to a man who economically opposes you'. The Liberal Party was offering harmony and compromise whilst trade unionists wanted support and independent representation.

These developments were coupled with the rise of socialist societies and independent workers' movements across the region. These provided a sphere in which workers could organise together, develop self-reliance and also develop political programmes. These included the formation of

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the Socialist League in Bradford and Leeds, Labour Union clubs as well as more 'cultural' aspects of life such as socialist Sunday schools, the Clarion cycling clubs, and support from some Anglicans and nonconformists. In this way organised labour began to arise as a genuinely independent movement from the Liberal Party and to break the hegemony of Liberals as the 'best representatives of the working class'. What had been the hope of John Stuart Mill in the 1850s was being utterly refuted by locally organised labour groups developing outside the Liberal Party giving organised labour the opportunity to develop their own interests and increasingly to see themselves as the best guarantors of their fulfilment.

Laybourn finished by arguing that the Liberal Party had neglected the needs of workers at their cost. It was a pity that he had not focused more on *how* the Liberal Party had failed to articulate the needs of workers in its programmes, rather than simply describing the failure and Labour's rise to fill the vacuum. At times it seemed to him as if it were self-evident that the Labour Party should represent organised labour best, and that it was merely a matter of workers coming to realise this truth rather than of anything more complex. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the trade unions had often been suspicious of Liberal reforms (as in 1906–14) and the failure of the Liberal Party to involve workers in decision-making processes could have only exacerbated this. The Liberal Party, by assuming that it knew what the workers needed better than they did themselves, only served to drive itself further away from organised labour movements that sought actually to involve working people in the decisions that affected their lives.

Dr Powell and Professor Laybourn provided interesting and challenging discussions on the collapse of relations between the Liberal Party and organised labour in the nineteenth and early

What had been the hope of John Stuart Mill in the 1850s was being utterly refuted by locally organised labour groups developing outside the Liberal Party.

twentieth century. Whilst both brought differing perspectives to bear on the question of this relationship, it was interesting how both presentations brought out the problem of the Liberal Party's assumption that it was the 'natural' home of the working class and the effect that that had on attitudes towards organised labour and socialist movements. After all, if you are their 'natural home' any challenge to that is likely to be seen as misguided, rather than as

necessarily dangerous. Is the idea that the Labour Party is the 'natural' home of the working class an idea that has come to an end? Is the Labour Party aware of this? Is now a time for new possibilities of articulating alliances between Liberals and organised labour groups on issues of mutual concern? Who knows, but what seems clear is that it cannot get worse than Liberal-labour relations in the early and mid-twentieth century.

Civil liberties in war and peace

Evening meeting, January 2005, with Professor Clive Emsley and Julian Dee

Report by **Neil Stockley**

Since the events of 11 September 2001 and the so-called 'war on terror' began, the question of balancing the need to protect the state against the desire to promote individual freedom has been at top of the political agenda. Liberal Democrats take considerable pride in our steadfast commitment to civil liberties. We roundly condemned the detention of foreign nationals for an indefinite period without trial in Belmarsh prison. We were against the government's proposals to detain terror suspects without trial and its plans to place them under house arrest and to apply other restrictions on liberty, with only limited appeal to judges. We oppose Labour's plans to bring in compulsory identity cards. In his personal introduction to *Freedom, Fairness and Trust*, the party's 'pre-manifesto' document before the 2005 general election, Charles Kennedy declared that 'our Liberal background makes us wary of an over-mighty state and dedicated to civil liberties'.

But is there really a Liberal heritage on matters of personal freedom; if so, how can we describe it? Did our political

antecedents really champion civil liberties, even when the state perceived itself to be under threat? This meeting gave answers that were different to what many Liberals might expect, or, indeed, be comfortable with.

Professor Clive Emsley explained how the Whig Charles James Fox had 'kept the flame of liberty alive' during the 'reign of terror' of William Pitt the Younger during the 1790s. When the French Revolution happened, it was initially viewed sympathetically in this country. However, as Professor Emsley put it, 'things went a bit nasty' after English and Irish radicals took inspiration from events over the channel. They wanted to reform Parliament and create a true democracy. Some spoke of overthrowing King George III. In 1793, war broke out with revolutionary France as the Pitt ministry, which had been formed four years earlier and supported by the majority of Whigs, sought to save the King and the state.

Professor Emsley gave a grim summary of the steps taken by Pitt's government. These included: the suspension of habeas corpus in 1794 and 1795;

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the 'gagging acts' of 1795 that forbade criticism of the government; the extension of the laws of treason and sedition; the Seditious Meetings Act that required any public meeting of more than fifty persons to be authorised by a magistrate; the Incitement to Mutiny Act 1797 that followed naval uprisings; the legislation against the administration of unlawful oaths and the Suppression of Treasonable and Seditious Societies Act, both of which were aimed primarily at secret societies in Ireland; the 'ferocious' suppression of the Irish rebellion in 1798; and the Combination Acts of 1799 and 1800 that forbade societies or amalgamations of persons for the purpose of political reform. Pitt's justification for these measures was that they were necessary to preserve English liberties and the rights of free Englishmen that had been so hard won in 1688. Similar arguments have been many heard many times as governments of different political measures have tried to justify the suppression of personal freedoms.

For his part, Fox continued strongly to support the Revolution and, with a small minority of Whigs, vehemently opposed Pitt's measures as excessive infringements of personal liberties. He even went as far as perjuring himself when supporting one United Irishman who was put on trial for treason. In 1797, Fox became so frustrated with opposing the government in Parliament that he led around fifty followers in seceding from Parliament.

Fox's actions are often treated as a model of a Whig taking a principled stance, however lonely, against Tory excesses. But Professor Emsley seemed gently to counsel the audience against applying simplistic or anachronistic thinking to the 1790s. He stressed that the war with revolutionary France was different from those that had gone before. To those in power at the time, the future of the crown itself appeared to be stake. The war was fought by mass, national armies that had

been conscripted. Above all, the war was ideological in character, against the French Revolution and spurred by the threat of a similar insurrection in Britain. By the late 1790s, Fox was not merely a democratic reformer. He was inclined to use the language of 'revolution and insurrection' and had even come to believe that if such momentous events came to pass in this country, he and his supporters could head a revolutionary regime.

Fox accused the Pitt government of 'treading on our liberties'. Professor Emsley then explained how before, during and just after the First World War, 'it was Liberals who were doing the treading'. After the Liberal Party won power in 1906, tensions between Britain and Germany became more acute. The two countries were engaged in a naval arms race. The Liberal government became more concerned about German spies in this country and, in 1911, passed the Official Secrets Act, making the disclosure of any official information without lawful authority a criminal offence. The Act was introduced into Parliament late on a Friday afternoon and passed into law in just one hour but was to provide the legislative bulwark against open government for some eighty years.

