

Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



Hidden workers of the party

Kathryn Rix

The professional Liberal agents, 1885–1910

David Bebbington

Gladstonian Liberalism according to Gladstone

Dennis Hardy

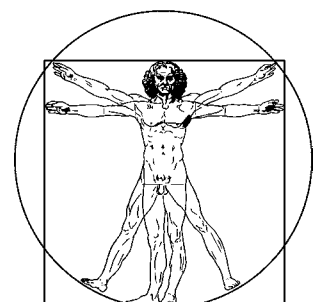
'Freedom not regimentation' Liberalism, garden cities and early town planning

David Dutton

Liberalism reunited The Huddersfield experience 1945–47

David McKie

A 'sincere, thorough and hearty Liberal'? Jabez Balfour (1843–1916)



THE 1906 GENERAL ELECTION – FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW LIBERALISM?

Robinson College, Cambridge: Saturday 21 October 2006

A century ago the Liberal Party secured a landslide victory, enabling it to introduce significant social reforms.

This one-day conference seeks to re-evaluate the impact of the 1906 landslide victory. It will focus on the key electoral issues, from human rights to economics, and assess why it all went wrong.

Bringing together a range of leading academics and MPs, topics include 'Religion, human rights and policies, 1906–2006'; the philosophy and economic strategies of the New Liberalism; Winston Churchill as Liberal leader and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman; and 'the strange death of Liberal England'.

Agenda

10.00 Coffee and registration

10.30 Introduction

David Howarth MP

10.45 Session I: Keynote

Alan Beith MP: Religion, human rights and politics, 1906–2006

11.30 Session II: Policies and ideas

Deborah Thom: Gender and social reform

Alison Holmes: The New Liberalism as a philosophy of social reform

Ian Packer: Economic strategies and the New Liberalism

12.45 Lunch

14.00 Session III: Beginning of the end or end of the beginning?

Anthony Howe: The long-term significance of the election of 1906, with special reference to Liberal politics and ideas

Vernon Bogdanor: The strange death of Liberal England?

15.00 Session IV: Leadership

Ewen Cameron: Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman

Richard Toye: Churchill as a Liberal leader

16.00 Tea

16.15 Session V: Point counter point

David Dutton and Martin Pugh

17.15 Conclusion

Cost: £25 (£15 for students and over-60s)

For further information, including up-to-date information on speakers, please contact Dr Eugenio Biagini (efb21@cam.ac.uk); Robinson College, Cambridge, CB3 9AN).

History Group on the web

The Liberal Democrat History Group's website, www.liberalhistory.org.uk, is currently undergoing an extensive revamp and reorganisation.

Thanks to funding kindly provided by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust for the 'Liberal history online' project, we have been able to extend the website's content well beyond our original expectations, with the result that its internal architecture was no longer able to cope well. So it has been radically redesigned to provide a more easily navigable internal structure. This is a lengthy process, however, and is not yet complete – please bear with us while it is in process!

Volunteers wanted

Anyone wishing to volunteer to help us manage the website would be welcome. Basic computer literacy is essential, but no particular knowledge of website design is needed; familiarity with Liberal history is essential. Please contact Duncan Brack on journal@liberalhistory.org.uk for further details.

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 website and fill in the details on the 'Contact' page.

Journals on the web

Older issues of the *Journal of Liberal History* (issues 1–28) are available free for download as pdf files from the website. More recent issues are available for online subscribers, who will be sent a password (changed each year) for access to the protected area of the site. Online subscriptions cost £40.00 per year for individuals or £50.00 for institutions.

Journal of Liberal History

The *Journal of Liberal History* is published quarterly by the Liberal Democrat History Group.

ISSN 1479-9642

Editor: **Duncan Brack**
Deputy Editor: **Sarah Taft**
Assistant Editor: **Siobhan Vitelli**
Biographies Editor: **Robert Ingham**
Reviews Editor: **Dr Eugenio Biagini**
Deputy Reviews Editor: **Tom Kiehl**

Patrons

Dr Eugenio Biagini; Professor Michael Freedon;
Professor John Vincent

Editorial Board

Dr Malcolm Baines; Dr Roy Douglas; Dr Barry Doyle;
Dr David Dutton; Professor David Gowland; Dr
Richard Grayson; Dr Michael Hart; Peter Hellyer; Ian
Hunter; Dr J. Graham Jones; Tony Little; Professor
Ian Machin; Dr Mark Pack; Dr Ian Packer; Dr John
Powell; Jaime Reynolds; Iain Sharpe

Editorial/Correspondence

Contributions to the *Journal* – letters, articles, and
book reviews – are invited. The *Journal* is a refereed
publication; all articles submitted will be reviewed.
Contributions should be sent to:

Duncan Brack (Editor)
38 Salford Road, London SW2 4BQ
email: journal@liberalhistory.org.uk

All articles copyright © *Journal of Liberal History*.

Advertisements

Full page £100; half page £60; quarter page £35.
Discounts available for repeat ads or offers to
readers (e.g. discounted book prices). To place ads,
please contact the Editor.

Subscriptions/Membership

An annual subscription to the *Journal of Liberal
History* costs £20.00 (£12.50 unwaged rate). This
includes membership of the History Group unless
you inform us otherwise. The institutional rate is
£30.00. Non-UK subscribers should add £5.00.

Online subscriptions cost £40.00 (individuals) or
£50.00 (institutions). Instead of printed copies,
online subscribers will be able to access online
copies of current and all past *Journals*.

Cheques (payable to 'Liberal Democrat History
Group') should be sent to:

Patrick Mitchell
6 Palfrey Place, London SW8 1PA;
email: subs@liberalhistory.org.uk

Payment is also possible via our website,
www.liberalhistory.org.uk.

Cover design concept: **Lynne Featherstone**

Published by the Liberal Democrat History Group,
c/o 38 Salford Road, London SW2 4BQ

Printed by **Kall-Kwik**,
426 Chiswick High Road, London W4 5TF

September 2006

Issue 52: Autumn 2006

Hidden workers of the party: The professional Liberal agents, 1885–1910 4

Dr Kathryn Rix examines the activities of this crucial element of the party organisation during a formative period.

Gladstonian Liberalism according to Gladstone 14

What were the prevailing principles of the Liberal Party in the late Victorian period? **Professor David Bebbington** explores the views of its leader.

Letters to the Editor 19

Cuckoo in the nest? (**Roy Douglas**); Liberals in Windsor (**John Austen**).

'Freedom not regimentation': Liberalism, garden cities and early town planning 20

Professor Dennis Hardy examines the influence of Liberals on the development of garden cities and the first town planning legislation.

Report: Defender of liberties – Charles James Fox 26

with Professor Frank O'Gorman and Dr Mark Pack; report by **Graham Lippiatt**.

Liberalism reunited: The Huddersfield experience 1945–47 32

How fusion between the two Liberal factions helped Liberalism survive in Huddersfield; by **Professor David Dutton**.

A 'sincere, thorough and hearty Liberal'? 38

Biography of Jabez Balfour (1843–1916), by **David McKie**.

Reviews 44

Geddes & Tonge (eds.): *Britain Decides – The UK General Election 2005*, Bartle & King (eds.): *Britain at the Polls 2005*, Kavanagh & Butler: *The British General Election of 2005*, Norris & Wlezien (eds.): *Britain Votes 2005*, reviewed by **Tom Kiehl**; Hammonds: *The Village Labourer*, reviewed by **Tom Villis**; Price, *David Lloyd George*, reviewed by **J. Graham Jones**; Campbell, *If Love Were All ... The Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George*, reviewed by **J. Graham Jones**.

Liberal Democrat History Group

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

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

Chair: **Tony Little** Honorary President: **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**

HIDDEN WORKER

THE PROFESSIONAL LIBERAL

THE SLAVE TO DUTY.

Described by the chief Liberal agent in 1909 as the ‘hidden workers’ of the party, the Liberal constituency agents have generally been overlooked by historians. The years after 1885 were significant ones for the agents, as they sought to respond to the effects of major electoral reforms and to establish themselves as a profession. **Kathryn Rix** examines the activities of this crucial element of the party organisation during this formative period, which included the Liberals’ landslide victory in 1906.



POLITICAL PARTY AGENT: 'Wish I could get a holiday like the M.P.'s—and people call this a "lull in politics"!'

'The slave to duty'
(*Manchester Evening News*, 19 August 1910)

Speaking as guest of honour at a dinner held at the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Liberal Club in 1909, Sir Robert Hudson, the chief Liberal agent, declared that he was there 'as a representative of

Liberal organisation and of Liberal Agents. If you go for a sea-voyage, you will find a number of charming gold-braided officers, who walk the bridge, navigate the ship, and determine its course – always with the hidden assistance of certain rather grimy

WORKERS OF THE PARTY

FEDERAL AGENTS, 1885 – 1910

engineers down below. It is on behalf of those hidden workers of the Liberal Party that I thank you for the honour done to me this evening.’

These ‘hidden workers’ – the constituency agents – have received remarkably little attention from historians, despite the vital role which they played in party organisation. Within a constituency, the agent not only managed local and parliamentary election contests for Liberal candidates, he also attended to the registration of voters, and served as secretary to the local Liberal association, making arrangements for its political and social activities. This article considers these key party workers during the period between 1885 and 1910.

The year 1885 saw the first general election to be held under the revised electoral conditions created by the passing of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act (1883) and the Third Reform Act (1884–85). Candidates now faced an enlarged electorate, the 1885 election being the first at which the majority of adult males had the vote. The electoral map was completely redrawn, with redistribution into largely single-

member constituencies. For the first time, limits were placed on how much candidates could spend during an election, and the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act also provided strict guidelines on how this money could be spent. The year 1910 saw the last general election before the electoral system again underwent major revision, with the 1918 Representation of the People Act.

Constituency activities: registration

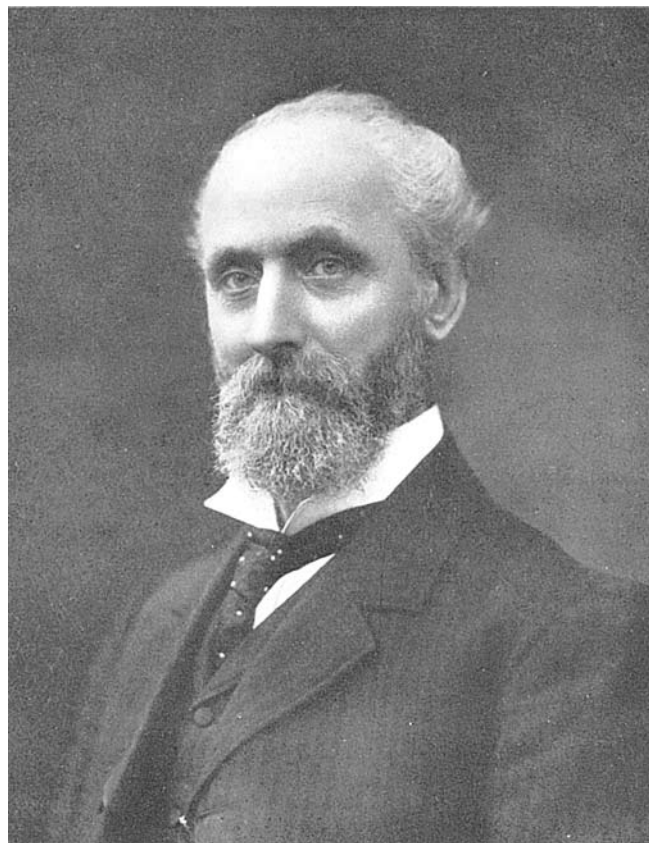
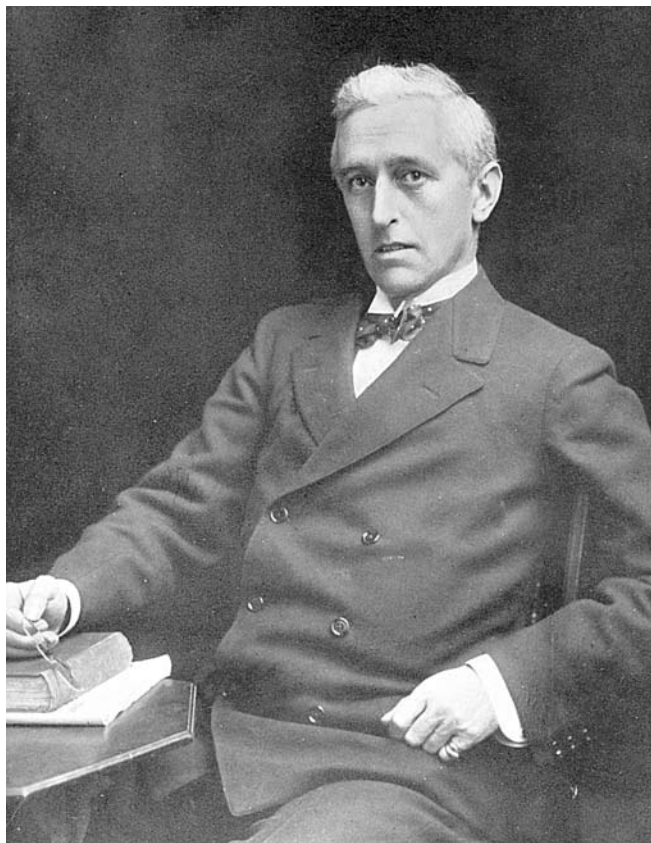
The wide variety of political work undertaken by agents in the constituencies was outlined in 1903 by Bertram Furniss, agent for Liverpool, when he produced an account of his previous year’s work. Furniss superintended a permanent staff of ten, with up to one hundred extra clerks employed at election time, and up to fifty extra workers for registration. A great deal of effort was put into registration work, marking up the new electoral registers in January, making two surveys of the constituency in June and July to collect information on those eligible to be registered, and defending registration claims and objections in the revision

In 1902, almost a quarter of a million letters were dispatched from the offices of the Liverpool Liberal Federal Council.

courts held in September. Local election contests also occupied much of Furniss’s time, with elections to the Board of Guardians and the municipal council. At the start of the year, Furniss made arrangements for the annual ward meetings, sending a personally addressed circular to every known Liberal in Liverpool. A total of 108 ward meetings were held in January and February. At the end of the year, Furniss turned his attention to collecting subscription arrears. In 1902, almost a quarter of a million letters were dispatched from the offices of the Liverpool Liberal Federal Council.²

Although the large-scale organisation managed by Furniss was found only in major cities such as Liverpool, the annual routine he described was typical of the agent’s work in many other constituencies. As Furniss’s account made clear, registration work was central to the agent’s endeavours. Although lists of voters were drawn up before 1832, it was the First Reform Act (1832) which introduced the principle of the electoral register. The parish overseers had the annual task of compiling the register, which was then scrutinised by the revising barrister.

HIDDEN WORKERS OF THE PARTY



The political parties realised that it was in their interest to get involved in this process, lodging claims for votes on behalf of supporters, and objecting to claims made by opponents. The Second Reform Act (1867) greatly extended the work of registration. With the creation of the household and lodger franchises in borough constituencies, it produced a substantial increase in the numbers eligible to vote. By 1869, the UK electorate stood at over 2.4 million, almost three times what it had been in the immediate aftermath of the 1832 Reform Act. The Third Reform Act (1884–85) extended the household and lodger franchises to county constituencies, with the result that by 1886 there were over 5.6 million voters – roughly two in every three adult males.³

While the Reform Acts marked the most significant changes to the franchise, there were by the close of the nineteenth century well over 100 different Acts of Parliament and 660 appeal cases governing the franchise and registration process.⁴ The complexities of registration

Left: Sir Robert Hudson, chief Liberal agent. Right: J.H. Linforth, Liberal agent for Leeds, and one of the founders of the SCLA.

required an immense amount of knowledge on the part of the agent, as well as considerable financial outlay by the political parties. Not until the 1918 Representation of the People Act – which simplified the franchise and provided for more efficient compiling of the register by public officials – was this burden on party organisers relieved.

The agent's key task was to ensure that as many Liberal supporters as possible were on the electoral register. Throughout the year, information was collected on those eligible to vote, with names being sent to the parish overseers for inclusion on the voters' lists. As well as lodging claims on behalf of eligible Liberal voters, the agent would make checks on the validity of Conservative voters' claims, so that objections could be lodged where possible. The annual revision courts in September, when the revising barrister decided on the merits of the claims and objections lodged, marked the culmination of the agent's efforts. While Furniss had a considerable staff to assist

him with registration work in Liverpool, other agents were much more reliant on their own efforts. Stanley French, Liberal agent for Wellington in Somerset, described in 1910 how he toured this rural constituency each summer by bicycle. Accompanied by his wife, child, maid, office lad and dog, he camped overnight, and collected the necessary information for registration purposes from local inhabitants.⁵

While the nature of registration work was to some extent dictated by the type of constituency – urban Liverpool, with its more mobile population, requiring greater efforts than rural Somerset – another crucial factor was the funds available for registration work. The Liberal Party's weaker financial position meant that in some constituencies the Liberals went unrepresented in the revision courts, or relied on volunteer effort rather than the assistance of a qualified professional agent. When the Liberals did turn their attention to registration in previously neglected areas, the results could be strik-

ing – in 1905, the Liberals made a gain of 2,000 on the register at Wimbledon. With the Liberals unrepresented in the Wimbledon revision courts for the previous eleven years, ‘the Tories had done what they liked and had stuffed the register’, but now the Liberals ‘turned a microscope on it’.⁶ Increased Liberal effort at registration prior to 1906 was one factor contributing to their landslide election victory, showing the vital importance of the agent’s work.

Constituency activities: party organisation and political education

The agent’s activities between elections were not, however, solely concerned with the technicalities of registration, essential though this was. The agent also played a significant part in arranging the social and political activities of the local Liberal organisation, which it was hoped would help to secure and maintain support for Liberalism. Both Liberals and Conservatives were keen to provide ‘political education’ for the ever-growing number of voters. It was felt that efforts at education between elections could reap greater rewards than activity during the election itself: recommending ‘a vigorous Educational Campaign’ of public meetings and distribution of literature in the constituencies, the agents’ journal, the *SCLA Quarterly*, suggested that ‘to send out loads of literature during the excitement of an election when the electors are not in a frame of mind for reading and studying it, cannot surely be considered the most effective method of educating an electorate’.⁷ The distribution of leaflets and pamphlets was one means of political education; political lectures, meetings and debates formed another important element.

The agent’s role in this work was sometimes confined to practicalities: booking rooms

for meetings, getting posters printed, hiring men to distribute leaflets. However, some agents were more directly involved in spreading the political message. James Martin, a Liberal agent in Warwickshire and later in Suffolk, gave hundreds of lectures using the ‘magic lantern’ to provide illustrations. Drawing on his own background as a former agricultural labourer, F. C. Rivers used ‘labourers’ language’ to write letters on political topics to the local press in the rural constituencies where he served as agent, sometimes using the pseudonym ‘Tom Ploughman’. Rivers also undertook lecture tours for the Home Counties Liberal Federation. Other agents wrote political pamphlets or served as editors of local Liberal publications: Birkenhead’s agent in 1897 edited *The Free Lance*, while Frome’s agent produced *The Beacon*.⁸ The greater effort devoted to such activities illustrates how the agent’s duties were expanding during this period, and helps to explain why political agency was no longer dominated by those from legal backgrounds, a development explored further below. The *Liberal Agent*’s list of the agent’s essential attributes in 1900 included not only ‘1. Knowledge of Election Law and Practice (including Registration)’, but also ‘2. General political knowledge; 3. A fair all-round education; 4. Tact; 5. Adaptability; 6. Readiness of speech.’⁹

Constituency activities: electioneering

The culmination of the agent’s work came with the election contest. While in some cases, candidates chose to appoint a local solicitor as their election agent, by the end of this period it was more usual for the constituency agent to manage the election campaign. The agent had overall responsibility for the candidate’s election accounts and the employment of elec-

tion workers. The election agent had to ensure that the laws with regard to bribery and other corrupt and illegal practices were strictly observed. In his memoirs, J. H. Linforth recounted how in 1885, while agent for Nottingham, he stopped a local councillor who wanted to hire the traditional election ‘lambs’ (gangs of rowdies), pointing out that this would constitute illegal employment.¹⁰

Articles in the *Liberal Agent* in the run-up to elections showed that no detail was too small for the agent to consider. In 1910, W. J. Arnold advised his fellow agents to prepare a booklet of political songs for use at election meetings: ‘set to catchy tunes, they fill up an interval of waiting, and keep the audience in good humour’. While modern technology such as the motor car could provide valuable assistance in the essential work of canvassing voters and getting them to the poll, the agent needed to ensure that it was used to best effect: ‘it too frequently occurs that motor cars are aimlessly taken about by members of committees who are more desirous of having a motor ride themselves than fetching voters’.¹¹ The election agent also needed to ensure that suitable election speakers, posters and pamphlets were selected. After the establishment of the Liberal Publication Department in 1887, the central party headquarters supplied an increasing amount of election literature: at the 1906 election, 118 tons of literature were sent out, wrapped with three tons of brown paper and ten hundredweight of string.¹² However, locally produced election material – sometimes with the agent as author – remained essential.

The rise of the professional agent

The years between 1885 and 1910 were significant ones for the Liberal agents, for it was during this

Linforth recounted how in 1885, while agent for Nottingham, he stopped a local councillor who wanted to hire the traditional election ‘lambs’ (gangs of rowdies), pointing out that this would constitute illegal employment.

HIDDEN WORKERS OF THE PARTY

period that they made concerted efforts to establish themselves as a profession. Before 1885, the typical agent was a solicitor, who handled the work of registration and electioneering on a part-time basis alongside his legal practice. After 1885, these solicitor agents were increasingly being replaced by professional agents, who undertook the work of party organisation full time. There were a variety of factors underlying this transition. With the enlarged electorate after 1885, registration work was a growing burden, making it less easy for solicitors to undertake this on a part-time basis. By placing limits on the amounts which candidates could spend at elections, the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act also boosted the importance of organisational work between elections. Candidates could now employ only a limited number of paid election workers, and paid canvassers were prohibited. Instead candidates would have to rely on volunteer election workers. Local party associations became increasingly important as a vehicle for recruiting and retaining the support of these volunteers. The expansion of local government during this period – county councils were established in 1888 and parish and district councils in 1894 – also meant a growing number of local election contests, at which the agent could provide valuable assistance to candidates. As the work of local party organisation expanded, the employment of a full-time professional agent rather than a part-time solicitor agent was desirable.

The pace of change varied from constituency to constituency. While some constituencies employed full-time non-solicitor agents even before 1885 – the Manchester Liberal Association appointed Benjamin Green, a former publisher and bookseller, as its agent in 1874 – others were still relying on the part-time services of solicitors as late as 1910. It was unsurprising that

major towns such as Manchester and Birmingham were the pioneers of professional organisation after 1867, for the Second Reform Act greatly increased the demands of registration and organisation in these large boroughs. The Manchester Liberals' decision to appoint Green may have been influenced by the Conservatives' appointment of a professional agent in 1870. The organisational activities and electoral position of opponents were certainly important factors in deciding how much effort should be put into Liberal organisation. In 1890, the Stretford Liberal Association announced its decision to devote more resources to registration work in response to renewed Conservative activity: 'either they must work on such a scale as affords hope of beating their opponents in the battle of revision, or cease operations of this nature altogether. Any intermediate course can only lead to a waste of money and effort.'¹³

Financial considerations were often paramount in deciding whether to employ a full-time agent. In London in particular, the Liberals were outstripped by their wealthier Conservative rivals when it came to party organisation. In 1893, the Metropolitan Conservative Agents' Association could muster thirty-four members, heavily outnumbering the mere handful of Liberal agents in London. Even by July 1905, with significant efforts from party headquarters to improve organisation in preparation for the 1906 election, there were only fifteen members of the Liberal agents' association covering London's sixty-two seats.¹⁴ Yet while some Conservative strongholds were left unchallenged by the Liberals, elsewhere agents helped to keep the party flag flying. 'No agent has a lonelier furrow to plough than he' was the *Liberal Agent's* verdict on William Finnemore, working in 'politically pagan' Birmingham.¹⁵ Conversely, some areas of Liberal strength lacked

As the work of local party organisation expanded, the employment of a full-time professional agent rather than a part-time solicitor agent was desirable.

professional organisers – a Welsh branch of the Liberal agents' association was not established until 1903, but here Conservative organisation was similarly weak. While large urban constituencies were among the first to appoint full-time agents, rural county seats where traditional landed influences remained strong were slower to adopt professional organisation. However, there were signs of change even here: in Mid-Northamptonshire, influenced by the Spencer interest, a professional agent was appointed in 1903 to replace the local solicitor who had previously handled Liberal affairs.¹⁶

In addition to these regional variations, the employment of agents fluctuated with the party's electoral fortunes. Liberal agents were said to have been 'plunged into a sea of difficulty' following the party split over Home Rule in 1886: 'many Agents disappeared as such – with their Associations; and others held their positions practically as Honorary Agents, unwilling to abandon the cause'.¹⁷ The ebb and flow of political activity between elections also influenced the appointment of agents, not least because the presence of a candidate within a constituency could have a significant effect on local party funds. Following defeat in 1900, some associations economised by dispensing with their agents. Conversely, there was a flurry of appointments in anticipation of the 1906 election: the Lancashire and Cheshire Liberal agents reported in July 1905 that 'qualified Agents have been appointed in almost every constituency'.¹⁸ The growth of the Labour Party presented another potential influence on Liberal activity. Barnard Castle found itself without a Liberal agent in 1903 when Arthur Henderson resigned after seven years' service to contest, successfully, the seat for Labour. However, the embryonic nature of Labour organisation in most constituencies meant that this was not yet a major concern for the Liberals.

While there was therefore a great deal of diversity in the appointment of agents, the overall trend was towards the employment of full-time professionals. By 1898, the Liberal agents' associations had a total of 243 members, representing over half of all English constituencies. By 1906, this had increased to 321 members, including some Welsh agents. Despite this increase, the Liberals were still outstripped by their Conservative rivals. In 1896, the Conservative agents' associations had an estimated membership of just over 300, while in 1902, there were said to be 400 Conservative agents in England and Wales.¹⁹

It is worth assessing how much impact the appointment of professional agents had. The agent's registration work clearly had the potential to make an important contribution to electoral success, altering the political make-up of the electorate which would go to the poll. This was particularly significant given the large number of constituencies with small majorities. Prior to the 1900 election, thirty Liberal and forty-five Unionist seats were held with majorities of under 200.²⁰ The Liberal Publication Department declared in 1896 that 'systematic neglect' of registration by the Liberals had 'repeatedly been responsible for adverse results'.²¹ Yet registration efforts alone were not necessarily enough to tip the balance. While Liberal neglect of registration for five years prior to the 1898 Gravesend by-election was clearly a significant factor in their defeat, the *Liberal Agent* estimated that even with registration work, the Conservative majority would still have been around 200.²²

As the agents were aware, organisation – whether before the election or during the contest itself – was only one possible factor in the election result. The candidate's personal appeal, the strength of the opposition and the particular issues being campaigned on all had to be

The Liberal Agent's declaration that the 1905 North Dorset by-election 'was won by Beer' need not have alarmed Liberal temperance sympathisers: Mr Beer was the Liberal agent.

taken into account. Nevertheless, it was felt that an effective agent could have a decisive influence. The *Liberal Agent's* declaration that the 1905 North Dorset by-election 'was won by Beer' need not have alarmed Liberal temperance sympathisers: Mr Beer was the Liberal agent.²³ However, the agents recognised that there were occasions when even their best endeavours would be to little avail. They wasted little time contemplating the lessons of the 'khaki' election in 1900, for as William Lord, agent for Burnley, argued, 'the tide of jingo passion had been so overwhelming that all minor issues were submerged'. Reading 'solemn homilies' on how things might be better done in future 'would be as idle as it would have been for the generation following Noah's flood to have met in solemn conclave for the purpose of discussing the merits and demerits of umbrellas and waterproofs as a precaution against another deluge'.²⁴

Whether or not the Liberals achieved electoral success at parliamentary level, the presence of a professional agent within a constituency could have a significant impact in stimulating Liberal organisational efforts between general elections, be this through registration, political education, social activities or local government election contests.

Professional organisation

Like many other occupational groups at this time, the Liberal agents established their own organisations as part of their efforts to achieve professional status. The education and training of members was a key concern. The first Liberal agents' association was established just before the major electoral reforms of 1883–85. The Liberal Secretaries and Agents Association (LSAA) was founded in 1882, at a meeting held under the auspices of the National Liberal Federation (NLF). Although its

inaugural meeting was held in London, the LSAA's membership had a northern bias, and it seems likely that it was established in response to the North of England Conservative Agents' Association, founded in 1871.²⁵ Amongst its earliest activities was the publication of guidelines for members on how to manage elections under the restrictions laid down by the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act. From 1889, agents' meetings became a regular fixture at the NLF's annual conferences, and it was around this date that their organisation adopted a new title: the National Association of Liberal Secretaries and Agents (NALSA). In addition to its national gatherings at NLF conferences, the NALSA had district branches which organised regular meetings.

In 1893, a significant development occurred, with the emergence of a rival to the NALSA. The Society of Certificated Liberal Agents (SCLA) was founded as a breakaway movement from the NALSA. The key reason for the split was the belief among the SCLA's founders that agents should hold certificates of proficiency. Agents would have to qualify for these certificates either through experience or by passing an examination. The SCLA's honorary secretary, Fred Nash, observed that 'it was the necessity for a real practical test to keep out interlopers and duffers that compelled the formation of a new society'.²⁶ In February 1894, the SCLA held its first examination, with two separate papers, Registration, and Elections. In addition to technical questions on registration and election law, candidates were asked more wide-ranging questions on electioneering. The following question provides one example:

A Bye-Election is announced in a constituency where there is little or no organisation and a heavy majority against the Liberal Party. You are the nearest *Certificated Agent*, and you

HIDDEN WORKERS OF THE PARTY

are appointed to manage the Election, and are authorised to spend any sum not exceeding the maximum. Indicate your plan of campaign.²⁷

Passing either the Registration or the Elections paper entitled an agent to become a Fellow of the SCLA. The alternative means of qualifying as a Fellow was five years' full-time experience as an agent. Those not meeting either requirement could join at the lower grade of Associate. In contrast, the NALSA neither held examinations nor issued certificates to its members. In holding examinations, the SCLA was clearly emulating the Conservative agents: the National Society of Conservative Agents had held its first examination in 1892.

This division among the Liberal agents saw heated debates at the 1894 NLF conference, which saw the SCLA's formal launch. William Lord, agent for Burnley, echoed the thoughts of many NALSA members when he declared that 'there was an indefinable thing about an agent which you could not examine'. While agents did require knowledge of registration and election law, they needed other qualities, such as tact, adaptability, and determination. The manner in which the SCLA was founded also aroused anger. The society came about as the result of a NALSA sub-committee established to consider the question of issuing certificates of proficiency. In establishing a new organisation, the sub-committee members had clearly exceeded their remit. The NALSA's president, Benjamin Green, recently retired as agent for Manchester, complained that agents in London and the North had not been consulted about the scheme. It appears that regional loyalties fuelled the divisions on this question. While those who supported Green's attack on the SCLA came largely from the North of England,

the SCLA's seven founders all had close connections with the central party organisation. William Woodings, secretary to the NLF's Registration and Elections Department, and William Allard, secretary to the Home Counties Liberal Federation, both worked at party headquarters. The other five – Edwin Perry (Devon Liberal Federation), J. H. Linforth (Leeds), Fred Nash (Colchester), George Docwra (Coventry) and John Skinner (Sheffield) – were all experienced agents, who had served as district agents for the NLF in 1890–91.²⁸

However, once the initial acrimony surrounding the SCLA's formation had subsided, the two organisations coexisted peaceably. Indeed there was cooperation on several matters. In September 1895, the SCLA established its own professional journal, the *SCLA Quarterly*. With the fifth issue, in July 1896, this was renamed the *Liberal Agent*, and became the official organ of both societies. Green's death in January 1896 removed a key opponent of the SCLA. Analysis of the membership lists reveals that there was considerable overlap between the two bodies: in 1898, two-thirds of the SCLA's members also belonged to the NALSA, while nearly a third of the NALSA's members belonged to the SCLA. This undoubtedly facilitated the amalgamation of the two societies, a prospect first raised in December 1899, when the NALSA appointed a committee to consider the question of issuing proficiency certificates. Once concerns about safeguarding the value of certificates had been resolved, with the decision to retain strict requirements for those wishing to qualify as Fellows, the two societies formally merged in July 1901. The united body took the title of the Society of Certificated and Associated Liberal Agents (SCALA). By 1906, the SCALA could boast a total of

321 members in England and Wales.²⁹

This high membership figure reflected the society's usefulness to its members. The SCALA and its predecessors aimed to provide professional education for all members, not just new entrants to the profession. To this end, regular meetings were held at both national and regional level. The topics discussed ranged from the technicalities of registration and election law to the practicalities of election campaigning and party organisation. For example, at their meeting at the 1898 NLF conference, NALSA members considered 'Bazaars as a means of raising funds for Liberal Association Work', before debating the merits of 'The Scottish Registration System'.

Agents could give each other the benefit of their experience: in 1899, Thomas Newbould advised NALSA members who wished to use the 'magic lantern' to show slides during political lectures that they should avoid using acetylene gas in their lanterns, due to its smell and its explosive properties. Agents' meetings provided an invaluable opportunity for informal discussion with fellow professionals. Amos Whitehead, agent for Darlington, suggested that 'an hour's chat with a brother' on a legal or organisational point could be more useful than 'a day's reading up'. Links between agents were also fostered through the *Liberal Agent*, which in addition to its technical and educational content carried reports of agents' meetings and included biographies and other news about agents. Professional solidarity was given an additional boost with the establishment of an agents' benevolent fund in 1900.³⁰

The professional agents' backgrounds

One important question is who the members of the profession

William Lord, agent for Burnley, echoed the thoughts of many NALSA members when he declared that 'there was an indefinable thing about an agent which you could not examine'.

were, if agents were no longer drawn predominantly from the ranks of solicitors. The biographies published in the *Liberal Agent* revealed that agents came from a wide range of backgrounds, from agricultural labourers to journalists, from teachers to factory workers. Other previous occupations followed by Liberal agents included a draper, a jewellery manufacturer, a corn merchant, a coach-builder, a cabinet-maker, an engineer, a joiner, an auctioneer and a miner.