Even more draconian measures were to follow. In the days after war was declared in 1914, the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, persuaded Parliament to pass the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA). This legislation and its successive amendments, along with the regulations promulgated under it, placed a wide variety of restrictions on freedom of movement and assembly. DORA gave the government powers to control labour, requisition buildings or land needed for the war effort and, in time, to take control of industry and food production. Professor Emsley might also have mentioned the Munitions of War Act of June 1915, which made strikes and lockouts illegal, reduced factory pay and working conditions and

altered the routing of supplies so that munitions factories and related industries had priority over non-essential enterprises. Once again, the government had a bold justification: the notion that the country was embroiled in 'a new kind of war'.

Many Liberals were horrified at this turn of events and there were protests outside Parliament. Although Professor Emsley did not mention it, the conventional wisdom is that most prosecutions under DORA arose from accidental breaches of the comprehensive legislation rather than protests against infringements of civil or industrial liberties. But DORA was also used after the war ended, most notably to deal with communist agitators, who seemed to be the new threat to the state in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Lloyd George's coalition replaced DORA with the Emergency Powers Act of 1920, which gave the government (through the sovereign) powers to declare a national emergency by proclamation.

Professor Emsley concluded that the way a party balances the protection of civil liberties with the imperatives of war depends on the situation in which it finds itself. In short, there is plenty of room for principle in opposition but 'if you're in power, you think you need to preserve government, the state and society as we know it'. In this respect, he argued that Asquith, Lloyd George and their Liberal colleagues were no different to members of the other parties. I believe that, as with the example of Fox, we should be careful before drawing too many definitive conclusions about the true nature of Liberalism. No political value system is frozen in time and Liberal attitudes towards many of the challenges that faced Asquith and Lloyd George have developed considerably since that time. For instance, I have great doubts whether a Liberal Democrat government led by Charles Kennedy, even if it found itself

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in similar circumstances, would immediately pass an Official Secrets Act or a DORA. It would be even less likely to be responsible for a Belmarsh or the type of anti-terrorism legislation that Labour produced earlier this year.

The second speaker, Julian Dee, explored Britain's experience with identity cards and national registration during the Second World War and the post-war controversies that eventually led to their abolition. As researcher to the Convenor of the Crossbench Peers in the House of Lords, Mr Dee has studied this country's experience with ID cards between 1939 and 1952 in some detail. But he was very careful neither to endorse nor condemn what took place.

Within days of declaring war on Germany in September 1939, the Chamberlain government persuaded Parliament to pass the National Registration Act, which established the compulsory national registration regime and required all citizens to carry identity cards. Ministers argued that such measures were needed for three purposes: facilitating conscription for the armed forces, protecting national security and enabling rationing to work. Mr Dee suggested that national registration had enabled the wartime authorities to collect manpower data, to enforce night-time curfews in parts of the UK, to identify air raid victims and, after the war, to round up some deserters and avert a possible crime wave. In an interesting observation, he speculated that ID cards may have provided something of an icebreaker or a prompt whereby British reserve or politeness could be put aside, allowing everyday life and transactions potentially to be put into the framework of state officialdom. Perhaps ID cards put both sides of any given transaction on notice that there was a duty of identification and accountability of which the ID cards were a significant part. Still, other powers of identification such as common sense, the usualness of an activity, intuition and community lines

of accountability may have been expected to assume a greater significance.

However, the subsequent discussion showed that the cards did not altogether prevent crime and black marketeering, as they were quite easy to forge and, as Robert Ingham has noted, thousands of deserters remained at large once hostilities ended.

The rationale for identity cards would have seemed to have disappeared when the war was over. But the Attlee Labour government kept the identity card regime in place for its entire six years in office. Julian Dee explained that, by the early 1950s, officials had thirty-nine official reasons for retaining the cards, including the prevention of bigamous marriages! Ministers argued that identity cards were required for the successful administration of the NHS as well as to maintain conscription and rationing on a viable basis. However, as Mr Dee was quick to point out, none of these were adversely affected once identity cards were no longer used. He mentioned that pre-war plans for wartime rationing did not reportedly include an identity card regime.

In February 1952, Mr Crookshank, the new Conservative Health Secretary, finally announced that the public no longer needed to carry identity cards. This decision was spun as a cost-cutting measure: £1 million was saved and 1,500 civil servants were either redeployed or made redundant. Julian Dee suggested that the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, may have provided the real impetus for the change. Indeed, not long before Germany surrendered, he had made an eloquent speech against using identity cards during peacetime.

The Liberal Party did not play a direct role in the ending of identity cards. After all, the Liberals were not simply out of office – the party was now reduced to a tiny rump of MPs and fighting for its very survival. Still, Julian Dee showed that several Liberals,

He told the story of Harry Willcock, a former Liberal councillor and parliamentary candidate, who, in December 1950, was stopped by police for speeding and then refused to produce his identity card.

and one in particular, certainly helped to bring the issue to a head. He told the story of Harry Willcock, a former Liberal councillor and parliamentary candidate, who, in December 1950, was stopped by police for speeding and then refused to produce his identity card. He was duly prosecuted for the latter offence, convicted in the magistrate's court and fined 30/-. For refusing to produce his identity card, the court felt bound to convict him of an offence, but he was granted an absolute discharge.

Willcock opted to challenge the National Registration Act in the High Court. When his case was heard in June 1951, he was represented by a formidable team of Liberal lawyers. The Attorney-General, Sir Frank Soskice, successfully argued that Parliament had legislated in 1939 not to deal with one emergency but with several, undefined emergencies and therefore, legislation requiring the carrying of identity cards remained valid. Despite ruling against Willcock, Lord Chief Justice Goddard concluded that the statute's definition of 'emergency' was ambiguous. He called on the government to ask Parliament to grant special powers to require the cards to be carried in peacetime. Police officers were soon told that they could only require the cards to be produced in exceptional circumstances.

Between Willcock's conviction and his High Court hearing, the government began to come under pressure to get rid of ID cards. Julian Dee described how members of the Freedom Defence Association (formed by Willcock) demonstrated on the steps of the National Liberal Club and tore up their cards. Later, members of the British Housewives League made a similar protest outside Parliament. After the Willcock case was determined, the Liberal Party leader, Clement Davies, urged the government to repeal the 1939 emergency legislation. Still, there was no mention of identity cards in the party's manifesto for the 1951 general election. Mr Dee

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also explained that after the war a number of Labour and Conservative MPs had also called for identity cards to be scrapped. But he noted that whereas Tories tended to use arguments based on efficiency, Liberals objected because they believed that identity cards infringing basic freedoms of the individual.

I am sure that the actions of Harry Willcock provided the audience with a great deal of reassurance about the nature of the Liberal heritage. It may be

difficult to apply the principles followed by Liberals in the early twenty-first century to our counterparts in the 1790s and the First World War, or vice versa. But the instinctive attitude of modern Liberals to being forced to carry identity cards are, surely, beyond argument. As Harry Willcock said on refusing to produce his ID card when stopped by police on that fateful evening in December 1950, 'I am a Liberal and I am against this sort of thing.'