A common path into the agents' profession was to begin by undertaking voluntary work for the local Liberal Party – canvassing voters at elections or serving on local committees. One example is provided by David Hirst, a Halifax carpet-weaver. Born in 1851, Hirst worked in the mills from the age of eight. In 1875, he joined the Halifax Liberal Association, and subsequently played an active role, serving as a ward representative on the executive committee, speaking at meetings, and collecting subscriptions. When the Liberal agent, Mr Brook, was taken ill during the registration court proceedings in 1893, Hirst was fetched from the mill to take his place. On Brook's retirement in 1895, Hirst was appointed as agent, quitting his former occupation after thirty-five years' service. A. K. Durham, who worked in an accountant's office, assisted at the 1883 Newcastle by-election which saw John Morley elected as Liberal MP. In 1884, Durham served as secretary to the annual temperance festival held on Newcastle town moor, a three-day event attended by over 100,000 people. Following this demonstration of his organisational prowess, it was suggested that Durham apply for the Newcastle agent's post, and he was duly appointed.³¹

While the majority of agents during this period moved into political work from other professions, there were some

At the NLF's 1899 conference, the NLF President, Robert Spence Watson, declared that 'no one had rendered more services to the Liberal Party than the agents had'.

individuals for whom agency was their first career. In 1906, the *Liberal Agent* proudly reported on 'A Trio of young Certificated Liberal Agents', Oliver Linforth, Norman Rivers and Walter Belcher. All three were sons of agents, and began their training by assisting in their fathers' offices from a young age: Rivers gained his first experience of by-election work aged just twelve. Rivers and Belcher then went on to train in the offices of other experienced agents, following which Rivers became agent for Mid-Northamptonshire, while Belcher, aged twenty-one, was appointed as agent for Eccles. After three years assisting his father in Leeds and Pudsey, Linforth temporarily left the profession to work in South Africa, first as the representative of a Leeds cycle manufacturer, then serving as a volunteer in the Boer War. However, on his return to England in 1903, he took up political work once more, and like Rivers and Belcher, he passed the SCALA examination.³² While these men followed in their fathers' footsteps to join the agents' profession, one leading Liberal agent, Fred Nash, urged that his own sons should not enter the agents' ranks, because 'the "plums" in that profession are too few'.³³

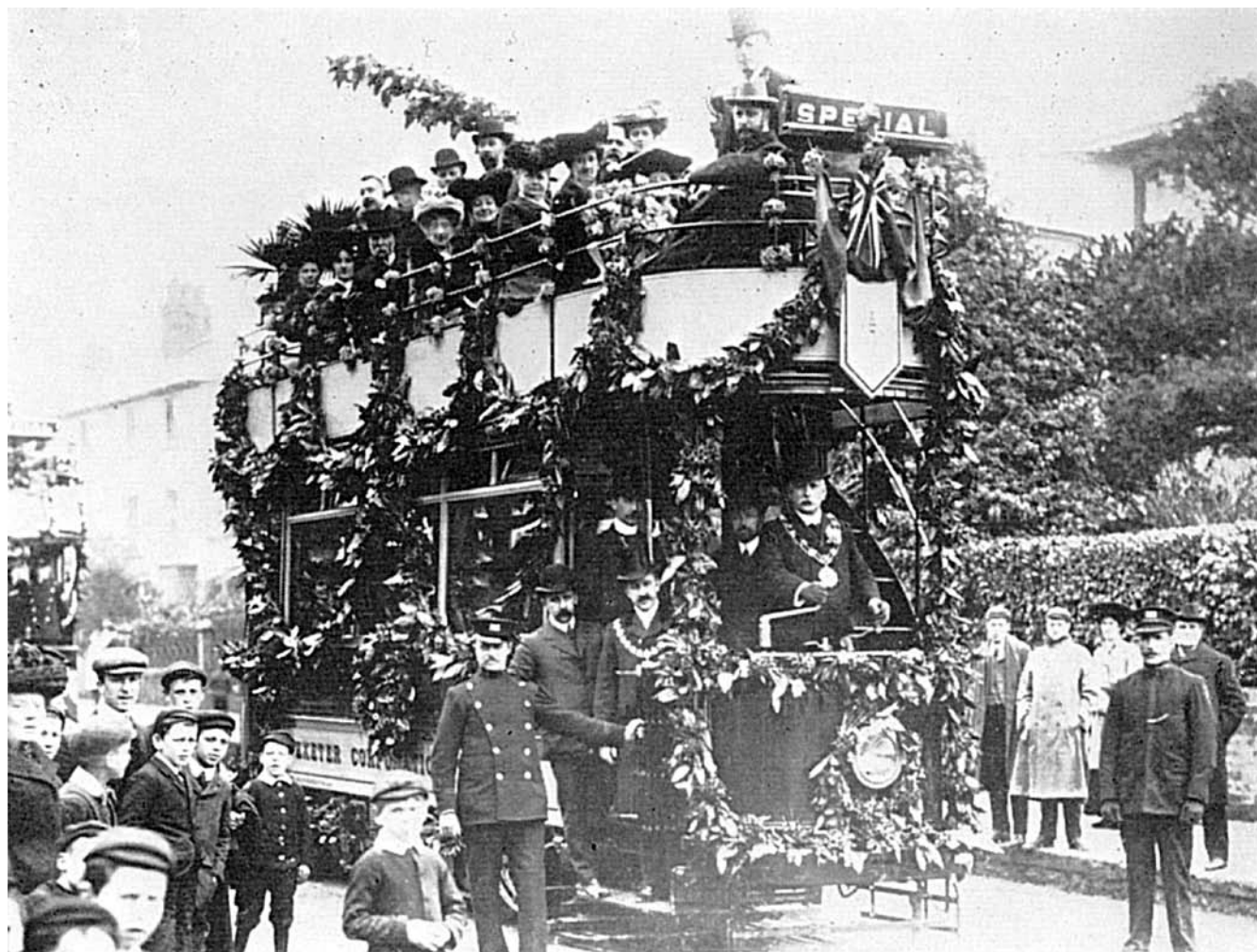
The agent's status

Nash's comments touched on an issue which was a recurrent concern for the professional agents: the agent's status. For the agents, this was closely bound up with the question of their pay and their employment conditions.

At party conferences, agents were lauded by leading party figures for the vital role they played within the party organisation. At the NLF's 1899 conference, the NLF President, Robert Spence Watson, declared that 'no one had rendered more services to the Liberal Party than the agents had', while Campbell-Bannerman described the agents

as 'the skeleton – the bones on which the flesh and blood of the party are built', expressing admiration for their 'devotion and intelligence'.³⁴ However, for the agents, it appeared that there was a gap between party conference rhetoric and the day-to-day reality of their situation in the constituencies. There were regular complaints that the salaries which agents received were not in keeping with their professional skills, responsibilities and aspirations: the *Liberal Agent* protested that 'for the salary of an inferior foreman they expect a man to live and dress as a gentleman [and] ... to know all the intricacies of a most intricate branch of law'.³⁵ The fact that solicitors continued to be appointed as election agents, in some cases over the head of the local professional agent, also provoked anger. A further grievance was the lack of job security which agents faced. The trio of young agents recorded by the *Liberal Agent* in 1906 provided a case in point: Linforth had just lost his position as agent for Ashford after only fifteen months, following the Liberal candidate's defeat, while Rivers had been dismissed despite securing a large Liberal majority in his constituency, because the MP wished to give the agent's post to a relative.

It is worth noting that Conservative agents at this time were voicing similar concerns about status, pay and employment conditions. However, for Liberal agents, the problem appeared particularly acute because of the party's weakened financial position in the aftermath of the Home Rule split in 1886. Lord Rosebery himself declared at the 1896 NLF conference that 'the great want of the age is a want of funds. I do not seek to parade the poverty of the Liberal Party ... but we have lost almost entirely the great and wealthy of the earth'.³⁶ Given that the agent's salary represented a sizeable proportion of local association



expenditure, it is clear that this had significant implications for the agents.

How much then could a Liberal agent expect to earn? Annual salaries varied from constituency to constituency, with the financial position of the local association obviously affecting the sums on offer. At the top end of the scale, the Manchester Liberal Federation in 1903 offered a salary of £500 to its new agent, Fred Burn. This was, however, exceptional, with the more usual salary range being between £150 and £300. Yet even at this level, it was clear that the agents' profession provided an opportunity for advancement, particularly given the relatively humble backgrounds from which many agents came. Fred Nash provides a good example: having left school aged twelve to earn 4d. a day bird-scaring, he then went on to become an office boy, supplementing his 4s. weekly

wage by milking cows, sewing canvas bags and bookkeeping in the evenings. A move to Birmingham to enter the coal trade brought him into contact with Francis Schnadhorst of the NLF, and in 1882 he became agent for Handsworth. By the time of his death in 1906, he had risen through the ranks to become one of the leading members of the profession.³⁷

At the opposite end of the scale from Burn and Nash, however, many agents were far less well rewarded. In 1903, the Liberal agency for Holmfirth was advertised at a salary of two pounds a week (£104 annually), for which the agent was expected to work a forty-eight-hour week, with his duties including 'the collection of subscriptions, visitation of all parts of the Division, assisting in arrangements for public and committee meetings, advising local secretaries and other Liberals, circulating leaf-

Edwin Perry, secretary to the Devon Liberal Federation and one of the founders of the SCLA, presiding over the opening of the municipal tramway as Mayor of Exeter in 1905.

lets, pamphlets &c., by personal distribution or by post' [and] all necessary work in regard to the Registration of Voters'.³⁸ It was little wonder that some agents chose to leave the profession in the hopes of greater remuneration and job security. In 1897, the *Liberal Agent* reported that Doncaster's agent was leaving for the better-paid position of clerk to Worksop District Council, while Dartford's agent was quitting to become secretary to the Dartford School Board.³⁹ The varying levels of pay on offer also contributed to relatively high levels of mobility within the profession, as agents sought to secure what Nash deemed to be the 'plums' of the profession. Burn beat around eighty other applicants for the Manchester agency in 1903.⁴⁰

Despite these concerns about pay and related questions, it is clear that the agent's status was improving during this period.

Many agents became men of standing within their constituencies, involved not only with the political work for which they were employed, but with a wide range of social, philanthropic, sporting and educational activities. While agent for Colchester, Nash served as secretary to Colchester Football Club, and helped establish the Pearson Charity Cup to raise money for the local hospital. Other Liberal agents were involved with causes such as temperance and adult education. Agents also sought election to local office: Exeter's mayor in 1905, when he presided over the opening of the municipal tramway, was Councillor Edwin Perry, one of the SCLA's founders, agent for Ashburton and secretary to the Devon Liberal Federation. Perry also served as a JP, as president of Exeter's Pleasant Sunday Association, and was involved with local schools and hospitals.⁴¹ The outside activities in which agents participated in their constituencies were of service to them in their political work, bringing them into contact with a broader section of the electorate, rather than Liberal supporters alone. Agents were able to gather local knowledge which would be of use in their work of registration and electioneering.

The period between 1885 and 1910 was clearly a highly significant one for the Liberal agents. It saw the agents establish themselves as a profession, with their own professional organisation, journal and examinations. Legal dominance of political agency had given way to a new group of individuals who took on the role of constituency agent as a full-time position. The varied backgrounds from which these new agents came was indicative of the wider responsibilities which the agent's work now entailed. Knowledge of registration and election law was still essential, but agents also played a significant part in the work of political education and party organisation.

Many agents became men of standing within their constituencies.

Dr Kathryn Rix is a Fellow and College Lecturer in History at New Hall, Cambridge. She is currently preparing a book entitled Politics and Professionalisation: The Party Agent and Electoral Culture in England, 1880–1910, to be published in the Royal Historical Society's Studies in History series.

- 1 *Liberal Agent*, 59 (January 1910), pp. 118–19. The *Liberal Agent* is held by the University of Bristol Library, Special Collections.
- 2 *Liberal Agent*, 32 (April 1903), pp. 202–05.
- 3 T.A. Jenkins, *Parliament, Party and Politics in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 90.
- 4 *The Tory*, 59 (December 1897), p. 1598.
- 5 *Liberal Agent*, 60 (April 1910), pp. 172–78.
- 6 W. M. Crook to H. Gladstone, 7 November 1905, British Library, Herbert Gladstone papers, Add. MS. 46024, f. 216.
- 7 *SCLA Quarterly*, 3 (March 1896), p. 5.
- 8 *Liberal Agent*, 28 (April 1902), pp. 22–31; *ibid.*, 49 (July 1907), pp. 1–4; *ibid.*, 8 (April 1897), p. 20; *ibid.*, 12 (April 1898), p. 45.
- 9 *Liberal Agent*, 19 (January 1900), p. 40.
- 10 J. H. Linforth, *Leaves from an Agent's Diary* (Leeds: Wildblood & Ward, 1911), p. 88.
- 11 *Liberal Agent*, 59 (January 1910), pp. 124, 128.
- 12 Liberal Publication Department, *General Election 1906*, British Library, Herbert Gladstone papers, Add. MS. 46107, f. 145.
- 13 Stockport Local Studies Library, B/NN/2/7, Stockport Liberal Association Minute Book, 26 February 1890 [press cutting on the Stretford Liberal Association].
- 14 Figures calculated from minute books of the Metropolitan Conservative Agents' Association (held in the British Library of Political and Economic Science) and from *Liberal Agent*, 41 (July 1905), pp. 48–51. On party organisation in London, see also P. Thompson, *Socialists, Liberals and Labour: The Struggle for London 1885–1914* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 71–75.
- 15 *Liberal Agent*, 46 (October 1906), pp. 39–40.
- 16 J. Howarth, 'The Liberal revival in Northamptonshire, 1880–1895: A case study in late 19th century elections', *Historical Journal*, 12: 1 (1969), p. 94; *Liberal Agent*, 43–44 (January–April 1906), p. 140.
- 17 *Liberal Agent*, 35 (January 1904), p. 110.
- 18 *Liberal Agent*, 41 (July 1905), pp. 40–41.
- 19 For detailed calculations on the membership of Liberal and Conservative agents' associations, see K. Rix, 'The party agent and English electoral culture, 1880–1906' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001), pp. 126–28.
- 20 *Daily Graphic*, 20 September 1900, p. 10.
- 21 Liberal Publication Department, *County Registration* (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1896), p. 1.
- 22 *Liberal Agent*, 13 (July 1898), pp. 16–18.
- 23 *Liberal Agent*, 40 (April 1905), p. 192.
- 24 *Liberal Agent*, 24 (April 1901), p. 7.
- 25 H. J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978 (2nd edn.)), pp. 241–42.
- 26 *The Tory*, 17 (June 1894), p. 407.
- 27 *The Tory*, 17 (June 1894), p. 405.
- 28 *Daily News*, 13 February 1894, p. 5; *The Tory*, 14 (March 1894), p. 303; *The Times*, 16 February 1894, p. 4; *The Spectator*, 17 February 1894, p. 227.
- 29 *Liberal Agent*, 11 (January 1898), pp. 58–67; *ibid.*, 19 (January 1900), p. 9; West Yorkshire Archive Service, Leeds, SCALA minute books, 5 June 1907 (annual report).
- 30 *Liberal Agent*, 12 (April 1898), pp. 23–24; *ibid.*, 16 (April 1899), p. 40; *ibid.*, 17 (July 1899), p. 31.
- 31 *Liberal Agent*, 79 (January 1915), pp. 130–33; *ibid.*, 51 (January 1908), pp. 71–73.
- 32 *Liberal Agent*, 43–44 (January–April 1906), pp. 139–41.
- 33 *Liberal Agent*, 37 (July 1904), p. 4.
- 34 NLF, *Annual reports and council proceedings*, 1899, pp. 103, 106.
- 35 *Liberal Agent*, 16 (April 1899), p. 4.
- 36 NLF, *Annual reports and council proceedings*, 1896, p. 127.
- 37 Manchester Central Library, Manchester Liberal Federation minute book, 18 September 1903; *Liberal Agent*, 25 (July 1901), p. 6; *ibid.*, 37 (July 1904), pp. 1–4.
- 38 *Liberal Agent*, 31 (January 1903), p. 117.
- 39 *Liberal Agent*, 10 (October 1897), pp. 4, 56–57.
- 40 *Conservative Agents' Journal*, 8 (October 1903), p. 104. On mobility among agents, see Rix, 'The party agent and English electoral culture, 1880–1906', pp. 95–99.
- 41 *Liberal Agent*, 57 (July 1909), pp. 20–21.



GLADSTONIAN

**ACCORDING
TO GLADSTONE**

N LIBERALISM

What were the prevailing principles of the Liberal Party in the late Victorian period?

David Bebbington explores the views of its leader, W. E. Gladstone.

William Ewart Gladstone was a man of ideas. He read widely, as the collection of his books at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, bears witness, and he wrote extensively. He published five separate titles on Homer alone; during periods of opposition he composed a lengthy article every month; and he encompassed a broad range of subjects, taking in not only politics and Homer but also many aspects of theology.

His most important output was concerned with Liberalism. He acted as leader of the Liberal Party from 1866 onwards, remaining in the role in substance, if not in name, during the 1870s and not retiring until 1894. During this period Gladstone defined what the principles of Liberalism were. The focus of this article is not on particular policies, the stuff of parliamentary debate, but on Liberal fundamentals, the groundwork of Gladstone's mature political theory. What was Gladstonian Liberalism according to Gladstone? The statesman's articles and speeches enable us to construct an answer.

Liberty

Prominent among Gladstone's values as Liberal leader was liberty, a principle usually associated with classic liberalism. He had altered his view of this subject since the 1830s, when, as a young Conservative MP, he had not believed that freedom was intrinsically good. Gladstone sometimes remarked that the single change of opinion during his career had been in this area, because he had come to accept the importance of liberty. The principle included, he maintained, free speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, freedom to worship and freedom of the person. It extended in foreign affairs to liberty for subject races struggling to escape from oppression, notably the Bulgarians against the Turks in the 1870s. Freedom also implied the minimising of the state. People, Gladstone held, should not look to the legislature for answers to their problems, but should seek solutions themselves. Here was the rationale for self-help. If the population expected the government to provide social benefits, the consequence would be an undermining of freedom. The state would grow and the government would become

oppressive at home. Gladstonian Liberalism certainly embraced the principle of freedom: 'without liberty,' remarked the statesman, 'there is nothing sound'.¹

Gladstone had come to give a high place to liberty chiefly through developing his economic views. He had learned from Sir Robert Peel that it was wise to reduce tariff barriers so as to promote free trade and global prosperity. His economic synthesis was a Christian version of political economy deriving from the Scottish theologian Thomas Chalmers. Laws made by human governments, according to Chalmers, could interfere with the laws of providence. The world was designed by its Creator to be a self-acting mechanism that, if left alone, would operate efficiently. Hence there should be as little regulation of trade as possible. Gladstone's policies were erected on this foundation. As Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1850s and 1860s, he called for retrenchment, the cutting back of public spending. He even circulated to his civil servants a memorandum about regularly counting the number of paper clips on their desk. None was to be wasted. Taxation was to be as low as possible, with Gladstone

'Without liberty', remarked the statesman, 'there is nothing sound'.

GLADSTONIAN LIBERALISM ACCORDING TO GLADSTONE

constantly aiming for the abolition of income tax. Money was to be left in people's pockets so that it would circulate and generate wealth. The population was to be free in the economic sphere to engage in enterprise.

The question arises of whether Gladstone should be classified as an individualist in consequence of his version of economic liberalism. Individualism is often seen as the kernel of nineteenth-century liberalism. Society, on this understanding, is an association of rational egoists pursuing their own self-interest. Gladstone's concern for liberty seems to be an assertion of the right of the individual to be free from the tyrannies of the state and so his identification with this perspective appears plausible. His speeches, however, show that he set a high value on other principles beside freedom. He habitually suggested that liberty needed to be balanced by order, or law and order, or loyalty. Liberty did not stand alone in splendid isolation as a sanction for individualism. Rather, values associated with the community were ranked alongside it. Gladstone should not be seen as an individualist, for he perceived the theoretical importance of belonging to human groups.

Community

Another feature of Gladstonian Liberalism was therefore community. The language of community runs through Gladstone's discourse. It is applied to corporate life of all kinds, whether small or large, at home or abroad. 'The sense of a common life', he declared in 1890, '— parochial, municipal, county, national — is an ennobling qualification to civilised man.'³ Each individual must show respect for the whole, for the common good. This bond of human society Gladstone called 'reverence'. There must be reverence for the customary, traditional ways of the group, and especially for its

Gladstone should not be seen as an individualist, for he perceived the theoretical importance of belonging to human groups.

leaders. Individuals should be willing to submit their judgement to the inherited wisdom of the collectivity. Reverence would then function as the glue of human communities.