As Harry Willcock said on refusing to produce his ID card when stopped by police on that fateful evening in December 1950, 'I am a Liberal and I am against this sort of thing.'

while the Conservative government was beginning to recover. What alternative strategy would have worked?

Bill Rodgers

Local pacts

Robert Ingham's article 'Battle of ideas or absence of leadership?' (*Journal of Liberal History* 47) embarks on the tortuous story of Liberal electoral survival at the municipal level after 1945. From a later perspective it is difficult to accommodate the idea of Liberal–Conservative electoral pacts but, having known a number of those involved at the time, I am somewhat more sympathetic.

In many cases Liberal aldermen and councillors had run these boroughs for many years and the – relative – electoral debacle of 1945 left them stranded. Unwilling to see the local Liberal heritage of their earlier hegemony swept aside by a mere national trend, they made whatever local 'dispositions' they could to retain office.

By 1960 it was clear that any residual political argument for local electoral pacts had disappeared and that even the electoral case was no longer sustainable; Liberal candidates were polling better in three-cornered fights than in straight fights in the same wards.

The Bolton East by-election of November 1960 signalled the formal end of the party's national tolerance of such pacts. Pratap Chitnis had become Liberal Party Local Government Officer in the same year and, among many other things, embarked on building a national database of local election results. With this it was eventually possible to identify where there were electoral pacts and to demonstrate what arrangements had been made for which local wards. For instance, in addition to the places mentioned by Robert Ingham, a number of smaller boroughs such as Eccles and Dukinfield had electoral arrangements with the local Conservatives.

LETTERS

SDP strategy

In issue 45 of the *Journal*, Stephen Barber gave an account of what he called the SDP strategy. He concluded that in the 1983 election the SDP was 'never clear if it wanted substantially to replace the Labour Party or the Tories'. That is not the case.

Shirley Williams, David Owen and I had been deeply involved in the Labour Party right up to the general election of 1979. We were members of the Cabinet but increasingly concerned about the militant left and the influence of Tony Benn. As we approached the painful break towards the end of the following year, we believed that Labour was in terminal decline. Only a new social democratic party could fill the gap.

When we put together the Limehouse Declaration in January 1981, it grew from our ideas and values, an instinctive response to Labour's failure. We were not calculating how best to write a programme that would win.

I had earlier written to Roy Jenkins that the 'Conservative Party will always be with us ... if a fourth party were to be launched, I would want it to be firmly social democratic'. This approach was never in dispute at the time of Limehouse.

As for our relations with the Liberals, the Gang of Four had no internal discussions or discussions with David Steel about Parliamentary seats before the launch of the SDP. But given that Liberals were well entrenched in a number of marginal Tory seats, it was certainly my view that the SDP should particularly challenge Labour seats.

The division of seats became a dispute between me – supported by Shirley Williams and Roy Jenkins – and David Owen. Owen soon took the view that the SDP should have contested all or most seats, to try to squeeze out the Liberals. But his purpose was to make the SDP top dog, not just to seize promising Tory seats. All the Gang of Four hoped to get a fair share of 'silver,' and 'gold' seats and this included some Tory seats. But that does not mean that we were equivocal about our primary aim.

Stephen Barber says that even before the Falklands War, there had been a decline of support since the SDP peak of 1981. That is correct. But I do not understand how the leadership could have adapted 'this more realistic situation'. Our wish was to replace the Labour Party which had not yet reached its nadir,

Soon after I had taken over from Prata at Party HQ in mid 1962 I was sent on a grand tour of all the towns involved in order to give the local council groups the hard word that the party officially disapproved of electoral pacts. Armed with both the political and mathematical evidence of the damage caused by these arrangements it was possible to make a strong case for their termination. I had little direct effect, but the pacts petered out of their own accord as the senior Liberal aldermen and councillors either lost or died off. But, at the time, it was a curious task, which produced a number of eminently retellable anecdotes!

By coincidence, I was also very much involved in the Southport Liberal scene which had one of the very rare instances of a Liberal–Labour electoral pact. This stemmed not from a wish to maintain past glories but from a very different standpoint – a desire to abandon the staid Liberalism of the past in order effectively to challenge the massive Conservative domination of the County Borough Council – on which, at its peak, there were 56 Conservative members, three Liberals (two aged aldermen and one elderly councillor) and a single Labour member (a very dedicated socialist, Ernest Townend, who had been Labour MP for Stockport).

Following a disastrous parliamentary by-election in February 1952, which saw the only instance of a lost Liberal deposit in Southport, there were strenuous efforts to rejuvenate the local party. The advent of an able and charismatic local doctor, Sidney Hepworth, led to the convenient absence of Labour candidates in his local ward and Hepworth scraped in at the first attempt.

Labour Councillor Townend subsequently recounted the moment at the first council meeting after the election when he rose to propose an amendment – all of which had for years hitherto failed for lack of a seconder – and, he said, ‘I looked

round, and Councillor Hepworth rose to second it. I knew we were going to have some fun!’

Under Hepworth’s persuasion able candidates came forward and fought and won more and more wards which Labour willingly abandoned to the Liberals. Eventually, ten of the fifteen wards were being fought by Liberals and five by Labour, and a Lib–Lab administration took control in 1962. Alas, it did not last long enough to reap the electoral fruits of its bold planning policies and, of course, Southport CB disappeared into that bureaucratic nonsense, Sefton Metropolitan

District, at local government reorganisation in 1974.

The Southport case is an example of a leader able to renew the party locally and to create an electoral strategy without losing many of the older brigade. Sadly Sidney Hepworth became the only Liberal involved in the Poulson corruption case and he served a prison term, dying a few years later.

All pacts become greater than the parties that make them and they have a dangerous momentum of their own.