Which communities in particular did Gladstone mean? In the first place there was the family, the basic building block of society. Its high esteem in the nineteenth century, according to Gladstone, was one of the greatest fruits of Christianity. The Christian faith had raised respect for women over the centuries. In Aristotle, women are wrongly treated as inferior participants in the household. In Christian teaching, by contrast, women possessed moral and social equality. There might be a difference of function, but there was equality of status. Gladstone praised the 'reciprocal deference' between husband and wife to be found in the pages of Homer.³ The family was the essential training ground for children. And, not least for that reason, the statesman denounced threats to the family. In 1857, when he was out of office, the government introduced a bill to allow divorce. Previously divorce had been possible only by means of a separate act of parliament, which by its cumbersome and expensive nature was inconceivable for nearly all the population. Now, although limited to very specific circumstances, divorce was to be made more widely available. Gladstone resisted vehemently in parliament, arguing that marriage was sacred and designed to be permanent. Although his campaign was unsuccessful and the bill passed into law, the strength of his opposition was an index of the high value Gladstone placed on the family.

A second community that Gladstone envisaged as having a place in social theory was the church. Gladstone, though beginning as an evangelical, had adopted a high view of the place of the church as a visible and organised society. It possessed its

own rulers, the bishops, whose authority was independent of that of the state. Although a strong defender of the Church of England as established, Gladstone always insisted that the state was not to interfere with the internal life of the church, specially its teaching. His *bête noire* was Erastianism, the belief that the state was to control the church.

This conviction caused serious problems in government. During his first administration, in 1870, the government was responsible for a bill that aimed to fill the gaps in the national system of education in England and Wales. It had to consider what form of religious instruction should be given in the new schools. Gladstone wanted there to be dogmatic Anglican teaching in accordance with the creed. His fellow cabinet members, on the contrary, wanted the religious training to be acceptable to all Protestants, whether Anglican, Methodist, Congregationalist or whatever. There were acute tensions in cabinet until, in the end, the bill was passed in the form preferred by his colleagues. One of the greatest legislative measures of his government enacted a policy that Gladstone himself detested.

Yet as Prime Minister, Gladstone was able to serve the Church of England. The bishops were appointed by the Queen on the advice of her premier, and so Gladstone was able to recommend men who would give able leadership on the episcopal bench. He drew up a list of the qualities he looked for in a potential bishop:

Piety. Learning (sacred). Eloquence. Administrative power. Faithful allegiance to the Church and to the Church of England. Activity. Tact and courtesy in dealings with men: knowledge of the world. Accomplishments and literature. An equitable spirit. Faculty of working with his

brother bishops. Some legal habit of mind. Circumspection. Courage. Maturity of age and character. Corporal vigour. Liberal sentiments on public affairs. A representative character with reference to shades of opinion fairly allowable in the Church.⁴

With such paragons at its head, the church could hardly fail to thrive. Gladstone wanted to strengthen the church through its leadership so that it would be a powerful and independent force in the life of the nation.

A third type of community that he envisaged was the municipality. Gladstone saw towns and cities as possessing a strong corporate identity. He believed it was desirable to foster a sense of local loyalty, and so opposed measures of centralisation transferring powers from local to national authorities. Municipalities, he believed, should be entrusted with large powers.

The point can be illustrated by reference to temperance reform. Some Liberal leaders rejected the proposal that local authorities should be allowed to prohibit the sale of alcohol within their bounds. If in a local poll most people voted to ban liquor, leaders such as Lord Hartington believed, the majority would be tyrannising over the minority who wanted to be able to buy a drink. That would infringe the principle of individual liberty. Gladstone, however, was willing to support a majority decision to ban alcohol. The expression of conviction by the community as a whole should, in his view, override individual freedom.

Because he upheld local decision-making, Gladstone thought it crucial for people to participate in municipal affairs. They should both vote and offer themselves as candidates for election. Local political involvement was, in the statesman's opinion, a sure sign of a healthy body politic. Local leaders, trained by joining

in the direction of local affairs, would go on to become MPs. Gladstone in office set himself to extend local government, his last bill as Prime Minister being a measure to establish a council in every parish. Even villages were to have a distinct political identity, together with a sense of responsibility for their own affairs. Whether tiny villages or great cities, local settlements were to display a community consciousness.

The nation had even stronger claims on the loyalty of the individual. Gladstone saw patriotism and nationalism as interchangeable. Nationalism, he maintained, was a force for good in the modern world. He conceded that it could be corrupted into national pride and so become oppressive or assertive. In general, however, nationalism fostered progress, stimulating industry, for example, in the newly united Italy. Gladstone envisaged nationhood as a compound of race, religion, language, history and other factors. In Wales, national identity was specially linked to history and language. More often it was linked to religion and even more frequently it was rooted in race.

Nationhood was a delicate question in the British Isles in Gladstone's day. Whereas England, Scotland and Wales were content to form part of a United Kingdom, Ireland was not. There a strong movement aimed at establishing a separate parliament and perhaps a separate state. Gladstone pondered Irish claims, gradually reaching the conclusion that Ireland should be treated as a nation distinct from Britain. In 1886, therefore, he proposed Home Rule, the setting up of a parliament in Dublin, separate but subordinate. Accepting Irish claims against Britain was the boldest move of Gladstone's career, and, though he failed to carry the bill, the proposal represented a noble effort to bring about a peaceful settlement to the relations between Ireland

and Britain that might well have averted the troubles of the succeeding century. Irish Home Rule was an indication of Gladstone's commitment to giving recognition to nations as distinct communities.

Nations, however, were part of a larger international community. In that sphere, Gladstone held, there should be cooperation rather than competition. He often spoke of the Concert of Europe, meaning the great powers acting together to settle differences, restrain over-ambitious states and keep international order. Gladstone believed that each great power, when acting separately, naturally pursued its own self-interest. When, however, the great powers took joint action, the effect was to neutralise national selfishness. In Gladstone's series of Midlothian speeches in 1879, the most celebrated triumph of his public oratory, he explained that among the proper principles of foreign policy was the maintenance of the Concert of Europe.

Gladstone's vision extended beyond his own continent, recognising the importance of Britain's relations with America, a great power of the future. In his first administration he insisted on settling the big outstanding difference with the United States. During the Civil War the Confederate vessel *Alabama*, built on the Mersey, had preyed on Federal shipping. After the war the United States demanded damages from Britain. The Conservatives generally favoured brushing aside the idea as an impertinence, but Gladstone made a generous settlement through arbitration. He argued that the decision helped establish the principles of international law.

Furthermore, Gladstone held that small nations should have a recognised place in the international arena. Another Midlothian principle was acknowledging the equal rights of all nations, not just of the

Irish Home Rule was an indication of Gladstone's commitment to giving recognition to nations as distinct communities.

GLADSTONIAN LIBERALISM ACCORDING TO GLADSTONE

great powers. The statesman was known as a champion of small nationalities struggling to be free. Nations therefore should accord respect to each other, so avoiding war. Each nation was to recognise itself as part of a wider community of nations.

Communitarianism and its critics

Gladstone's mature political vision therefore embraced a range of communities: family, church, municipality, nation and international relations. He broadly fits the school of thought called in recent times the communitarians. These writers were theorists who in the 1970s and 1980s criticised the assumptions of American political life prevailing at the time.

Their critique was directed centrally against John Rawls's book *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls postulated the absolute priority of liberty in making political arrangements. Such a liberal polity, Rawls argued, would be chosen in the abstract by any rational agent. This case, communitarians contended, postulated a mistaken conception of how human beings operate. They do not live as rational agents in the abstract, but, rather, are bound up with particular communities possessing a distinct territory, shared activities and common values. Rawlsian theory deprived human beings of the benefits of community, and in particular of mutual encouragement to the good life. This charge was the burden of Charles Taylor's *Hegel and Modern Science* (1979) and of Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981). Communitarians offered an alternative political theory to what in Rawls, despite all the qualifications he offered, amounted to a form of liberal individualism. Gladstone was far more like Taylor and MacIntyre than he was like Rawls. The community, according to Gladstone, confers benefits on

individuals, claiming their allegiance without calculation of self-interest. Involvement in public life is a duty, and patriotism, based on a sense of common values, is a virtue. The principle of justice is embodied in the community. All these views were shared by Gladstone with the communitarians. The foundation of his position was by no means a species of liberal individualism. Paradoxical as it may appear, the leader of the late Victorian Liberal Party was far more of a communitarian than a liberal.

Two major criticisms are often mounted against the communitarian political thinkers of the modern world. One is that they neglect the sharpness and frequency of conflict within communities. The communitarians, on this view, are so concerned with the role of the group that they assume its solidarity. Internal differences such as class conflict are minimised or else ignored altogether. A second criticism is that theorists of this school neglect the relations of members of a community with those outside its bounds. They so stress the mutual obligations of people within the community that they have nothing to say about their responsibilities to members of other communities. Where did Gladstone stand on these points?

On the issue of the internal divisions within communities, Gladstone often spoke of the separation of interests within groups. In the church, he was extremely conscious of the party tensions. In the nation, he often spoke of the divergent interest of the classes. In the international community, he was highly aware of the pursuit of national self-interest. Gladstone's constant theme was that every section should subordinate its own interests to those of the community as a whole. Within the nation, for example, all classes were to seek the common good. The task of the politician, as

Gladstone saw it, was to achieve a balance between classes. Thus in taxation policy, he tried to ensure that all classes contributed their fair share to the national coffers. The aristocracy should pay tax on land, the middle classes on income and the working classes on food. Gladstone's fiscal skill lay in persuading each of the classes that the balance was just. In his last years in public life, Gladstone often spoke of the conflict of the masses against the classes. The 'masses' were the rank and file of the population, the mass of the people who represented the whole nation. The 'classes' were the selfish professionals, whether soldiers or lawyers, who pursued their own interests at the expense of the nation at large. He was highly aware of the fragmented nature of the body politic, but he asserted the priority of the whole, of the common good. That was to stand in a long tradition of Christian social analysis.

The other question raised by critics against the communitarian school is the issue of the relation between members of one polity and those outside. The communitarians often neglect the responsibility of people in one land for those elsewhere, treating each nation as self-sufficient. Gladstone, however, did not fall into that snare. Here another salient category of Gladstone's thought needs to be introduced, the idea of humanity. Gladstone frequently spoke of our 'common humanity'.⁵ In 1876, for instance, he urged that Turkey must not be allowed to massacre her Bulgarian subjects. The Conservative government was declaring that it was in Britain's interest to support Turkey against Russia, and so to ignore the massacres. According to Gladstone, however, the people of Britain shared their humanity with the Bulgarian people. Because the British had fellow-feeling with the oppressed in their suffering, they must denounce Turkish misrule.

Paradoxical as it may appear, the leader of the late Victorian Liberal Party was far more of a communitarian than a liberal.

The effect was to galvanise the existing Bulgarian agitation into a powerful political force. His efforts are still remembered to this day, with a street in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital, being named after Gladstone. The rationale for the campaign was humanity, the fundamental human characteristics of the peoples of the two lands.

The same theme of humanity runs through Gladstone's later speeches. In 1879 he appealed on behalf of the hill tribes of Afghanistan when the country was invaded by Britain under a Conservative administration. 'Remember', he declared, 'that He who has united you together as human beings in the same flesh and blood, has bound you by the law of mutual love.'⁶ Humanitarian concern is rooted here in the intentions of the Creator, and humanity was conceptualised by Gladstone as a distinctly Christian value. It derived from the statesman's theological development. He had come to recognise the humanity of Christ and his consequent sympathy for suffering as central dimensions of faith. Consequently Gladstone insisted that dwellers in one land must be concerned for inhabitants of others, particularly when they were undergoing suffering. There was an obligation not just to other members of one's own community but also to all other human beings. Gladstone escapes the criticism mounted against other communitarians because his version of their theory was tempered by humanitarianism.

Gladstone's Liberalism is therefore rather different from how it is often portrayed. Certainly it did not amount to a simple individualism. Rather, his political philosophy as Liberal leader had three supreme values: liberty, community and humanity. He believed in freedom for individuals, but not at the expense of responsibilities to others. He believed in the importance of community, but not to the neglect of outsiders.

Gladstone escapes the criticism mounted against other communitarians because his version of their theory was tempered by humanitarianism.

He believed in humanity, but not in the abstract: the need of individuals to enjoy freedom had to be taken into account. The combination provided its own checks and balances. In terms of recent debate in political theory, Gladstone should be seen as a communitarian, but, unlike some later representatives of the school, he was acutely aware of the salience of internal divisions within communities. Hence the statesman's position was a qualified communitarianism.

That stance may even have its relevance today. Perhaps a combination of liberty, community and humanity is worth pursuing in the twenty-first century, as in the nineteenth.

David Bebbington is Professor of History at the University of Stirling. He is the author of William Ewart Gladstone: Faith and Politics in

Victorian Britain (*Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993*) and *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer and Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)*, Chapter 9 of which provides an ampler and fully referenced version of the case propounded here. This paper was delivered as the Founder's Day address at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, on 8 July 2004.

- 1 *The Times*, 24 October 1890, p. 4.
- 2 *The Times*, 30 October 1890, p. 4.
- 3 William E. Gladstone, *Juventus Mundi: The Gods and Men of the Heroic Age* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), p. 410.
- 4 John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, 3 vols (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), Vol. 2, p. 431.
- 5 *The Times*, 28 November 1887, p. 4.
- 6 William E. Gladstone, *Political Speeches in Scotland, November and December 1879* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1879), p. 94.

LETTERS

Cuckoo in the nest?

I am not sure that Lawrence Iles fully appreciates the point of my criticism of Herbert Gladstone for his part in the Liberal-LRC pact of 1903-06 ('Organiser par excellence: Herbert Gladstone (1854-1930), in *Journal of Liberal History* 51 (summer 2006)).

Gladstone was absolutely right to want more working-class MPs. His father had expressed eager appreciation of the few who already existed in the late nineteenth century. But he went disastrously wrong when he helped a separate party to struggle to its feet.

It was predictable at the time that, at the very least, the nascent Labour Party would thus become stronger when it sought to fish in the same pond as the Liberals for working-class votes,

and that the long-term beneficiaries would be the Tories. At worst, it would actually kill the Liberal Party – as it very nearly did.

Roy Douglas

Liberals in Windsor

In arguing that the Liberal Democrat position in 2005 was too far to the left, Antony Wood claims that Windsor 'has never had anything other than a Conservative MP' (Letters, *Journal of Liberal History* 51 (summer 2006)).

In fact this is not true. Elections in Windsor between 1832 and 1874 frequently returned Liberal MPs.

John Austen

'FREEDOM NOT R LIBERALISM, GARDEN CITIES

The end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the next saw the emergence in Britain of a pioneering version of town planning. This took the form largely of varying attempts to build garden cities, and later the introduction of the first town planning legislation. The stamp of Liberal thinking on this process is unmistakable, although it was by no means uncontested political ground. In this article by **Professor Dennis Hardy**, the story is told of key individuals and actions in a formative period for Britain's cities and countryside.



'REGIMENTATION' AND EARLY TOWN PLANNING

Garden cities, garden suburbs and early town planning were shaped to a remarkable degree by Liberal ideas and activists. First among them was Ebenezer Howard.

Howard's way

It is deeply to be deplored that the people should continue to stream into the already overcrowded cities, and should thus further deplete the country districts.¹

In the opening pages of Ebenezer Howard's seminal book, *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, published in 1898, the author spoke of congested cities and an impoverished countryside as two sides of the same coin. All political parties, he claimed, were agreed that this related problem had to be solved, but how was it to be done? At one political extreme the answer lay in an enhanced role for the state, and at the other a solution would emerge from the interplay of free market forces. Howard himself (a member of the National Liberal Club) was not driven by party politics but his commitment to charting a middle course, avoiding the perceived regimentation of socialism and the self-interests of capitalism, was

in line with Liberal thinking. In a draft of his book he penned the phrase 'freedom not regimentation' (amending this later, in an attempt to remove possible offence to potential socialist supporters, to 'freedom and cooperation').

Howard in his time dabbled with various inventions (including a machine for shorthand typing) and it was as an invention that he saw the garden city, the subject of his book. He is often dismissed as politically naïve – George Bernard Shaw dubbed him 'an heroic simpleton' – but nothing could be further from the truth. In successive drafts of *To-Morrow*, he went to great lengths to avoid political contention. Before he alighted on the name of garden city he was thinking in terms of 'Unionville', eventually rejecting it because it sounded too strident; he thought that, in contrast, 'garden city' would lure supporters with its evocative imagery. Howard's ideas were forming at least a decade before his book was published, as evidenced by his reaction to *Looking Backward*, the work of the American socialist, Edward Bellamy. In response to the latter's portrayal of the ideal city of the future, Howard was at first enthused but then saw that beneath the utopian veneer was a hard core of authoritarianism. There had to be a better approach.

His answer was the garden city. At first glance this was seen by many at the time as just another utopian scheme with no chance of realisation; the antagonistic Fabians (preferring to put their own trust in the state) were quick to make this very point. But there was more to the garden city than at first met the eye. At one level, it was a plan for a model settlement, containing the best features of both town and country while discarding the worst. Each garden city would have a limited population, with most living in the main settlement and the rest in a surrounding agricultural belt. They would be cities of gardens – with wide boulevards, parks and individual gardens – as well as cities within a garden, with the encircling farmland a foretaste of the modern green belt. When the population target was reached a new garden city would be formed; in his diagram of a constellation of garden cities, in view of his Liberal sympathies, it is surely no coincidence that he names one of them 'Gladstone'.

Dig to the next layer and things were not quite so simple. Howard had been tussling for years with the problem of how to find a way to share wealth within the community and yet attract a broad level of political support. His approach was likened to that of charting 'a course between the Scylla of anarchy

**They would
be cities
of gardens
– with wide
boulevards,
parks and
individual
gardens
– as well
as cities
within a
garden.**

'FREEDOM NOT REGIMENTATION'

and the Charybdis of despotism'.² He also coined the term 'social individualism' (elsewhere referred to as 'associated individualism') to describe his middle way. In practical terms, he proposed the formation of a trust to purchase and then maintain, on behalf of the community, the land and buildings. The freehold would remain with the trust so that the community would enjoy the benefits resulting over time from rising land and rental values. All of this, of course, depended on finding sufficient capital in the first place to buy and develop suitable land.

Howard himself rather skated over the problems of attracting investors, his sights being set more on what would happen next. He believed that once the first garden city was formed, people would see the advantages and further experiments would soon follow. There was no limit to what might then happen. Landlords in the cities charging extortionate rents would be forced out of business as people chose to go and live in garden cities; over a period, the entire conurbation would gradually disintegrate as individuals and firms left for pastures new. Moreover, within garden cities there would be opportunities for cooperative schemes of housing and profit-sharing in the workplace so that, little by little, the whole system of capitalism would be transformed: hence the sub-title, *A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*. Three years after his initial publication, a second edition of his book was renamed, less contentiously, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*.

Having presented his ideas, the challenge was then to put them into practice. He was not alone in his efforts; in the year following the publication of *To-Morrow*, the Garden City Association was formed to spread the word and to initiate the world's first garden city. A number of individuals with valuable business experience and contacts were drawn to the cause

– people who knew more about the world of finance and property than Howard himself. The first Chairman was T. H. W. Idris, manufacturer of mineral waters and a Liberal member of the London County Council. He was succeeded by Ralph Neville, an experienced barrister and former Liberal MP in Liverpool from 1887 to 1895, who was to become a leading light in the garden city movement.³ As well as the Chairmanship of the Garden City Association he also led the companies formed to buy a suitable site and then to build the first garden city. Directors on the Board of the first of these companies, the Garden City Pioneer Company, included influential and wealthy Liberals like Aneurin Williams and T. H. W. Idris.

The first Secretary of the Garden City Association, Thomas Adams, was also a committed Liberal. Before coming to London to take up his new post, he had been active in Liberal politics in Edinburgh, at one time Secretary of his local association and then party agent in the 1900 general election. He claims to have been drawn to Howard's ideas less by the garden city as such and more by the underlying philosophy of social individualism.

As well as Neville and Adams, the idea of the garden city attracted others with Liberal sympathies, such as Lord Grey, the MP for South Northumberland from 1880 to 1885 and Tyneside from 1885 to 1896; something of a maverick in his parliamentary career, he later stood as a Liberal Unionist but was defeated. Grey chaired an early and influential meeting of the Garden City Association at Bournville and offered his help in various ways to promote the campaign. Between 1904 and 1911 he was Governor-General of Canada, and in that post invited garden city evangelists from Britain to come and spread the message in that young nation. On the domestic front, two Liberal MPs who played a

Howard also coined the term 'social individualism' (elsewhere referred to as 'associated individualism') to describe his middle way.

valuable role were Henry Vivian (Birkenhead, 1906–10, and Totnes, 1923–24), who straddled the related movements of garden cities and co-partnership, and Aneurin Williams (Plymouth, 1910; North West Durham, 1914–18; and Consett, 1918–22), a founding director of the First Garden City Company and later its Chairman. In 1906, of the thirty-seven MPs who were members of the Association or shareholders in the First Garden City Company, thirty-three were Liberals and the other four Conservatives.

At a more local level, in Letchworth before 1914, amongst the more influential Liberals active in the town was one of the garden city's two master planners, Barry Parker; the editor of the local newspaper, W. H. Knight; the unsuccessful candidate in the Hitchin ward in the 1906 general election, T. T. Gregg; and a stalwart garden city campaigner and later the Chairman of Letchworth Urban District Council, Dr Norman MacFadyen.⁴

Co-partnership in the suburbs

... he was sane enough after a fashion, I knew the type. Vegetarianism, simple life, poetry, nature-worship, roll in the dew before breakfast. I'd met a few of them years ago in Ealing.⁵

Ridicule, as George Orwell (in the above quote) well knew, is an easy way to dismiss a social experiment that is alien to one's own political beliefs. In this vein, garden cities and related schemes – which often attracted the kind of social progressive who could easily be labelled eccentric – offered a ready target for a sharp tongue.

External critics were one thing but garden city enthusiasts often added to their own difficulties. Garden cities were evangelised by their founders as the only true gospel, and fellow reformers were warned of diluted versions, such as garden suburbs.

(Right): Ebenezer Howard, and plans for garden cities



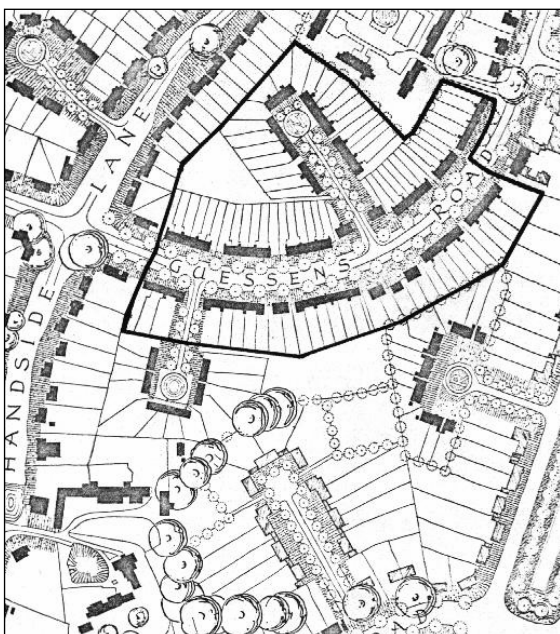
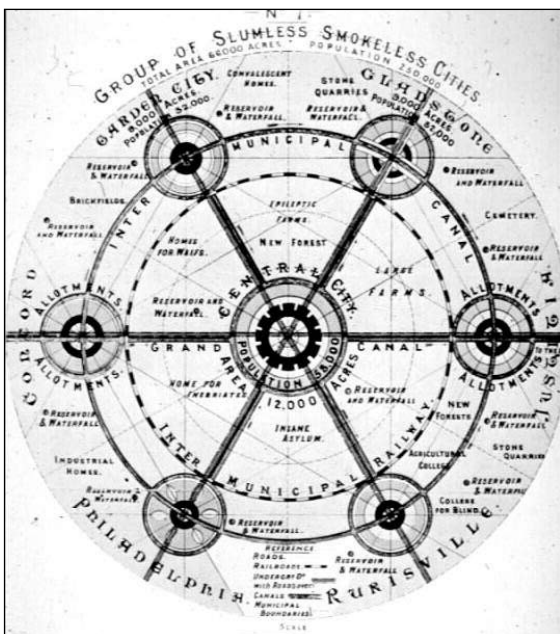
There was indeed a difference, as the former were envisaged as self-standing communities, whereas the latter, as urban extensions, would add to the size and problems of existing cities. But to the many people who only wanted to see an improvement in the general standard of urban housing this difference was largely academic, and a good garden suburb was as welcome in its way as a full-blown garden city. The respective garden city and garden suburb movements each attracted their own dedicated followers as well as an overlapping list of supporters; even the original garden city architects, Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, felt comfortable in moving on from Letchworth to new garden suburb schemes. So, too, did Henry Vivian, who was warmly appreciative of the work of Howard but who was personally responsible for one of the most significant of all garden suburb experiments.

Vivian (rather like Howard) made his way in the world from humble beginnings. He was born in 1868, the son of a carpenter in a Devon village, and followed his father into the trade. At the earliest opportunity he moved to London and was soon drawn into trade union activity and the co-partnership movement. The latter, represented through the Labour Association⁶ (of which Neville himself was chairman at one time), was effectively an offshoot of the better-known cooperative movement which the co-partnership firebrands thought had rather lost its way. At the heart of the newer movement, the co-partnership campaigners promoted the idea of employees sharing in the management and profits of their place of work; in practical terms this amounted to the idea of workers being shareholders in their own companies. Far from aligning itself with the emergent Labour Party the association constantly stressed that it was not a threat to capitalism – a point that was turned on its head

by the Fabians and others with Labour allegiances who saw co-partnership as simply a capitalist ploy to defuse working-class opposition.

Vivian, himself, held the position of Secretary of the Labour Association and in that role met like-minded people who were later to be his associates in other ventures: Ralph Neville, Aneurin Williams, Earl Grey and Ebenezer Howard. In 1906 Vivian entered Parliament in the 'Lib-Lab' camp of the party. During the earlier part of his career, Vivian was at the heart of discussions on how best to proceed. In this context, it proved to be just one step from co-partnership in the workplace to applying the principles to housing, where profits could be enjoyed by tenants rather than landlords. An experimental scheme was launched in 1888, in which, with a minimum shareholding of £1, tenants would receive a dividend on their rent as well as on shares. Vivian was attracted to the idea and went one step further in combining co-partnership in the home with the same in the workplace. He set up his own construction company on co-partnership lines and by 1896 his workers were building houses that they could then live in. The problem with that, though, was that through £1 shares it was difficult to raise sufficient capital. Almost by chance a solution to this funding problem emerged.

Vivian was tireless in his promotion of co-partnership, and it was at a meeting in Ealing in 1901 that he met a group of like-minded men. Without saying it in so many words, they discounted the idea of a scheme for the poorest workers and set their sights, instead, on the needs of skilled artisans (like themselves) who could invest more and would more likely be attracted to the idea of profit-sharing. Their aim was to build houses that the members would own collectively and rent themselves, so that every man 'would be his



'FREEDOM NOT REGIMENTATION'

neighbour's landlord'; it would strike a balance between self-interest and collective ideals. Vivian was elected chairman of the pioneering company, Ealing Tenants Ltd, set up to put it all on a legal footing. The outcome was a model estate, Brentham Garden Suburb – an amalgam of co-partnership ideas and the architecture of a garden city. Although some of its central ideals were eroded over the years, it succeeded in demonstrating a way to build fairly priced housing in a good environment and with a lively sense of community.

Brentham was by no means a large development (just sixty acres) but it was an important milestone in the emergence of progressive town planning. A company was formed, Co-partnership Tenants Ltd, with Vivian as its first chairman, to promote similar schemes nationwide. By 1914 there were more than thirty co-partnership societies across the country, responsible for building 7,000 houses. Some of these later schemes had a larger tally of co-partnership houses than Brentham itself, most notably Hampstead Garden Suburb which included three such developments in its own boundaries. Vivian, himself, took a close personal interest in another offshoot, Wavertree Garden Suburb, and became Chairman of that development and its management company, Liverpool Garden Suburb Tenants Ltd.

Moreover, for all the differences in provenance, there were always close links between the co-partnership campaign and the parallel garden city movement. In Letchworth, Howard was instrumental in promoting his own co-partnership experiment, while, in turn, at a dinner in 1912 in honour of Howard, Vivian (then Chairman of the Labour Association) headed a table of forty co-partnership delegates and spoke warmly of the common interests of the two movements. In the following

Henry Vivian himself warned that unless the nation began to improve the state of the towns 'we may as well hand over our trade, our colonies, our whole influence in the world, to Germany without undergoing all the trouble of a struggle in which we condemn ourselves beforehand to certain failure'.

year, Vivian joined the Council of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (successor to the Garden City Association). Some years earlier, in 1907, the appointment of Unwin and Parker to prepare plans for a newly acquired extension of Brentham had already exemplified this productive partnership. Unwin was enthusiastic about co-partnership, believing that it was at the heart of blending aesthetics and community: 'instead of the buildings being mere endless rows ... they will naturally gather themselves into groups, and the groups again clustered around the greens will form larger units, and the interest and beauty of grouping will at once arise'.⁷

It is easy to see how Liberals would have felt comfortable with this ethos of cooperative garden suburbs. An amusing footnote to this episode comes a few years later, just after the end of the First World War, when Prime Minister Lloyd George employed a group of staff to work closely with him at 10 Downing Street. Because their accommodation overflowed into the basement and garden area it was referred to as the 'garden suburb'⁸; no one in the circle would have been unhappy with that.

Taming the state

... an organic plan of social progress, which implies a new consciousness of Liberal statecraft.⁹

It was one of the architects of modern Liberal philosophy, J. A. Hobson, who spoke perceptively of 'a new consciousness of Liberal statecraft'. The issue was challenging: how could Liberalism, at the start of the twentieth century, use the state to its own advantage? How could it unshackle the enormous potential of the state without threatening the very liberties it sought to enhance? Certainly, there were social problems where it

seemed as if the state could be used to offer a solution, but the balance of judgement was always going to be fine.

By the time of 'the halcyon years of Liberalism' from 1906 to 1914,¹⁰ the need to do something about the state of the nation's housing was widely recognised. The arguments were by no means simply moral; poor environmental conditions led, in turn, to the debilitation of the labour force and this was an impediment to industrial productivity. So, too, were living conditions linked to the fitness of the country's fighting forces. In a period when there was increasing competition with other industrial nations, notably Germany and the United States, the incentive to improve the nation's housing stock was keenly recognised. Henry Vivian himself warned that unless the nation began to improve the state of the towns 'we may as well hand over our trade, our colonies, our whole influence in the world, to Germany without undergoing all the trouble of a struggle in which we condemn ourselves beforehand to certain failure.'¹¹ At least he and others could point to the shining examples of experiments like Bournville and Port Sunlight (both garden villages sponsored by Liberal industrialists, George Cadbury and W. H. Lever, later Lord Lever), Letchworth Garden City, and garden suburbs like Brentham and Hampstead. But was the scale of what needed to be done too great, by then, for voluntary effort alone? Was it time to create a new role for the state?

The idea of the state intervening in these matters was certainly not new. Important first steps had been taken more than half a century before in relation to public health and housing, and it was only a further step in that direction to embrace a more comprehensive approach in the form of town planning. Ideologically, the time was right for a venture of this sort. Social

reform had not previously occupied the centre ground for Liberal administrations but times were changing. Spurred on by the growing influence of the socialist movement and its direct threat to Liberal seats in parliament (if not to parliament itself), the party's philosophers, under the banner of New Liberalism, reconciled old traditions with new circumstances. State intervention in the social realm could be justified if it helped individuals to enjoy (rather than diminish) their liberties within a capitalist system; doubters in the party could be persuaded that it would be better to do things this way than suffer the upheaval of a socialist approach.

When the Liberals were returned to power in 1906, although the prospect of an unprecedented programme of social reforms, laying the very foundations for a future welfare state, was not immediately obvious this, of course, is what happened. In this wider context of extensive change, a seemingly modest measure in favour of town planning hardly seemed likely to create too many political ripples. Modest it may have been, but the very idea of potentially interfering with the rights of private property – stopping land-owners from doing as they wished – was highly contentious in itself. For this reason, in the hope of minimising opposition, a bill was framed without the more interventionist clauses that the town planning lobbyists had wished to see.

Ironically, it was a former socialist, John Burns (by then converted to Liberalism) who steered through the new legislation. Burns had previously been a member of the Social Democratic Federation, although he later represented Battersea as its Liberal MP. By the time that town planning was on the political agenda he held the position of President of the Local Government Board. He recalled, rather glibly, why he promoted this measure: 'I was born in a

slum and this made me a town planner'.¹² In fact, the Housing, Town Planning, etc. Act of 1909, did nothing to alleviate the kind of problem experienced by Burns in nearby Lambeth, where he was born. It looked, instead, to ways of planning suburban extensions but had only a minimal impact on those; attempts to do more had been effectively forestalled when the bill was drafted and, in the course of passing the legislation, by a group of Conservative Lords suspicious of what it might lead to. In the event, if the 1909 Act is to be recognised for anything it is simply for putting town planning on to the statute books and for locating it as a function of local government.

An interesting addendum is that Burns set up a unit within the Local Government Board with the job of making sure that the Act worked. The unit included a post of town planning assistant and that was filled by Thomas Adams, formerly Secretary of the Garden City Association. His biographer, Michael Simpson, considers it a shrewd move: 'he had been acquainted with Burns since 1906 and his Liberal background may have been significant'.¹³ Certainly, Adams made the most of his new position to advocate the wider cause of planning.

Postscript

It is interesting to record that early town planning, in its various forms before 1914, was consistent to such an extent with Liberal principles. The measures taken could be seen to fit comfortably in that middle ground between unbridled individualism and an omnipotent state; all were designed to alleviate social deprivation but also to improve the workings of the economy. A fit and healthy workforce was important on both counts.

To some extent, after the First World War there were still important connections with this pioneering period of Liberal

initiative, although very soon a drift towards a more interventionist approach was evident. The second garden city, Welwyn, dating from 1919, was a less radical venture than Letchworth, and the so-called third garden city, Wythenshawe, even less so. In many ways, the latter marks something of a watershed between the progressive social experiments of an earlier period, with their reliance on voluntary initiative, and the more regimented character of governmental action that was to become commonplace.

Wythenshawe, to the south of Manchester was designed to solve some of the problems of overcrowding in the great conurbation.¹⁴ It was the brainchild of two councillors, one Labour and one Liberal. The Liberal, Ernest Simon, was born into a Jewish industrial family and was first elected to Manchester City Council in 1912; he was later MP for the Manchester Withington division from 1923 to 1924 and from 1929 to 1931. It was as a Manchester councillor with a passionate interest in housing that he worked with his Labour counterpart, Alderman Jackson, to promote the idea of a new settlement for 100,000 people. A third figure in this formative period was Ernest's wife, Shena, herself a highly committed campaigner for better housing and wholly behind the Wythenshawe project.

Land was acquired in the early 1920s and the established garden city architect, Barry Parker, was commissioned to prepare the master plan. In spite of a sympathetic layout the very scale of the project, combined with its municipal provenance, meant that it bore little or no resemblance to a true garden city. It was, in fact, little more than a very large overspill housing estate. Simon, meanwhile, was becoming more enamoured with interventionist policies and eventually, in 1946, he joined the Labour Party; in the following year he became Baron Simon

Modest it may have been, but the very idea of potentially interfering with the rights of private property – stopping land-owners from doing as they wished – was highly contentious in itself.

'FREEDOM NOT REGIMENTATION'

of Wythenshawe. He had, in fact, considered switching his party allegiance before then and it might be significant that his wife did so in 1935. Certainly, there would have been a degree of tension between the reality of a centralised, municipal bureaucracy and a Liberal belief in individual freedom.

As Wythenshawe indicated, the day of localised ventures was over. After the Second World War, social experiments were to be conducted through the state, with the post-war Labour administration setting the new pattern. Garden cities were by then seen as a concept from the past, to be superseded by a nationwide programme of new towns. For the best part of half a century that was how things were to be. More recently, however, opposition parties in a long period of Labour government are pointing once again to the limitations of the state. With sustainability at the top of the planning agenda and community an essential means of securing social change, environmental politics is taking on a new meaning; in this changing context, local as well as national Liberal politicians can again assume an important role. A glance back at the contribution of their predecessors in the pioneering days of planning might offer a timely source of inspiration.

Dennis Hardy is Emeritus Professor of Urban Planning at Middlesex University, and now works as a writer and consultant. He has written various books, including the two-volume official history of the Town & Country Planning Association, *From Garden Cities to New Towns and From New Towns to Green Politics* (both Chapman & Hall, 1991). His latest book is *Poundbury: The Town that Charles Built*, Town & Country Planning Association, 2006.

Acknowledgement: In writing this paper I am most grateful for helpful comments provided by three anonymous referees.

A glance back at the contribution of their predecessors in the pioneering days of planning might offer a timely source of inspiration.