Michael Meadowcroft

REVIEWS

Man of many talents

Andrew Adonis and Keith Thomas (eds.): *Roy Jenkins – A Retrospective* (Oxford University Press, 2004)

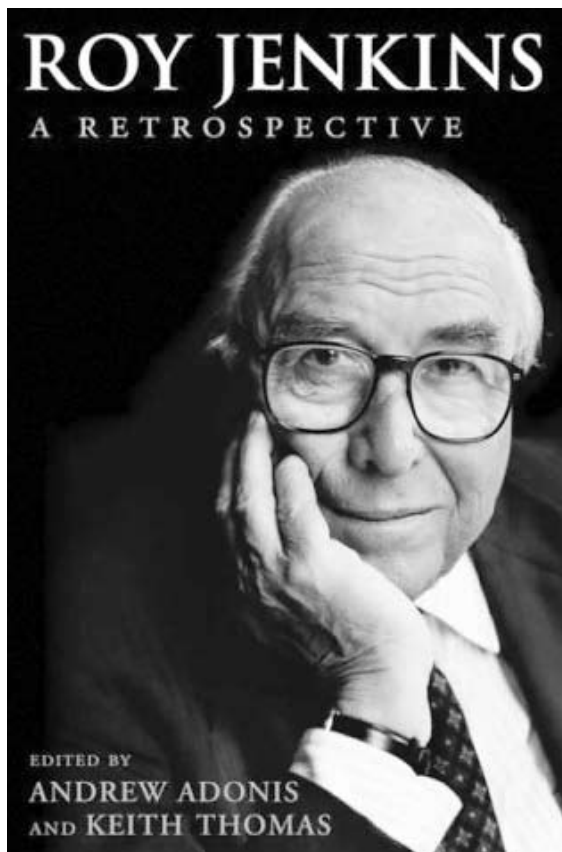
Reviewed by **Dr Julie Smith**

In 1994, Andrew Adonis suggested to Roy Jenkins that he would like to become his biographer. Jenkins demurred for three years before giving Adonis a key to his East Hendred home and access to his papers. Eight years on, the biography has yet to appear. In the meantime Adonis has collaborated with Keith Thomas to edit a series of essays about Jenkins by people who knew him at various stages throughout his life, from friends to political colleagues, academics and other writers.

The essays are broadly chronological, ranging from interviews about his early years with Jenkins’s cousin and his best friend from secondary school, via an essay on his time as an undergraduate in Oxford, to one on his period as Chancellor of the

University. Overall they cover eighty years of British political history, offering not only a range of fascinating insights into Jenkins’s own life but an excellent overview of British political, economic and social history from the General Strike through to the New Labour government that took office in 1997, from his father’s time as an MP and on through Jenkins’s own political career. It takes us through the internal divisions of the Labour Party – the differences between the Gaitskellites and the Bevanites, the pro- and anti-Europeans, between Jenkins and Wilson, and Jenkins and Callaghan, and the ultimate rupture that was to lead to the creation of the SDP – recalls the social reforms of the 1960s which Jenkins did so much to facilitate, and the economic

All pacts become greater than the parties that make them and they have a dangerous momentum of their own.



crises that Jenkins sought to tackle, and finally reminds us of the ongoing British problem with 'Europe'.

One of the dangers of a book such as this is that repetition can creep in as each contributor seeks to give a definitive picture of the subject. Yet the editors have contrived to produce a set of essays that complement each other extremely well. True, there are certainly episodes of Jenkins's life, his origins or his personal traits that are covered by more than one entry but they are never repetitious. That Jenkins was a man who loved numbers of any sort – be it sums or railway timetables, university league tables or the Enigma machine – came across from a composite of several chapters, which stressed his varying fascinations for counting (including the numbers of people he met when out campaigning), distance and time. As his cousin Pita Karaka put it, 'The main thing about Roy as a child was his addiction to numbers. He was always silent and counting or working out some sum. He was like that ever after!' (p. 4).

Perhaps it was not surprising, therefore, that he should be sent to work at Bletchley Park in April 1944. He did not himself work on the now-famous Enigma codes, although contributor Asa Briggs did, as he recounts at some length in an essay that reveals rather more about Briggs and about Bletchley than about Jenkins. Briggs implies that Jenkins did not particularly relish his time at Bletchley working on 'Fish', yet Jenkins clearly retained an interest in the Enigma machine. Almost by chance he met Robert Harris, the author of *Enigma*, and upon learning that Harris had one of the machines on loan, Jenkins rapidly made plans to meet Harris and the machine, and thereafter ensued a deep friendship based, in part, on Jenkins's determination never to eat lunch alone (p. 308). Despite his prolific output Jenkins claimed to find writing much harder than politics. He told Harris that 'the sheer deadweight effort' of getting up in the morning and trying to fill a blank page with words 'is the hardest sheer intellectual work, harder than anything in a minister's life, which I've ever done' (p. 312).

If Jenkins found writing difficult, it did not show. Although not trained as a historian (he read Modern Greats – otherwise known as PPE – at Balliol), he began writing about political history, and often about Liberal politicians, before his career in politics really took off. As Alan Watkins recalls, when he first met Jenkins in 1959, he was still 'best known as the author of *Mr Balfour's Poodle*, which was about the battle between Asquith's government and the House of Lords before 1914, and *Dilke*' (pp. 31–32). And he did not stop writing for the rest of his life, winning prizes for his biographies of *Gladstone* (1996) and *Churchill* (2001), and when he died he had almost finished a book on Franklin D. Roosevelt and was thinking about commencing a biography of JFK

(p. 272). As David Cannadine notes (p. 293), after 1964 Jenkins did not undertake any 'original archival research' work; nevertheless, he believes that four at least of his works are likely to endure: *Asquith* (1964), the prizewinning biographies of *Gladstone* and *Churchill*, and Jenkins's autobiography, which Cannadine considers 'one of the few outstanding political autobiographies of the twentieth century' (p. 305).

And, of course, it is Jenkins's career as a politician that leads many to read his work, and works about him, such as this *Retrospective*. Many of the contributors note that Jenkins's parents, particularly his mother, were very ambitious for their only son. It is not so clear what those ambitions were, though Oxford was clearly mentioned at an early stage. By contrast, the young Roy's own ambitions seem to have been obvious from his youth. The son of a miners' leader, Arthur Jenkins, who became an MP and PPS to Clement Attlee, his childhood was suffused with politics, including visits from leading Labour Party figures to the family home in Wales. And thus it seems that Roy's ambition from a young age was a life in politics. As his friend from grammar school, Hugh Brace, remarks, 'Politics came absolutely naturally to him' (p. 9).

If national – Labour – politics were to come naturally to Roy, success in university debating came perhaps less easily (college friend Ronald McIntosh noted that 'he never achieved the complete mastery of Union audiences which he displayed in the House of Commons during the 1960s'), and he failed to achieve an early ambition to become President of the Oxford Union. Roy forged a number of friendships at Oxford that were to persist into later life – politically with Tony Crosland, and on a personal level with Madron Seligman, later a deeply pro-European Conservative MEP, and Mark Bonham Carter,

who would later also become a political ally. As McIntosh and Asa Briggs remind us, Jenkins was responsible, with Crosland, for splitting the Oxford Labour Club in August 1939 over the issue of participation in the war. McIntosh draws the parallels with Jenkins's decision to leave the Labour Party in 1981: 'in what was almost a dry run for the formation of the SDP forty years later, [Jenkins] created a breakaway – and highly successful – social democratic organisation' (p. 16) – and one that left Denis Healey behind, still associated with the Communist-dominated Labour Club.