- 1 Ebenezer Howard, in *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (facsimile edition, London, Routledge, 2003), pp. 2–3.
- 2 Howard includes this quote from a *Daily Chronicle* article at the start of Chapter 9 of *To-Morrow*; the article is discussing ways of reconciling Socialism and Individualism.
- 3 For this and other parliamentary records, see M. Stenton and S. Lees (eds.), *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament*, Vol. 2, 1886–1918 and Vol. 3, 1919–1945 (Sussex: Harvester, 1978 and 1979).
- 4 Mervyn Miller, *Letchworth: The First Garden City*, (Chichester, Phillimore, second edition 2002), p. 115.
- 5 George Orwell, in Aileen Reid, *Brentham: A History of the Pioneer Garden Suburb 1901–2001* (London, Brentham Heritage Society, 2000), p. 93.
- 6 The full title was the Labour Association for Promoting Co-operative Production Based on Co-Partnership of the Workers.
- 7 Raymond Unwin, 1910, in Dennis Hardy, *From Garden Cities to New Towns* (London, Chapman & Hall, 1991), p. 90.
- 8 Roy Douglas, *History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* (London, Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971), p. 140.
- 9 J. A. Hobson, in Chris Cook, *History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* (London, Macmillan, 1976), p. 48.
- 10 Chris Cook, *History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* (London, Macmillan, 1976), p. vii.
- 11 Henry Vivian, in Dennis Hardy, *From Garden Cities to New Towns* (London, Chapman & Hall, 1991), p. 40.
- 12 John Burns, in Gordon E. Cherry, *Pioneers in British Planning* (London, Architectural Press, 1981), p. 12.
- 13 Michael Simpson, *Thomas Adams and the Modern Planning Movement* (London, Mansell, 1985), p. 55.
- 14 See, especially, Andrzej Olechnowicz, 'Civic Leadership and Education for Democracy: The Simons and the Wythenshawe Estate', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 3–26.

REPORT

Defender of Liberties: Charles James Fox

Fringe meeting, March 2006, Harrogate, with Professor Frank O'Gorman and Dr Mark Pack; Chair (Lord) Wallace of Saltaire

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

On 13 September 1806, Charles James Fox, Whig statesman, defender of civil liberties, champion of the American and French revolutions and advocate of the supremacy of parliament, died aged fifty-seven. Determined to commemorate Fox's achievements and celebrate his liberal heritage in the 200th year since his death, the History Group was especially pleased to welcome Frank O'Gorman,

Emeritus Professor of History at Manchester University, together with History Group committee member Dr Mark Pack, to tell us about Fox the man, the politician, the liberal and his legacy.

Professor O'Gorman opened by acknowledging that Fox was regarded as one of the founding fathers of Liberalism, operating at the same time that Edmund Burke and Pitt the Younger were staking their claim to be founding fathers

of Conservatism. But Fox was not really a Liberal. As a political party the Liberals were not formed until the 1850s and the word Liberal as a noun was unknown before the 1820s, long after Fox died. The concept of the liberal reformer was known, although not common, and Fox, if asked, would have classified his politics as Whig.

Whiggism was the predominant political philosophy in the second half of the eighteenth century, based on the values of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Whigs believed in the rights of parliament, a constitutional monarchy, regular elections, accountable government, freedom of speech and religious tolerance. According to Professor O’Gorman, however, Fox was a Whig of a distinctive kind and he turned our attention to the different elements of this distinctiveness.

Fox was born in 1749, the son of Henry Fox, Lord Holland, one of the great fixers of the eighteenth-century Whig state. He entered parliament in 1768 for Midhurst, a rotten borough secured for him by his father. In less than two years he had become a junior minister at the Admiralty but resigned in 1772 and went into opposition.

Opposition defined Fox. With only three brief periods in government, he remained in opposition for over thirty years until his death. Fox sacrificed a career in government for a career in opposition and giving up office was rare in the politics of the day. Fox had inherited many of his father’s political attitudes, including an instinctive hostility to the monarch. He voted against the Royal Marriages Act of 1772, introduced at the behest of George III (designed to restrict the freedom of the monarch’s children to marry). Also, although he had been given office, he found he was not really interested in it, preferring the theatre and card

table to government business. He returned to the Treasury in late 1772 but continued his casual attitude and was dismissed in 1774. He discovered that his fantastic oratory, his ability to attract friends and create groups around him and his wealth – especially after the death of his father in 1774 – destined him for a celebrity that flourished more in opposition than in power.

Fox famously opposed the war with the American colonies between 1775–83, stating that countries must be governed by the will of their people. He believed that the war was wrong and that the colonies should achieve independence. He was an early supporter of campaigns for parliamentary reform. He gained a reputation as a rabble-rouser and was designated ‘Man of the People’, possibly the first English politician to be so described. His election to parliament as member for the populous and politically aware constituency of Westminster after 1780 boosted his popularity further. He consciously identified his politics with his party and after 1782–83 he played on his pre-existing anti-monarchism.

Fox came back briefly into government for a couple of occasions, lasting a few months, when George III’s chosen ministers fell, but he could not work with the King, who wanted a say over men and policy while Fox believed in working through the majority party in parliament. Fox mistrusted the King. He thought George III was trying to turn the clock back to seventeenth-century patterns of politics.

But Fox had his faults. He was indolent and self-indulgent, a notorious and prodigious gambler who often preferred pleasure to business. He also suffered from lapses in judgment, sometimes overestimating his own abilities and underestimating those of others.



Charles James Fox (1749–1806)

He could misjudge public opinion too and failed to appreciate the hold the monarchy could have over the people, as in the Regency Crisis of 1788–89.

Fox came fully of age as a politician over the issue of the French Revolution, pioneering a concept of Whiggism far removed from the aristocratic and elitist politics of his age. Fox welcomed the Revolution instinctively, describing it as ‘much the greatest thing that ever happened in the history of the world and how far the best.’ Using the ideals of the Revolution and attacking the French feudal system it swept away, Fox developed the idea of a political movement based on freedom, anti-monarchism, political and civil rights, parliamentary authority, and something resembling a modern nationalism. He supported popular rights and parliamentary reform with renewed energy, defending radicals from Pitt’s Acts of 1795 restricting civil liberties and other such legislation banning meetings and gagging the press. He encouraged protests and popular mobilisation on a nineteenth-century scale and became more of a party

REPORT

politician, giving the Whigs more centralised leadership and organisation and a party press. He introduced popular subscriptions and reduced the aristocratic influence in the party. It was a tragedy for Fox that the strains produced by the French Revolution broke his party in two, with the aristocratic wing joining Pitt's government in 1794, leaving Fox, in the great battle of principle with Pitt, leading the rump of a party.

Fox attacked Pitt's war against France, first in the Revolutionary phase and again in the struggle with Napoleon. Although he thought it justifiable to fight against an aggressive revolution, Fox believed that the anti-revolutionary stance of George III and the other monarchs of Europe had driven the French revolutionaries to defend themselves. He thought that England should fight a defensive war only and not try to reverse the French Revolution by restoring the monarchy and aristocracy. But Fox was becoming increasingly isolated and weary of being in small minorities. In 1797–1801 he ceased attending parliament, preferring to leave it to events to justify him. Nevertheless, in 1801, when Pitt fell from office, Fox rushed back to Parliament even though in the last five years of life, his habits were taking their toll. His big idea was peace with Napoleon. In the last months of his life, when he was in office as Foreign Secretary, he tried to negotiate such a peace and was devastated when Napoleon refused to take him seriously. He died in September 1806, a broken man.

Professor O'Gorman then summarised Fox's life and legacy. He was essentially a man of the eighteenth century, an aristocratic politician, accepting that the aristocracy dominated society with patronage, places and political fixing. He did not believe in social reform and was not really a democrat at all. His political ideal was not

progressive improvement but a balance between King, Lords and Commons. Despite his success in opposition, where he felt so comfortable, he never thoroughly grasped the idea of a permanent, developing opposition party, lacking sufficient perspective of the future.

Although he was a forerunner of liberal developments, not all nineteenth-century liberals took their inspiration from him. Foxite Whiggism was at heart a secular creed, and much future Liberal support derived from the religious circumstances of Nonconformity and Protestant dissent (although Fox did defend the right to religious tolerance). And the economic origins of nineteenth-century liberalism lay in the works of Adam Smith.

Like many great politicians, Fox became more influential after his death than during his life. Fox Clubs sprang up to keep the great man's legacy alive and a vast amount of commemorative art and sculpture was dedicated to him. Fox became massively popular in the nineteenth century. Bit by bit in the 1810s and 1820s his ideals permeated politics and their time came within two decades of his death. His antipathy to the powerful role of the monarch in politics was to establish itself as a Liberal idea; Foxite Whigs and their successors were never really comfortable with the crown.

Although not a democrat, Fox deserved the designation 'Man of the People'. The idea of parliamentary reform that he championed came to fruition in the nineteenth century and it was no surprise that it was Fox's heirs who passed not only the Great Reform Act but also the Municipal Corporation Act and abolished slavery, all in the 1830s. Fox championed free speech, religious tolerance and tolerance for minorities. He supported the rights of people to elect their own governments, even though his definition of the 'the people'

was the educated middle classes rather than the inarticulate masses. As to the question of whether Fox was the founding father of Liberalism, the answer is 'yes'. He was one of many, including J. S. Mill, Grey, Russell and Macaulay, but he was the earliest and finest and, before Gladstone, he was Liberalism's greatest statesman. If he was not a man of the nineteenth century, his politics foreshadowed many of its main features. Foxite Whiggism had the future, however uneven and unfinished a Liberal product it might have been.

Mark Pack opened his talk by reminding us that our meeting was taking place the day after the Liberal Democrats had elected a new leader to replace Charles Kennedy and that it was worth starting with some thoughts on what lessons there were to draw from Fox's life for the present times. He teased the audience by recapping the position Charles was in – leader of a party of over fifty MPs, opposed to a controversial foreign war, standing up for civil liberties at home and dogged by accusations of being a dilettante and a man with a drinking problem. He meant Charles James Fox, of course, and began an exploration of Fox's legacy for liberalism and the Whig party.

Fox's death on 13 September 1806 occurred just a few months after he had become Foreign Secretary and it had been a quarter of century earlier that Fox had last held government office; truly tragic timing, struggling to regain office for twenty-five years only to die a few short months after finally doing so. Yet while other leading politicians' deaths are regularly described as tragic and trigger 'what if' hypothesising, reactions to Fox's death both then and since have been rather muted in that respect. Speculations over 'what if' he had not died do not make it into the counterfactual history publications and his death did

He was essentially a man of the eighteenth century, an aristocratic politician, accepting that the aristocracy dominated society with patronage, places and political fixing. He did not believe in social reform and was not really a democrat at all.

not lead to an immediate public upsurge of emotion and statue-raising that the later demise of Peel, for example, did. The setting up of clubs dedicated to Fox's memory was delayed and then their establishment was conducted in competition with clubs commemorating Pitt, who also died in 1806.

In part this low-key response was because it had been the death of Pitt the Younger, the Conservative who had regularly bettered Fox in their political duels and who had served for many years as prime minister, a post Fox never achieved, which had allowed Fox the opportunity to regain office. In addition the government in which Fox was serving – the so-called 'the Ministry of All the Talents' – was seen as a rather unlikely, over-broad coalition. It is probable that, had Fox not died, he would have been out of office again soon enough, as the Ministry broke up in March 1807 and its Whig members were to see only the rarest flicker of hope of office for twenty-odd years afterwards. Fox's death was not seen, therefore, as cutting him off from a long period of office or in the midst of a successful political prime.

Indeed, it is easy to come to a negative interpretation of Fox's legacy. Although Fox was the first acknowledged 'leader of the opposition', when he squared up to Pitt in Parliament, it really was not much of an opposition for most of the time. Whereas today to lead a party of fifty or so MPs for many years in a three- or four-party system may be a respectable position, to do so in the late eighteenth century in a system that was broadly just government and opposition in a House of Commons roughly the same size as today, is rather less of an achievement. Not only did Fox not leave the Whigs in prosperous political shape, it was not even as if, like Neil Kinnock and Labour, he had clearly put them on the road to political recovery for a successor

to finish the job. There was no sustained growth in the number of MPs under Fox's leadership in those long lean years out of power. The numbers grew or decreased as factional boundaries shifted but there is no picture of a united hard core of MPs building up under Fox and for many years after his death they were out of office, apart from those who chose to join in supporting a Tory prime minister. So if he did not leave a legacy of Whig political power and success, what about the man and his beliefs?

Fox was born into the political establishment to a mother who was a great-granddaughter of Charles II and a father who had served the country's first prime minister, Walpole, for many years. From an early age he mixed an aptitude for hard work with bouts of dissolute behaviour and extravagant gambling. He broke the law by being under-age when he first stood for parliament and when elected he initially supported many conservative, even reactionary, causes. He most notably opposed press freedom, albeit on the basis of defending Parliament's supremacy and freedom. He never changed this opinion but later in his career his approach was more liberal, emphasising the protection of parliament from other forces such as the power of the King. The issues that radicalised Fox were the Royal Marriage Bill and the American War of Independence. Both brought him into conflict with the monarchy and he increasingly came to believe in the need for radical reform to trim monarchical power whilst strengthening and invigorating parliament.

In the 1770s, Fox was persistently one of the most radical Whigs, holding beliefs that a modern liberal would recognise – that power stems from the people and that government could be improved by large-scale reform, together with an

Fox was persistently one of the most radical Whigs, holding beliefs that a modern liberal would recognise – that power stems from the people and that government could be improved by large-scale reform, together with an optimistic belief in the possibility of progress.

optimistic belief in the possibility of progress. During the 1780s Fox served in government. He served as Foreign Secretary under Rockingham and made a notorious coalition with his former adversary, but fellow-opponent of the monarch, Lord North. This was not a success; they were out-manoeuvred by the King and his new favourite, Pitt the Younger. Pitt became prime minister and turned a minority administration into one commanding a comfortable majority. There then followed Fox's long decades out of office.

In those years, war and civil liberties dominated politics. The French Revolution occurred and swiftly descended into extreme violence, producing polarised responses in Britain. Some opposed the revolution from the start; others who had initially welcomed the overthrow of despotic monarchy were scared off by the violence and extremism and became increasingly opposed to any sniff of reform in Britain. In the face of what was happening in France, only a small group of parliamentarians (albeit with probably rather more support in the country as a whole) were willing to argue consistently for reducing the King's power and for franchise reform to give more people the vote.

Fox regularly led the parliamentary opposition to the government's repressive measures, brought in ostensibly to secure the country against violence. The alleged threats at the time were those of revolutionary plotters, perhaps with French backing or aid. The evidence as to how numerous or how much danger the plotters ever really represented is uncertain and has been a source of debate amongst historians. In public Fox and his supporters flirted with some of the radicals but it is not clear what links they had with the real extremists. The deliberate destruction of some key private papers of Fox's supporters certainly hints at connections it

REPORT

was later felt better to draw a veil over.

Pitt had no doubts about the threat of revolution and took a hard line on civil liberties. In April 1794 his government moved to suspend Habeas Corpus, effectively permitting imprisonment without trial. During the debate in parliament, Pitt claimed there were groups plotting a 'whole system of insurrection ... under which the weak and ignorant, who are most susceptible of impression from such barren abstract positions, were attempted to be seduced to overturn government, law, property, security, religion, order and every thing of value in this country.'

In response, Fox made one of his most famous speeches, underlining his reputation as one of the leading orators of his generation. As a speaker the force of his speeches was based more on clear arguments and nimble, humorous debate than any original thought or great rhetoric. The impact of his speeches made him a significant figure in parliament but his style meant that he left behind few oratorical flights to catch future imaginations. This should not diminish the importance of Fox's stance at the time, his willingness and ability to find the phrases and formulations to make the case for civil liberties and to argue that measures proposed in the name of protecting liberty and the British constitution in fact threatened both.

Fox believed that freedom and the liberties of the individual were to be valued in themselves and that encroachment upon them ran grave risks of encouraging even more damaging violations. This has become a persistent feature of liberal thought and was a defining element of the philosophy of the Liberal Party that emerged in the 1850s. Fox bequeathed to the Whigs and, later, Liberals, a clear legacy in favour of civil liberties and

Fox believed that freedom and the liberties of the individual were to be valued in themselves and that encroachment upon them ran grave risks of encouraging even more damaging violations.

was increasingly associated with views that modern liberals would recognise; belief in power stemming from the people, desire for wide-ranging reform, strong preference for peace rather than war and an optimistic belief in progress through appropriate policy.

For Fox, the correct response to trouble was tolerance and liberalism rather than repression and crack-down. He believed that the latter were more likely to trigger revolution than the former. In addition he thought it was important to restrain the power of the monarchy, not just because of any monarch's potentially despotic tendencies but also because financial waste and corruption could too easily follow. In his speech on the suspension of Habeas Corpus Fox warned of the 'despotism of the monarchy' and against a situation where 'our pretended alarms were to be made the pretexts for destroying the first principles of the very system which we affected to revere.' Fox lost the vote at the end of the debate by 183 votes to 33 – a crushing but not unusual defeat.

His defences of civil liberties were frequently based on a desire to protect the constitution, especially the supremacy of parliament. This also meant he was not an enthusiast for democracy in the modern meaning of the term and he opposed more radical notions of democracy such as those advocated in Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*, believing they would weaken parliament. As a result, other radicals of the time, like William Cobbett, were often suspicious of Fox, even though the Tories tended to pigeonhole Fox and the radicals together as untrustworthy.

As well as speaking out on civil liberties Fox attacked the alleged misuse of public money, demanded cuts in the Civil List and supported the idea of annual parliaments, all of which

brought him a popular following outside parliament. But Fox always saw parliament as the primary political stage.

Politics, however, was never the only part of Fox's life. He enjoyed the good life hugely, often gambling and drinking to wild excess. He was a flamboyant playboy. There is a trace in his character of an instinctive contrariness – a desire to be different just for the sake of being different; an intuitive seeking of the opposite point of view to that held by the incumbent majority, usually for principled reasons but sometimes just for the hell of it. Fox has bequeathed that instinctive contrariness to liberals down the years. If you think of a liberal as someone who, finding themselves in a minority of one, is not put off but rather rubs their hands with glee and thinks 'what fun', then Fox was certainly in that category. Although Fox's gambling made him a somewhat disreputable figure in the eyes of many, he was also a loveable and indeed principled character to others, standing by his views rather than desperately seeking power and the money which would come with it – even when he needed cash to pay his large gambling debts. Even the apparently cynical power-seeking coalition with North earlier in his career was motivated largely by a shared hostility to the monarch.

Fox also had an impact on two other important matters. His eloquent arguing of the case against slavery almost certainly had an effect in helping reduce its extent and impact, no small thing given the amount of human misery slavery produced. He also secured the passage of the Libel Act to restore significant power to juries to determine what was or was not libellous, an issue dear to the hearts of contemporary leaflet writers.