Despite the decision to split the Labour Club, Jenkins remained loyal to the Labour cause and was desperate to secure a seat in the 1945 general election. He fought the unwinnable Solihull that year and then agreed to stand in the Southwark Central by-election in 1948 – even though he knew he would not be able to fight the new seat after the next election, such was his determination to enter Parliament. Thereafter, he secured a safe Labour seat, Birmingham Stechford, which he served loyalty and which treated him well for twenty-seven years. Long-time fellow Labour MP in Birmingham, Roy Hattersley, argues, 'Part of the rapport between Jenkins and his constituency was the result of his ability to make and keep friends' (p. 54). This sort of sentiment re-emerges time and again in the book.

Jenkins, it seems, put a great deal of effort into his friendships and was never pompous or aloof in private, even if he sometimes appeared so in public. The same sort of warmth and loyalty extended not just to close personal friends but to supporters in Birmingham and later in Glasgow Hillhead, the seat he took for the SDP in the famous by-election. He took Glasgow, with which he had no previous links, so much to his heart that he referred to it as a 'senile love affair' (p. 239) – and the feeling

was reciprocated, according to Donald McFarlane. Similarly, as Chancellor of Oxford University, a mantle he donned in 1987 and which gave him great pleasure, he was loyal and deeply committed, always recognising, Anthony Kenny notes, that his role was ceremonial compared with that of the Vice-Chancellor who held real power (p. 260–61). In turn, he inspired as much affection in Oxford as elsewhere.

And what of Jenkins's political career? The book covers the many facets of his political life – from Home Secretary and Chancellor, to President of the Commission, to leader of the SDP – from a range of angles, too. If I have not gone into them in more detail here, it is because in many ways his achievements and legacies are so much better known than his personal traits. But they cannot be ignored. The chapter by Kenneth Baker perhaps best summarises Jenkins's political career: through a piece on cartoons from Jenkins's time as Minister of Aviation (a job that Alan Watkins believes he secured because of his journalistic writings on the topic), then as Home Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer, through to becoming the 'Grand Old Man' and mentor of Tony Blair, Baker reminds us of Jenkins's notable achievements and his problems with the Labour Party.

Jenkins's first stint as Home Secretary was ground-breaking in many ways; legalising abortion and homosexual activity between consenting adults are long-term legacies for which he will be remembered. Both the relevant Acts came about because Jenkins supported Private Members' Bills – the Abortion Act being introduced by opposition Liberal MP David Steel, with whom would later lead the Alliance. Such cross-party co-operation was something that Jenkins seemed to relish – he had worked with the Conservative Norman St John-Stevas on the Obscene Publications Act of 1959 and was later to serve as President of the

cross-party Britain in Europe group, campaigning for Britain to stay in the Common Market in 1975. By that time, Jenkins and his followers were disillusioned with the Labour Party and its attitude to Europe and thus, as David Marquand remarks, 'the referendum was pure joy for Jenkins and the Jenkinsites' (p. 132). Jenkins enjoyed working with Liberals and Conservatives in that campaign, the mark of a politician who, despite his undoubted convictions, was able to deal with consensus and compromise. In this he was in many ways ideally suited to his next task – as President of the European Commission – and later for co-operating with the Liberals.

Jenkins, a late convert (p. 119), was wooed to Europe by Helmut Schmidt's suggestion that being President of the European Commission was like being 'Prime Minister of Europe' (p. 182). He rapidly discovered it was not and friends found he was withdrawn in his early months in Brussels. Yet, as with his time as Home Secretary and Chancellor, so he left a positive legacy in Europe too, having fought to secure a seat at the table for himself, and his successors as President, in G7 and EU meetings. He acted as midwife for the European Monetary System, the forerunner of economic and monetary union (pp. 206–07). For a while, he seemed disengaged from British politics, to the extent that he did not even vote in 1979 (p. 213). This was all to change with his Dimpleby Lecture later that year. Expected to be on a European theme, Roy chose to call for 'a strengthening of the radical centre'. Some, like Marquand, saw it as 'a call to arms' (p. 138); his friend and fellow member of the Gang of Four, Bill Rodgers, recalls being far less impressed (pp. 214–15). Yet, the lecture marked a turning point – members of the Labour Party seriously began to talk about leaving and finally did so to form the SDP in January 1981. Without Jenkins and his Dimpleby

Jenkins enjoyed working with Liberals and Conservatives in that campaign, the mark of a politician who, despite his undoubted convictions, was able to deal with consensus and compromise.

REVIEWS

Lecture this would not have occurred.

A historian, a politician, Chancellor of Oxford University, *bon viveur*. Roy Jenkins is remembered as a man of many talents. In addition, what comes across most vividly throughout this book is what a warm-hearted man he was – someone who nurtured friendships and whose friends appreciated him. This is perhaps best summed up by Sir Crispin Tickell, Jenkins's *chef de cabinet* during his time as President of the European Commission, who writes, 'Throughout, his most conspicuous qualities were wide-ranging intelligence, tolerance,

a sense of history, sympathetic understanding of others, and loyalty to his friends'. Adonis and Thomas say in their Preface (p. viii) that they sought to avoid hagiography in the contributions – and they succeed, just. Yet each of the articles is essentially a memoir about Jenkins by someone who held him at the least in high esteem and in most cases rather more than that. The biography is still avidly awaited but in the meantime this *Retro-spective* serves Jenkins well.

Dr Julie Smith is Deputy Director of the Centre of International Studies, Cambridge University and a Fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge.

ity remains elusive. His personal magnetism, which attracted both intellectual advisers and new recruits in large numbers, is referred to only in passing; so is his whimsical and self-deprecating air, as if he was looking down (from his considerable height) at his audience and wondering why they took him so seriously. Barberis attributes 'the sense of Olympian distance' (p. 157) that Jo sometimes displayed to his growing deafness; but it was evident long before he began to go deaf. It's a pity that there is no photograph of Jo with a group of student Young Liberals. He was at his most appealing with them, ranging widely across political principles and policy choices. The phrase that struck home best for me was: 'Jo ... had a lazy streak ... yet his presence generated electricity.' (p. 103).