In final summary, Dr Pack said that Fox was greatly liked as

a human being by many of his contemporaries. He was charming, lively, quick-witted, funny and good company (if you did not worry about being corrupted in drunkenness or gambling).

He ended up a champion of press freedom, an opponent of despotic regal powers and an advocate of personal liberty. He argued these great causes, which were later seen as progressive and

correct, even if he secured only limited support for them at the time. But then, liberals frequently know all about arguing valiant causes and being in the minority when the votes are counted.

Graham Lippiatt is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

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.

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. (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, please see www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/projects/cobden). *Dr Anthony Howe, School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ; a.c.howe@uea.ac.uk.*

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.*

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

The Liberal revival 1959–64. Focusing on both political and social factors. Any personal views, relevant information or original material from Liberal voters, councillors or activists of the time would be very gratefully received. *Holly Towell, 52a Cardigan Road, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3BJ; his3ht@leeds.ac.uk.*

The rise of the Liberals in Richmond (Surrey) 1964–2002. Interested in hearing from former councillors, activists, supporters, opponents, with memories and insights concerning one of the most successful local organisations. What factors helped the Liberal Party rise from having no councillors in 1964 to 49 out of 52 seats in 1986? Any literature or news cuttings from the period welcome. *Ian Hunter, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DL; 07771 785 795; ianhunter@kew2.com.*

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@tinypoint.co.uk.*

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

The Liberal Party in the West Midlands from December 1916 to the 1923 general election. Focusing on the fortunes of the party in Birmingham, Coventry, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Looking to explore the effects of the party split at local level. Also looking to uncover the steps towards temporary reunification for the 1923 general election. *Neil Fisher, 42 Bowden Way, Binley, Coventry CV3 2HU; neil.fisher81@ntlworld.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. *Clr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@ncl.ac.uk.*

Life of Wilfrid Roberts (1900–91). Roberts was Liberal MP for Cumberland North (now Penrith and the Border) from 1935 until 1950 and came from a wealthy and prominent local Liberal family; his father had been an MP. Roberts was a passionate internationalist, and was a powerful advocate for refugee children in the Spanish civil war. His parliamentary career is coterminous with the nadir of the Liberal Party. Roberts joined the Labour Party in 1956, becoming a local councillor in Carlisle and the party's candidate for the Hexham constituency in the 1959 general election. I am currently in the process of collating information on the different strands of Roberts' life and political career. Any assistance at all would be much appreciated. *John Reardon; jbreardon75@hotmail.com.*

Student radicalism at Warwick University. Particularity 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.*

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.*

LIBERALISM

THE HUDDERSFIELD EXPERIMENT

Conventional wisdom suggests that the break between Liberals and Liberal Nationals was never healed, with the latter drifting inexorably towards absorption in the Conservative Party. But in specific locations such as London and Burnley the two groups did come together in the wake of the 1945 general election. In this article **David Dutton** considers the process of fusion in Huddersfield and argues that this helped ensure the survival of an outpost of Liberalism during the party's darkest days.

Whatever its existing problems, the events of 1931–32 removed any immediate or short-term prospect of a recovery in the fortunes of the British Liberal Party. From differing assessments of the performance of the outgoing Labour administration and differing attitudes towards the National Government which took its place, there emerged in effect two Liberal parties, along with a small and increasingly isolated third grouping under David Lloyd George.

In the wake of the general election of October 1931 almost three dozen Liberal MPs coalesced around the leadership of Sir John Simon to form the so-called Liberal National group, pledged to give unqualified support to the government whatever policies it took to meet the current economic emergency, including the introduction of tariffs. Though neither side seemed keen to admit the fact openly, the Simonite group rapidly assumed the functions and attributes of a separate party and, while both sides hinted at eventual reunion, the split turned out to be permanent.

The participation of both Liberal factions within Churchill's wartime coalition again muddied the dividing lines between them and there were talks on the possibility of reconciliation in the latter stages of the conflict. These, however, broke down, less over issues of policy than the determination of the mainstream party to contest the forthcoming general election as a fully independent movement.

As has been well described, a final attempt to repair the breach was made in 1946. Talks began following an initiative in May by Ernest Brown, a former leader of the Liberal Nationals, but had ground to a halt by the autumn, largely because the Liberal Nationals would not consider anything other than a reunited party taking its place alongside the Conservatives in a broad anti-socialist alliance. The Liberals, by contrast, were still insistent that any reunified party must be a completely independent political force beholden neither to Tories nor Labour.¹ But in specific locations the process of merger was brought to success. On 1 July 1946 *The Times* announced that the London Liberal National Party and the London Liberal Party had

In specific locations the process of merger was brought to success.

M REUNITED

EXPERIENCE 1945 – 47

decided to unite and that a new organisation would begin a campaign to ensure representation in parliamentary and local government elections in Greater London. The impact on the fortunes of Liberalism in the capital was, however, at best marginal; neither component in the reunion had much to offer in terms of residual strength in London. But the development of events in the West Riding town of Huddersfield was of considerably greater significance and arguably contributed to the survival of an outpost of Liberal strength during the darkest decade in the party's long history.

Divisions in the Huddersfield Liberal Party were slow to appear after 1931, not because of the absence of a Liberal National splinter group but because of the success of the town's Liberal MP, William Mabane, in taking the local Liberal Association with him into the embrace of the Liberal National Party, almost without the association being aware of what was happening to it.² As late as 1939 the Association kept up its affiliation to the Liberal Party Organisation, while only sending observers to meetings of the Simonite Liberal Nationals. Meanwhile, Mabane

The first sign of truly independent Liberal action came from a small group of disgruntled women in the local party.

himself held office in both the Yorkshire Liberal Party and the Yorkshire Liberal National Party. As a result, it was not until shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War that the mainstream Liberal Party in Huddersfield finally began to reassert itself.

Mabane easily overcame the surprised reaction of the staunchly free-trade Huddersfield Liberal Association (HLA) when he first became a member of the Liberal National group late in 1931 by arguing that he could act as a bridge between it and the mainstream party. He faced more serious opposition after his decision not to accompany Herbert Samuel and his followers when, somewhat belatedly, they crossed the floor of the House of Commons to rejoin the ranks of the opposition in the autumn of 1933. But again, the majority of the HLA accepted Mabane's explanation that Samuel should have taken this step immediately after the conclusion of the Ottawa agreements in August 1932 or not at all. Sixteen members voted against him at the HLA's annual general meeting in March 1934 and a small number resigned from the association in protest. But this did not stop

Mabane from being readopted as the Liberal candidate for Huddersfield in the general election of November 1935, and, in the absence of a rival Liberal candidate and with full Conservative support, he was easily able to retain his seat.

The first sign of truly independent Liberal action came from a small group of disgruntled women in the local party. Six members of the Huddersfield Women's Liberal Association resigned on 12 January 1938 when that body, in advance of its male counterpart, decided formally to affiliate to the Liberal National Party. With six others the rebels then formed the Huddersfield Borough Women's Liberal Association.³ But it would be more than a year before their menfolk followed suit. Finally, in the spring of 1939, the forces of independent Liberalism managed to reassert themselves. Under the guidance of three prominent local activists, Ashley Mitchell, Ernest Woodhead and Elliott Dodds, all of whom had stood unsuccessfully as Liberal candidates in earlier general elections, a rival Liberal Association was set up with the full backing of the Liberal Party Organisation in London.⁴ As the Liberal

LIBERALISM REUNITED

Nationals clung tenaciously to the title of HLA, the new body was christened the Huddersfield Borough Liberal Association.⁵

Mabane refused to be discouraged. The HLA was, he declared, an even more united body than it had been a year earlier. It was true that 'the smallest possible minority of people' had given the appearance of disunity, but this was not the reality. It was, he insisted, 'an arrogant assertion' to suggest that all who supported the National Government must forgo their right to describe themselves as Liberals, and he sought further to blur the distinction between Liberals and Liberal Nationals by reminding his audience that, notwithstanding the opposition of Archibald Sinclair and the party leadership, many distinguished Liberals, including the party's former leader Lord Samuel, had backed the government over the recent Munich settlement.⁶

Such internal wrangling was largely put on hold with the coming of European war in September 1939. Meanwhile, Mabane's personal career began to prosper. Appointed Assistant Postmaster-General in June 1939, he later served in junior posts at the Ministries of Home Security and Food before rising in May 1945 to the rank of Minister of State at the Foreign Office in Churchill's short-lived caretaker government, an administration in which Liberals declined to participate. But as the military tide finally turned and minds moved again to the issues of domestic politics, it was evident that the Borough Liberals had not gone away. Indeed, they decided to contest the forthcoming general election and secured the services of a promising candidate in the person of Roy Harrod, a committed free trader, academic economist and future biographer of John Maynard Keynes.

Mabane, standing now as an unequivocal Liberal National with Conservative support and as the only candidate favouring

One hopeful indicator of the prospects of reunion was that many local activists in Huddersfield seemed more concerned with propagating the gospel of Liberalism than with the precise party label under which they campaigned.

the continuation of Churchill's government, conducted a vigorous and confident campaign. But Huddersfield had been transformed by the migration of around 17,000 industrial workers into the town during the course of the war. On a massive swing J. P. W. Mallalieu, whose pedigree as the son of a former Liberal MP may have enhanced his appeal, took the seat for Labour with a majority of nearly 9,000 over Mabane, leaving Harrod, despite the support of the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, a further 13,000 votes behind.⁷ To no avail, the newspaper, which was controlled by the Woodhead family and edited by Elliott Dodds, insisted that Harrod was the only Liberal candidate in the field.

Set in a national context, Harrod's performance – 16 per cent of the poll – was almost respectable. The party of Gladstone and Asquith was now reduced to a parliamentary representation of just twelve MPs. Nearly 85 per cent of the party's candidates had come third. Its leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, and chief whip, Percy Harris, were among those who had gone down to defeat. In the face of disaster on such a scale, Liberals had to consider the full range of options open to them. Inevitably, the question of reunion with the Liberal Nationals forced its way on to the political agenda. In Huddersfield it was clear that the Borough Liberals were determined to carry on. But the outlook for the Liberal Nationals was far from rosy. Organisation had decayed and membership substantially declined during the years of war. Mabane's agent, Stanley Hickman, presented a gloomy prognosis. The Borough Liberals had:

... plenty of keen, able people of the type who enjoy politics, and as the election figures show have attracted the average Liberal. So long as there was no Sinclair Liberal candidate we got their votes, if not their

enthusiastic support. Now we are looked upon as Tories, and they are in great disfavour at present. Unless redistribution helps, we shall never beat Labour in a three-cornered fight. We have few leading men and women and we have no appeal to enthuse the masses.⁸

One hopeful indicator of the prospects of reunion was that many local activists in Huddersfield seemed more concerned with propagating the gospel of Liberalism than with the precise party label under which they campaigned. Mrs Potts, the Chairman of the Borough Women's Liberal Association, reported that during the general election campaign she had been invited to speak to the Milnsbridge branch of the Huddersfield Women's Liberal National Association. In so doing she had received the promise of several women to join the Borough Liberal Association.⁹ But for real progress to be made, one side or the other had to take the initiative. Some months before negotiations began at a national level, the Executive Committee of the Borough Liberals authorised their president to get in touch with his opposite number in the Huddersfield Liberal Association to consider the possibility of exploratory talks on the theme of reunion.¹⁰ 'I have to enquire', wrote H. V. Wood of the Borough Liberals,

... whether, in your judgement and considered opinion, the time is opportune for a small delegation of three or four of the principal honorary executive Officers of your Association to meet a like number of Officers of my Association for the purpose of exploring the present political position, particularly in Huddersfield, and to ascertain what are the points of difference in policy and/or otherwise which still separate our two Associations. Those delegates would enquire as to whether such differences could

be resolved and as to whether reunion is practicable or not.¹¹

For the Liberal Nationals, J. D. Eaton Smith reacted cautiously. His first loyalty was to Mabane, who had already been re-adopted as the Huddersfield Liberal Association's candidate for the next general election. But the officers of the HLA, without disclosing the approach to their full Executive Committee, eventually agreed that Eaton Smith should meet Wood and, if he considered that a further meeting would be useful, that a Liberal National delegation, to include both Eaton Smith and Mabane, should be constituted.¹² The meeting between the two presidents took place on 9 January 1946. Eaton Smith stressed that the HLA was more concerned with fighting socialism than with party labels and argued that in two years' time, when the reality of Labour government had become apparent, all Liberals would be compelled to unite against the common menace. But the two men parted with a feeling that the Borough Liberals' approach had been premature.¹³ The Borough Liberals' own interpretation of what had happened was that their initiative had been rebuffed. Their task now was 'to go forward without any hesitation'.¹⁴ Indeed, the Borough Liberals proceeded to adopt a number of candidates for the November municipal elections – something they had decided against in 1945 in the light of the possibility of reunion.¹⁵

The opening of discussions on a national level inevitably breathed new life into the process in Huddersfield. In line with the Liberal Nationals' stance in the national negotiations, Mabane stressed that there was no future for Liberalism except as part of an anti-socialist coalition:

I am quite sure that unless we merely wish the Liberal Party to be a propagandist body and not a body which seeks to have

a direct influence on affairs through parliamentary representation, there is no future in working as an independent party. Our objective must be to secure as great a degree of unity as we can as a first step ... to a larger association with all who feel that Socialism is a real danger.¹⁶

But the Borough Liberals were not to be thwarted and Elliott Dodds – 'determined to make as much trouble as he can'¹⁷ – took steps to publicise the secret approach made at the end of 1945. The balance of advantage between the two groups began rapidly to change. The problem for the Liberal Nationals was that their position was visibly crumbling. Amid evidence that the local Conservative Party was becoming restive at the continuing subordination of its electoral aspirations to a pact designed to support a government which no longer existed, the Liberal Nationals' own organisation was beginning to collapse. Hickman wrote to warn Mabane who, ensconced in London, was losing touch with the reality of the situation in Huddersfield:

The position here is becoming increasingly difficult and Mr Eaton Smith and I are having a struggle to keep any interest alive. Apart from a faithful handful, there is no enthusiasm and without the W[omen's] L[iberal] A[ssociation] the whole structure would collapse.¹⁸

This dismal picture was in line with that which existed in many other constituencies, such as Denbigh and Bradford South, where the Liberal Nationals had once been strong. Preparing for a meeting with Lord Teviot, chairman of the Liberal National Organisation, Anthony Eden had been advised that 'in a number of constituencies now represented by Liberal National Members, it is not an exaggeration to say that they are

returned almost entirely through the efforts of the Conservative organisation, and that there is practically no Liberal National organisation, as such, in those constituencies'.¹⁹

In Huddersfield 'the one bright spot' was the municipal elections. But, stressed Hickman, this was only because of collaboration with the Borough Liberals. Despite the latter's earlier decision to run candidates of their own in 1946, the Liberal National Alderman Joseph Barlow had successfully united the two groups into a single fighting force, convinced that 'we must get together or go out'.²⁰ Three Borough Liberals were among the candidates put forward. It was a situation which Mabane had some difficulty in understanding. 'It is rather confusing to me', he confessed. 'It appears – am I wrong – that while the Borough Liberals refuse to consort with the Conservatives for any Parliamentary purposes, yet for municipal purposes, in effect, ourselves, the Conservatives and the Borough Liberals make a solid block.'²¹ Others interpreted this situation more positively, especially when the Liberals 'fighting as a united team, held every one of their seats and came within an ace of capturing a seat from Labour', while the Conservatives lost three out of the four seats which they were contesting.²² According to Harrod the results showed that it was 'only through Liberalism that Huddersfield could succeed in displacing the Socialist Member of Parliament'.²³

Several prominent Borough Liberals were becoming impatient at the lack of progress towards reunion and objected to any new approach until there was evidence that it would be sympathetically received.²⁴ But the situation was transformed when, at the beginning of 1947, the local Conservative Party decided to nominate a candidate of its own for the next general election. Mabane now had no realistic prospect of recovering

The problem for the Liberal Nationals was that their position was visibly crumbling.

LIBERALISM REUNITED

his parliamentary seat. As the *Examiner* put it, 'the Tories themselves had kicked away the trestle on which the Liberal National platform has rested'.²⁵ Quietly, Mabane resigned his membership of the Huddersfield Liberal Club, a gesture which indicated that he did not wish to stand again in the constituency. The small band of supporters upon whom his position had rested now decided that the game was up. Hickman resigned to take on the position of Conservative agent in the neighbouring constituency of Elland, while Eaton Smith gave up the presidency of the Huddersfield Liberal Association, to be succeeded by Alderman Barlow.

Progress towards reunion was now rapid. A key meeting between delegations from the two groups took place on 10 March 1947. At this meeting the relative negotiating strengths of the two delegations was immediately apparent. For the Borough Liberals Wood stressed that they were affiliated to the mainstream Liberal Party and would remain so, a point immediately conceded by the representatives of the Huddersfield Liberal Association.²⁶ Mabane's absence from the Liberal National delegation was critical since, as someone who had been closely involved in the recently stalled national negotiations in which the Liberal Nationals had insisted upon a broad coalition with the Conservatives as the *sine qua non* of reunion, he would have found it impossible to adopt a different stance at the local level.