The strength of this biography is in its focus on Grimond's political ideas, their origins and evolution. Barberis sums him up as 'an anti-establishment establishment man' (p. 169). From a comfortable Dundee family, he was educated at Eton

'His presence generated electricity'

Peter Barberis: *Liberal Lion. Jo Grimond: A Political Life* (IB Tauris, 2005)

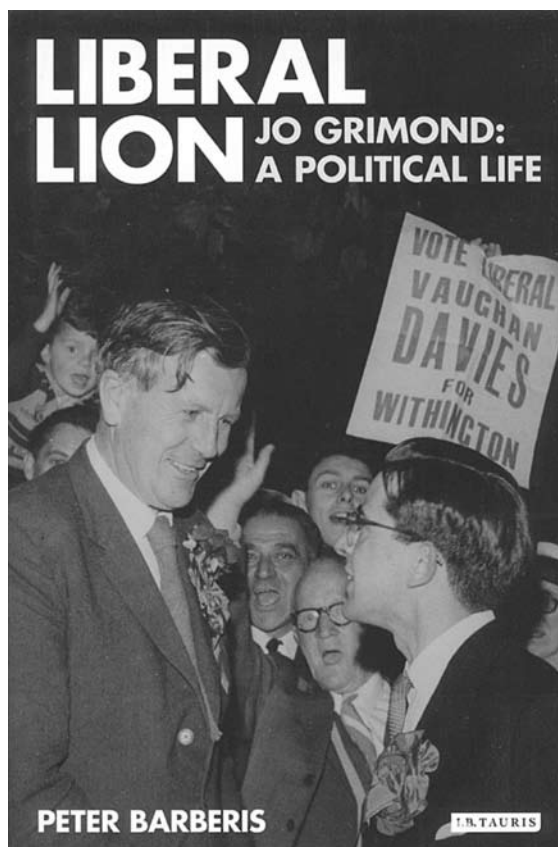
Reviewed by **William Wallace**

A second biography of Jo Grimond in less than five years, from a different (and more sympathetic) angle than Michael McManus, offers a chance to compare interpretations of the politician who, more than anyone else, gave the contemporary Liberal Party its shape – and, in his call for a 'radical realignment of the left', first spelt out the rationale for the alliance with the Social Democrats. Barberis does not credit Grimond with saving the Liberals from extinction, though Clement Davies had saved them from Churchill's embrace only to remain a marginal party, in non-conformist seats. It was Jo who led the party's revival, in terms of policy and political appeal; he was, for example, one of the first politicians to adapt successfully to television.

Barberis underestimates the scale of Grimond's success as party leader. The Liberals gained only twelve seats in the 1996

election, but all had been won against two or more opponents; in 1955 Grimond himself was the only one of the six MPs who had won against a Conservative opponent. Party membership surged to a peak of 300,000 in 1963, bringing in a new generation (myself included) who stayed with the party throughout the ups and downs of the years that followed. He shifted the party from an anti-socialist stance to social liberalism, spelling out coherent themes and policies that held the party together.

This is an academic study: carefully researched, and supported by a wide range of interviews. It even references several PhD theses on the Liberals. (I should admit, for future scholars, that my own thesis contains two quotations from Jo Grimond that I had myself written for him in the 1966 election campaign – but then, as Barberis makes clear, Jo took ideas and drafts from a great many people.) But Jo's personal-



and Oxford. As a young man he walked in the Highlands with Sir Archibald Sinclair, and married into the Asquith family. Yet, Barberis argues, he had already become a convinced Liberal at Oxford, and chose in 1935 to pursue a political career in a declining party because he was a disciple of T.H. Green and John Stuart Mill, modified by A.D. Lindsay's Balliol teaching about public service.

He inherited a party which had almost lost its radical wing, leaving behind a group of anti-socialist libertarians. He shifted it rapidly from economic towards social liberalism, writing extensively himself and drawing on the expertise of some of the best academics in Britain. His themes of active citizenship, community, wider distribution of wealth and power, and constitutional reform, still resonate for Liberal Democrats; so do his doubts on national sovereignty and independent defence (and on independent deterrence). Paddy Ashdown's comment, when setting out on a new cycle of reflective policy-making after the 1987 election and party merger, that 'we have been living too long off the intellectual capital of the Grimond era' (p. 210), recognised how much Jo had shaped the Liberal approach over the previous thirty years.

In his later years, Jo grew increasingly gloomy about the possibility of striking a stable balance between autonomous local communities, enterprise, and an active state. As the 1974–79 Labour government gave in to public sector unions, Jo flirted with the Institute of Economic Affairs, which had been founded by economic liberals who left the party as he had taken control. But he opposed Mrs Thatcher both for her nationalism and her political illiberalism. There were, Barberis, accepts, many 'loose ends' in his political philosophy. But Liberals have to live with the tension among the principles to which they are committed; and Grimond, this book argues, was

'He was spared entanglement in the grubby realities of power politics – realities that he would have found uncomfortable if not demeaning ... to remain a man of integrity, so giving politics a good name.'

a deeply committed Liberal. 'It was in a way his fortune never to have held ministerial office. Thus he was spared entanglement in the grubby realities of power politics – realities that he would have found uncomfortable if not demeaning ... to remain a man

of integrity, so giving politics a good name.' (p. 214).

Lord Wallace of Saltaire is joint Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords and President of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

Lloyd George and Churchill

Robert Lloyd-George: *David & Winston: How a Friendship Changed History* (John Murray, 2005)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

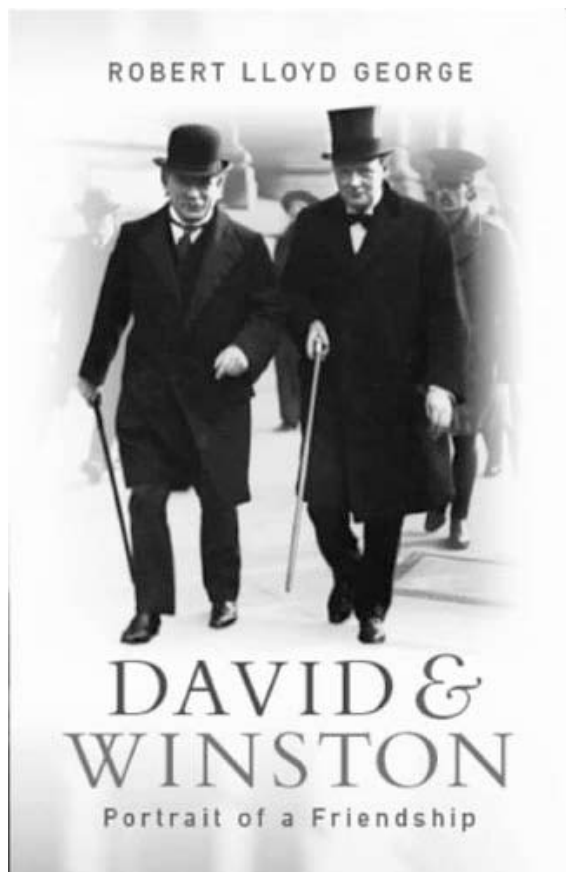
In a comparison of Lloyd George and Churchill, it has been said that Churchill was the greater man, but that Lloyd George was more fun. This fascinating book, thoroughly researched and exquisitely written by Lloyd George's great-grandson, tends to confirm this opinion. The author, Robert Lloyd-George, is the son of the present (third) Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor. It takes as its main theme Lloyd George's influence on Churchill's political career and, to some extent, personal and family life. The author has read widely and thoughtfully through a rich array of secondary, and some primary, source materials, and has skilfully woven his findings into a lucid and compelling read. Although Mr Lloyd-George is not a professional historian, his understanding of the intricacies of twentieth century political history is impressive.

Almost all the points at which the careers of the two politicians interact are thoughtfully covered in this comprehensive volume. Political history and personal detail are dextrously brought together within the book. There is new, fascinating material on the 1913 Marconi crisis, the drift towards the outbreak of the First World War, and Lloyd George's central role in propelling Churchill towards

the premiership in May 1940 (though the important role of Liberal MP Clem Davies at this juncture is not recorded at all). We are, however, all too regularly given lengthy quotations from the source materials which the author used in his research. On occasion these are over-long, given that many are taken from printed volumes which are within easy reach of most readers. The most glaring example is Churchill's tribute to Lloyd George in the House of Commons on 28 March 1945, printed on pp. 241–46. If it was considered necessary to reproduce this at such length in the book, it might well have been relegated to an appendix.

The author's writing style is unfailingly succinct and lucid, a real joy to read. This is immediately apparent in the description of Lloyd George at the beginning of the book:

Though only five foot six-and-a-half inches tall, he had a powerful frame and a deep chest. He wore a magnificent moustache and his carefully tended wavy hair was rather longer than was the custom of the time. He had a large and distinctive head, a broad forehead and striking greyish-blue eyes which sparkled with humour one moment and flashed with anger the next. (pp. 3–4).



LG's predecessor as Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, 'would have made a superb judge and was a great peacetime prime minister. By now [1916], however, it was clear that he lacked the dynamic energy and dedication required in a war leader' (p. 129).

The volume is superbly illustrated with a wealth of cartoons taken from contemporary newspapers and journals such as *Punch* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. There are also a number of fascinating photographs, many previously unpublished, taken from the family album. All are notably well chosen to reflect the themes in the text and they add much to the appeal and interest of the book.

Given the amount of ground covered in a relatively short volume, some factual errors and misjudgements are nigh on inevitable. On page 14 there is some confusion between Lloyd George's eldest daughter Mair Eluned (born in 1890) and the second daughter Olwen Elizabeth (born in 1892). 'Every seat in Wales' did not fall to the

Liberals in 1906 (p. 36), and it is unclear why Baldwin and Chamberlain are described as merely 'nominal leaders of the Conservative Party' (p. 29). There is some misunderstanding of the use and application of the infamous Lloyd George Fund in the 1920s (p. 192), and few historians would agree that, had Lloyd George remained in good health, he 'would have dominated the National Government' formed in August 1931. The undying enmity of both Baldwin and MacDonald would surely have relegated 'the Goat' to the sidelines of political life at this juncture. Is it really true to claim that Lloyd George 'hated writing letters' (p. 151)? He always seemed to relish writing regularly both to his wife Dame Margaret and his younger brother William.

One surprising omission is the lack of any reference to the award of an earldom to Lloyd George in January 1945. In the previous November, at Churchill's personal instigation, a Royal Marines courier had arrived at LG's North Wales home Ty Newydd, Llanystumdwy, bearing the offer of an earldom from the Prime Minister to a terminally ill Lloyd George, who was by then wracked with cancer. The 'Cast of Main Characters' printed on pp. 249–63 is most helpful, but

Mr Lloyd George should note that Frances Stevenson was born in 1888 (not 1890), and that A. J. Sylvester lived from 1889 until 1989 (not 1885 until 1984).

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the scholarly apparatus is the rather inadequate notes printed on pp. 270–84. They are confined simply to identifying the direct quotations used in the book, and yet even these are highly selective and many are incomplete, failing to give the full call numbers of the relevant documents. Many important quotations in the text still remain unidentified. The reader would undoubtedly have been much better served by conventional scholarly footnotes or endnotes.

Yet, given the huge number of biographies of both Lloyd George and Churchill and the spate of more specialised studies of certain aspects of their careers, Robert Lloyd-George has still succeeded in producing a thoroughly worthwhile book, a stimulating read for professional historians and interested laymen alike, abounding with information and fresh perspectives. It is certain to arouse great interest.

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

A hand-to-mouth man?

Patrick Jackson: *Harcourt and Son: A Political Biography of Sir William Harcourt, 1827–1904* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004)

Reviewed by **Martin Pugh**

Sir William Harcourt was the kind of politician we rarely see nowadays. He was intelligent, cultured and well-read but also robust and aggressive, and in fact a bit of a verbal bully towards colleagues and opponents alike. Denis

Healey is perhaps the nearest modern example.

Harcourt was undoubtedly a major figure in Victorian Liberalism; he served as Liberal Leader in the Commons from 1895 to 1898 and effectively led the party there during several periods

when Gladstone was absent and neglectful of the need for party management. From an ideological perspective he can be seen as the link between the politics of Gladstone and the New Liberalism of the Asquith–Lloyd George era. Harcourt's papers have been available at the Bodleian Library for many years, and those of his contemporaries are plentiful, to put it mildly. Yet he has been remarkably neglected by historians; the only previous biography was by the Liberal journalist, A. G. Gardiner, in 1923.¹

Despite this neglect, Harcourt makes a fine subject for a biography both as a person and as a public figure. Impulsive, condescending, larger-than-life, he was a brilliant public speaker who enjoyed attacking his own party as much as his opponents. He was unable to resist the temptation to be funny and flippant, and, as with Churchill, his language was often over the top. In fact Harcourt gave the impression of enjoying the game too much, hence the accusations of lawyerly opportunism that followed him throughout his career. That he failed to win the premiership on Gladstone's retirement in 1894 was obviously due to Queen Victoria's hostility to him, but must partly be ascribed to his inability to curb his tongue and conciliate his colleagues. His civil servants also found him trying, in the manner of a naughty child; if they pressed him to read a paper he disliked he retaliated by hiding it behind a bookcase.

Harcourt's family were landowners who came over with William the Conqueror and had lived at Stanton Harcourt in Oxfordshire for centuries. When his elder brother complained that he did not have the right ideas about the land, Harcourt tartly replied: 'You have the land and may leave the ideas to me.' After getting elected in Oxford in 1868, he was promoted to Solicitor General in 1873, which meant taking a knighthood. 'It is horribly

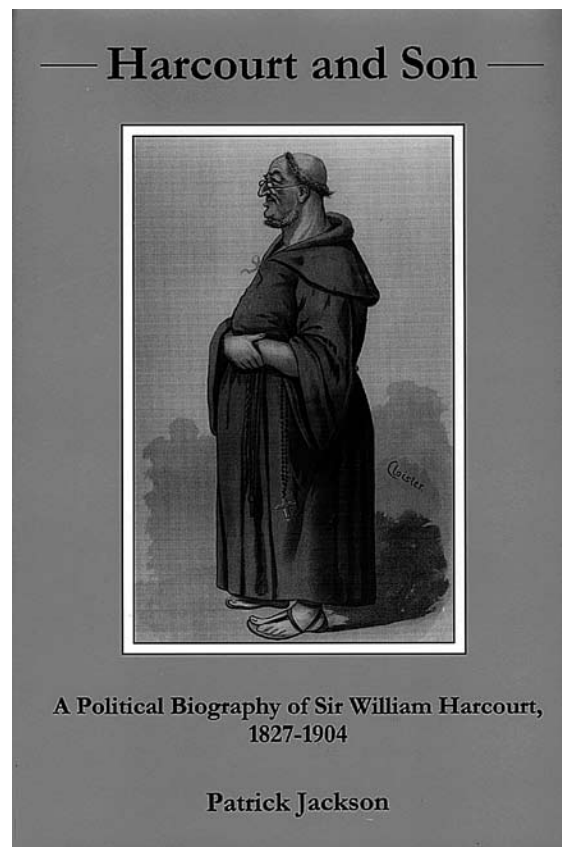
vulgar,' he protested, 'almost as bad as being a Baronet'. In these early years Harcourt's fellow Liberals in Parliament disliked him so much that they hoped he would join Disraeli. He certainly played a major part in the disintegration that eventually resulted in the breakdown of Gladstone's government in 1874. But Harcourt felt happier in opposition, though he found Gladstone infuriating – as, of course, did almost all the GOM's colleagues. However, although he saw the merits of Lord Hartington as an alternative Liberal leader, Harcourt became more appreciative of Gladstone as the one man capable of unifying the party; as a result – and rather paradoxically – he stayed loyal to Gladstone when he split the party over Home Rule in 1886, even though he did not really support the principle of Home Rule. For his part Gladstone recognised that Harcourt's energy and forensic talent fully justified keeping him in office or on the front bench, hence his promotion to Home Secretary in 1880 and Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1892.

It was as the new Home Secretary in 1880 that Harcourt became a famous victim of the rule that a minister must vacate his seat and win re-election on his appointment. He had eloquently defended the tradition but now found himself obliged to fight again in the highly marginal and corrupt borough of Oxford. He told the electors it was now 'my duty to consider the question of a cheap and pure supply of water for the people of London ... But how am I to do so when I am kept here by the cheap distribution of more or less beer in Oxford? [Hear, hear and laughter]'.² Harcourt lost but promptly moved to Derby, 'a thoroughly respectable constituency, which is more than can be said for your last place', Joseph Chamberlain told him.

Was Harcourt at all influenced by the presence of a

more organised working class in his new seat? He gave every appearance of being a strict retrenchment Liberal, following Gladstone's line in holding down expenditure and resisting costly policies of imperial expansion and reform of the armed forces; and he came unstuck in the 1895 election when he focused too much on temperance. Contrast this with Derby's Labour member after 1906, Jimmy Thomas, whose love of alcohol was legendary. However, we are given little indication of the interactions between Harcourt and his constituents. Derby gets only a brief mention in Patrick Jackson's book, which is focused almost entirely on high-politics sources.

The result is that in *Harcourt and Son*, as in many academic biographies, the important questions tend to get swamped by the literary tsunami of private correspondence generated by Victorian politicians. For example, when the author reaches the crisis over parliamentary reform in 1866–67 he plunges into the correspondence without explaining the issues or putting



ELECTION 2005 IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The 2005 election saw the Liberal Democrats win a higher number of seats than at any time since 1923, and, for the second election in a row, gain both votes and seats after a period of Labour government – a historically unprecedented achievement. Yet many had hoped for an even better result, and the election campaign itself saw relatively little movement in the Lib Dem standing in the opinion polls. Does 2005 represent steady progress, or a missed opportunity?

Speakers: **John Curtice** (Professor of Politics, Strathclyde University), **Andrew Russell** (Senior Lecturer, Department of Government, Manchester University; author of *Neither left nor right? The Liberal Democrats and the electorate*), and **Chris Rennard** (Liberal Democrat Chief Executive).
Chair: **Tony Little**.

8.00pm Sunday 18th September

Louis Room, Imperial Hotel, Blackpool

Please note that due to increased conference security, only those with conference photo-badges will be able to attend. For those only wishing to attend fringe meetings, registration is free but is limited to Liberal Democrat party members; and please allow time to register and pick up your badge at the Winter Gardens in Blackpool.

Harcourt into context; for the reader who is not already familiar with the details it is difficult to make much of the account.

This failing becomes serious in the remarkably brief treatment of what was surely the peak of Harcourt's career: his famous budget of 1894. Despite his orthodox past, this had some appearance of a break with Gladstonianism; the GOM certainly didn't like it. Harcourt adopted several innovative policies, including a scheme of graduated death duties that reached a peak of 6 per cent payable on estates worth a million pounds. Harcourt also wanted to introduce a graduated income tax. There is certainly a case for seeing this budget as a crucial step on the way to the radical measures implemented by Asquith and Lloyd George after 1906 and as an early manifestation

of the ideas of the New Liberalism.³ But there is little attempt in the book to evaluate his thinking or the evolution of Liberalism in the late-Victorian period. Instead the author presents the 1894 budget largely in terms of the infighting between Rosebery and Harcourt, as revealed in the correspondence. This approach trivialises a crucial theme in both Harcourt's life and the development of Liberal politics.

It may well be that Harcourt himself failed to see his innovations in terms of their wider significance. When the party lost office in 1895, his work as Leader in the Commons suggested that he had little consistent idea about the direction Liberalism should be taking. As one colleague remarked, Harcourt had 'always been a hand to mouth man and always will be'. There is clearly

something in this comment, but whether it offers a satisfactory perspective on his career remains in doubt.

Martin Pugh was Professor of Modern History at Newcastle University until 1999 and Research Professor at Liverpool John Moores University 1999–2002. His latest book is The Pankhursts (Allen Lane, 2001).

- 1 A. G. Gardiner, *The Life of Sir William Harcourt* (London: Constable, 1923).
- 2 *Daily Telegraph*, 3 May 1880, in Martin Pugh, "'Queen Anne is dead': The Abolition of Ministerial By-Elections, 1867–1926", *Parliamentary History*, 21, 2002, pp. 351–366.
- 3 See H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics 1892–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1973); Bruce K. Murray, *The People's Budget 1909–1910* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989).

Conrad Russell

Continued from page 31

of colleagues, some of them as young as his students. He was particularly supportive of women candidates – when he died there was much reference to his role during the Brent East by-election, both his contribution to it and how it provided him with a project. Sarah Teather tells me that his stories distracted others, and his practical ineptitude led the organisers to create a category of jobs for 'idiots or very clever earls'. Conrad was the worst envelope-stuffer in the world.

How lucky we were to work with him, to learn from him, and to be able to remember him with so much affection.

Baroness Sally Hamwee is a Liberal Democrat ODPM spokesperson in the House of Lords and is Chair of the London Assembly.