Agreement on policy posed no problems and at a second meeting the two delegations agreed upon a five-point statement to be submitted for the approval of their respective associations. The key point was that the Huddersfield Liberal Association and the Huddersfield Borough Liberal Association must both dissolve, that a new body would then be created out of the joint membership and that this new Association must

affiliate to the Liberal Party Organisation – a clear indication that in future Huddersfield Liberalism would be fully committed to the mainstream party. The Borough Liberals were able to sweeten the pill by announcing that Roy Harrod, their candidate in 1945 whom they had already readopted, was willing to follow Mabane's example and stand down so that the new joint Association could begin afresh the process of selecting a parliamentary candidate.²⁷

Several prominent Borough Liberals could scarcely believe that the process of reunion could be achieved so easily and so clearly on their terms and sought assurances, which were given, that 'a full Liberal programme was implied for the new Association'.²⁸ In an atmosphere of 'extreme cordiality' and a determination to 'let bygones be bygones' the two Associations met together on 25 June to make Liberal reunion in Huddersfield a reality. The resolution that a new Huddersfield Liberal Association be formed and that it be affiliated to the Liberal Party Organisation was carried by an overwhelming majority.²⁹

Despite the fact that the majority of Liberal members on the Borough Council had been loyal supporters of Mabane as the town's MP, it seemed that the Liberal National heresy in Huddersfield had now been extirpated. Yet Liberal National influence continued to be felt in one important respect. Since 1931 there had been no contests between Conservatives and the representatives of the Huddersfield Liberal Association in annual elections to the borough council. Only in by-elections did the two parties oppose one another in order to determine which of them should compete with Labour thereafter. The advantages which this arrangement to avoid three-cornered contests had brought about – in effect Liberal control of the local council – were not lightly to be abandoned and an informal

electoral pact between Conservatives and the new Liberal Association was maintained until 1961. When, in 1956, the Conservatives began to grow restless, claiming that the Liberals had broken a written agreement on the selection of candidates to represent certain wards – 'we have sacrificed much to preserve and maintain an anti-Socialist front and to avoid three-cornered contests; we have received no reciprocal sacrifice of the interests of the Liberal group' – the pact was formalised by the division of the town into spheres of influence.³⁰

Huddersfield Liberals thus really did have their cake and eat it. The party's institutional independence was preserved at a time when the Liberal Nationals, for all practical purposes, finally sacrificed theirs by entering into the Woolton–Teviot Agreement of 1947. But at the same time Huddersfield Liberals enjoyed the electoral advantages of collaboration with the Conservatives, something which had been at the heart of the Liberal Nationals' political strategy throughout their existence. The result of this policy in terms of maintaining a beacon of Liberalism during a time when the party had almost disappeared as a live force in English local government is only too apparent. After the municipal elections of 1953 Huddersfield was one of just two boroughs across the country in which Liberals remained the largest single group.³¹ Not until 1962 did they lose this position in Huddersfield.

What happened in Huddersfield needs to be set in a broader context. In many areas a tradition of Liberal–Conservative cooperation predated the Liberal National schism of 1931–32 and continued into the post-war era. It tended to depend upon a right-leaning local Liberal Party which saw socialism as the ultimate challenge to its core principles and values. Even before 1914 there were towns in which Liberals were starting to join forces

Huddersfield Liberals thus really did have their cake and eat it. The party's institutional independence was preserved at a time when the Liberal Nationals, for all practical purposes, finally sacrificed theirs.

with the Conservatives in an anti-Labour front for local elections. By the inter-war period a Liberal presence was only maintained on many councils as a result of anti-socialist municipal alliances with the Tories. Even in Manchester, with its long radical tradition, Liberals effectively gave up their independence when, in 1931, they joined the Conservatives in an anti-Labour pact. Politics in Bristol followed a similar pattern. After the Second World War the Conservative Party found it possible tacitly to support, or at least not oppose, right-leaning Liberal MPs, such as Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris in Carmarthen. In Cardiganshire in 1948 the local Tories initiated negotiations with their Liberal counterparts about the possibility of a jointly supported candidate to oppose Labour.³²

West Riding towns such as Huddersfield, where Liberalism had always been individualist and anti-Labour in orientation, with the economic liberalism of local mill-owning families to the fore, offered fertile ground for this sort of strategy. The challenge to Mabane from the Borough Liberal Association had never really been a challenge from the Liberal left. Indeed, at a meeting of the Yorkshire Liberal Federation in July 1943 delegates had debated a motion proposed by Ashley Mitchell in which the author of the Beveridge Report was described as a socialist.³³ Thus, while many Liberals had no hesitation in denouncing the Liberal Nationals, they often did so from a standpoint that had much in common with them.

Nor was the strategy of continuing inter-party cooperation in Huddersfield restricted to municipal politics. The constituency was divided into two seats, East and West, soon after the general election of 1945, opening up fruitful scope for a mutually advantageous arrangement. It was Elliott Dodds who first took up the issue in the pages of the *Examiner*, arguing that although fundamental differences between

The survival of Liberalism as a potent force in Huddersfield in the immediate post-war era helped lend credibility to the party's claim to remain a viable political force.

Liberals and Conservatives ruled out a national alliance, these did not preclude a local parliamentary agreement.³⁴ The town's group of Liberal councillors, where residual Liberal National influence remained strong, was of like mind. 'The only matter upon which there was full agreement was that three-cornered elections were most undesirable and that the probable result of such elections would be the return to Parliament of Labour Members.'³⁵ Indeed, the councillors reacted strongly when it was suggested that the HLA had decided to nominate a candidate for the East Division and they called upon the association to reaffirm its previous announcement that it would energetically promote a Liberal candidature in the West Division, but not cause a three-cornered fight in the East.³⁶

The Conservatives responded positively. After all, the local Tory organisation was not well placed to fight two constituencies after twenty years of relative electoral inactivity. Recognising that, if Liberals stood in both constituencies, a Conservative victory in either would be unlikely, and conscious that every single seat won might be important in the drive to remove Attlee's Labour government from office, the Executive of the Huddersfield Conservative Association recommended on 4 January 1950 the withdrawal of their candidate in the West Division in favour of a Liberal, providing that, in the event of the Liberals holding the balance after the election, the latter pledged himself to oppose a Labour administration committed to further socialism in any vote of confidence in the House of Commons.³⁷

Donald Wade, the Liberal candidate, sought to avoid the appearance of a formal pact, but was happy to announce that this was the sort of pledge he would willingly give to an enquiring elector.³⁸ On this basis Wade found himself elected to parlia-

ment for Huddersfield West, a seat he held until the general election of 1964. In parallel with the arrangement in local government, this Conservative-Liberal pact allowed for the presence of a Liberal MP at a time when the parliamentary party seemed in danger of disappearing altogether. Indeed, Huddersfield West and Bolton West – where, after 1951, Liberals enjoyed the benefits of a similar but more formal pact – were the only two English constituencies which consistently returned Liberal Members through the 1950s.³⁹

History would show that a right-leaning anti-socialist front did not offer the Liberal Party the road to salvation which it sought. Indeed, by the time that the Huddersfield pact was dissolved in the early 1960s, Jo Grimond was tentatively leading his party towards realignment with non-ideological Labour. Nonetheless, the survival of Liberalism as a potent force in Huddersfield in the immediate post-war era helped lend credibility to the party's claim to remain a viable political force at a time when that claim was in danger of being forfeited.

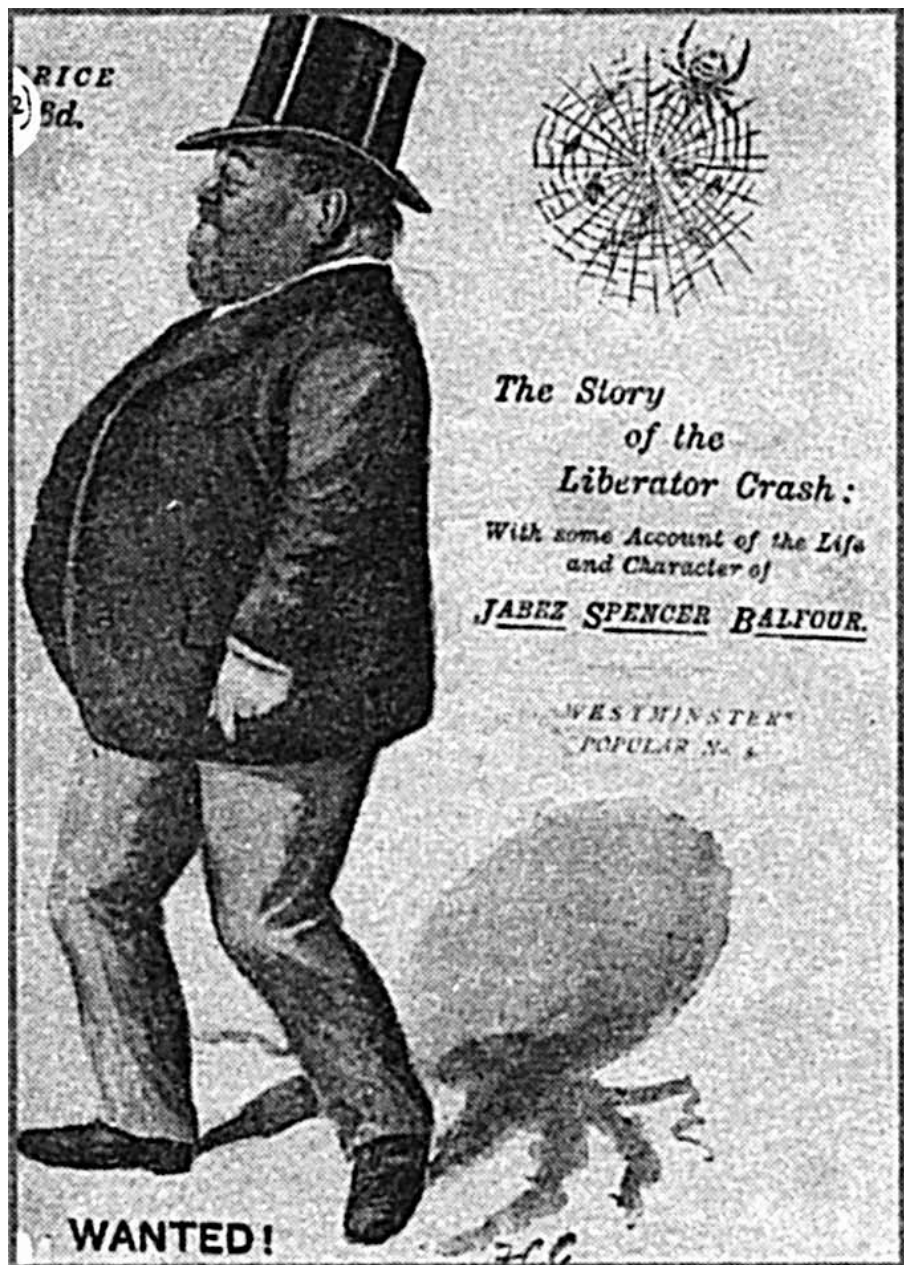
David Dutton is Professor of Modern History at the University of Liverpool. His forthcoming study of the National Liberal Party, Liberals in Schism, will be published by I.B. Tauris.

- 1 I. Hunter, 'The final quest for Liberal reunion 1943–46', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 32 (2001), pp. 12–16.
- 2 I have explored these issues more fully in 'William Mabane and Huddersfield Politics, 1931–47: By any other name a Liberal', *Northern History*, XLIII, 1 (2006), pp. 137–53.
- 3 Kirklees District Archives (K.D.A.), WYK 1146/1/2/1, Borough Women's Liberal Association Question and Answer Session 30 July 1942. I am grateful to Kirklees District Archives for permission to quote from unpublished material in their care.
- 4 Mitchell contested Scarborough and Whitby in 1923 and 1924, Penistone

concluded on page 43

A 'SINCERE, THOROUGH

A 'sincere, thorough and hearty Liberal', as he liked to describe himself, Jabez Spencer Balfour, MP for Tamworth from 1880 to 1885 and for Burnley from 1889 until 1892, was, if not exactly an ornament, certainly an undoubted asset to the Liberal cause until commercial and personal disaster plunged him into notoriety. He had built before then a reputation as a shrewd and successful businessman, a pillar of Nonconformity, a devoted friend of the temperance movement, and a dedicated champion of Liberalism, first in municipal Croydon and then on the national platforms on to which, as a reliably crowd-pleasing orator, he was often invited to speak. **David McKie** tells his story.



AND HEARTY LIBERAL'?

JABEZ BALFOUR, 1843 – 1916

Balfour – Jabez in his youth and in his late notoriety, but always J. Spencer Balfour when he was in his prime – was born, on 4 September 1843, in the Maida Hill area of London, to Clara Lucas Balfour, a celebrated lecturer, writer and temperance campaigner, and her husband James, who had married her when she was not yet sixteen and whose own attachment to the temperance movement reflected a previous weakness for drink. Clara Balfour's fame as a writer and a speaker at a time when women speakers on public platforms were rare brought the family out of near penury into a relative affluence which paid for the precocious young Jabez to be sent to schools abroad.

By now, his father was working at the Palace of Westminster as an aide to more senior officials while developing his own business interests. In the year of his seventeenth birthday, probably through his father's contacts, Jabez joined a firm of parliamentary agents. But his ravening ambition and restless energy propelled him towards greater things. Having married and settled in Reigate, he moved in 1869 with his wife and young family to the greater stage that

was Croydon, where he soon established himself as a person of consequence. The town's population had grown from 6,000 in 1801 to well over 50,000 by the time the Balfours arrived, and Jabez and Liberal businessmen like him believed it was time it was thoroughly modernised and given its independence from the county of Surrey.

Though motivated by a high local patriotism, they also scented a political advantage. Ratepayers excluded from voting under the old limited vestry system would be enfranchised if Croydon attained borough status, and that would push up the Liberal vote. 'In Croydon' says J. N. Morris in his history of religion and politics in the town, *Religion and Urban Change*, 'incorporation put an end to the claims of Anglicanism to act as the focus of community loyalties ... what the "democratisation" of local government ... achieved was therefore the supersession of the Anglican oligarchy who had previously ruled the town by what was in effect "a new municipal elite".'

That Croydon was given borough status in 1883 might have been partly due, Balfour suggested, to the influence he had deployed as a backbench Liberal MP. Though he represented

Under his guidance, the Liberator building society ... established itself as the biggest society in the land, offering families ... the chance to liberate themselves from the suzerainty of landlords.

(Left): Jabez 'wanted' on charges of fraud (Croydon Local Studies Library)

Tamworth in the west Midlands, his heart was always in Croydon, where it often seemed that little of consequence moved without him. The issues he raised in the Commons were as likely to concern the people of Croydon as the people of Tamworth. Before borough status, he regularly topped the poll for the school board. He sat on the bench and was active in local charities. He spoke often, and copiously, at the extravagant self-congratulatory banquets that punctuated the civic year. He served on an array of committees from the hospital to the commons preservation society. He was president of the local Liberal Party and a patriotic officer in the military Volunteers.

He was also by now a figure of increasing national reputation. Under his guidance, the Liberator building society – its name designed to echo that of the Liberation Society, an umbrella organisation promoting the interests of English and Welsh Nonconformity and challenging the privileged status of Anglicanism – established itself as the biggest society in the land, offering families who had seen no such hope before the chance to liberate themselves from the suzerainty of landlords. A string of satellite

A 'SINCERE, THOROUGH AND HEARTY LIBERAL'?

companies buttressed the Liberator: some to buy land, some to build homes for the society's clients. In time, the Balfour group launched its own bank, the London and General. Before long, it moved away from its founding commitment to extending the benefits of home ownership to unprivileged families and began to embark on prestige projects: the mighty Hotel Cecil, off the Strand; the luxurious apartment complex of Hyde Park Court; Whitehall Court, alongside the National Liberal Club. Admirers began to talk of Balfour's 'Midas touch', and companies in trouble sought to steady themselves and redeem their reputations by giving him seats on their boards. As the *Pall Mall Gazette* was later to recollect: 'Evidently, he was the coming man, and there appeared to be no bounds to his popularity. He was affluent, always smiling, always ready to give freely of both time and money.'

So when borough status was granted, his fellow Croydon Liberals persuaded him to put his name forward as charter mayor of the town, a role he performed with such energy, enthusiasm, generosity and swagger that the aldermen and councillors voted to keep him on for a second term. With his seat at Tamworth doomed to be swept away in a redistribution, he hoped to ride back to Westminster on this tide of popularity at the general election of 1885 as member for Croydon.

But here he was disappointed. In the second year of his mayoralty his reputation was dented by the operational problems and financial difficulties of the Croydon tramway system, which he ran with some Liberal colleagues, and his opposition to a planned new railway line linking the town centre with the city of London – an opposition all too clearly attributable to his seat on the board of a rival company. The Tories also succeeded in alienating potential supporters by representing Balfour's support

for the Liberation Society as hostile to the survival of the Anglican church and by implication to the Christian religion too. And despite their success in local politics, the Liberals were consistently disappointed at national elections in Croydon, even after Jabez had gone and less controversial candidates contested the seat. Maybe with his characteristic optimism, Jabez overestimated his chances of success. At any rate, in the event, he took only 4,315 votes to the 5,484 of the eminent local Tory drafted in to oppose him.

His affection for Croydon did not survive this reverse. Thereafter he was rarely seen in the town. He left his fine house and moved to the edge of Hyde Park, while he also acquired a country house in the village of Burcot in Oxfordshire, where he established himself as the philanthropic modernising squire of the village.

Balfour was eager throughout to resume his career at Westminster. Though he lost at Walworth in the general election of 1886, and failed to hold a Liberal seat at a by-election in Doncaster two years later, he took advantage of an early warning of a coming vacancy at Burnley to sweep into the town and tie up the nomination within hours of the formal announcement that the former member was quitting. Six days later, he was elected for Burnley, unopposed, the town's Unionists having been so badly wrong-footed that they did not put up a candidate. At the general election of 1892, he was re-elected with the biggest percentage majority seen in the town since the 1832 Reform Act. Now he anticipated preferment, confidently expecting, according to one seasoned political reporter, an under-secretaryship at the very least.

The record of his Commons performances hardly suggested that Balfour would prosper at the despatch box. Despite his success on public platforms, where on subjects from the

greatness of Gladstone to the need to reform the franchise and extend it to women or the case for home rule for Ireland, he could captivate and enthuse an audience, his Commons speeches were rare and made no great impact. An MP could achieve far more, he liked to explain, by assiduous work in committees and party meetings and Westminster corridors than by addressing the House. He made much more of a splash in his constituencies: at Burnley, a town he always extolled in lavish terms, he got himself installed as president of the football club, on whose behalf he accepted the Lancashire Cup after their unexpected defeat of their bitter rivals Blackburn in 1890, while also delivering a lecture lasting one hour and twenty minutes to the local Literary and Philosophical Society in honour of Dr Johnson. And working people's organisations were impressed with the energy and resolution with which he took up their causes at Westminster and in government offices. Above all, he got himself talked about: as for instance when, trapped in a late-running train and anxious not to be late for a Burnley occasion, he hired a special train to complete his journey from Wakefield.

Yet the party leader on whom he always lavished such praise failed to fulfil his dream of ministerial office. Perhaps Gladstone knew what was coming. Within weeks of his re-election, Balfour's commercial empire was in serious trouble. The economy was running into recession. The near-collapse of the great city house of Barings had fractured investors' confidence. And subordinates strategically placed within Balfour companies had begun to betray him. The collapse of one of these companies brought down his London and General Bank, where customers found the doors locked against them on 2 September 1892, and within a few days the rest of the empire began to look doomed.

His fellow Croydon Liberals persuaded him to put his name forward as charter mayor of the town, a role he performed with such energy, enthusiasm, generosity and swagger that the aldermen and councillors voted to keep him on for a second term.

Balfour tried to dismiss these problems as merely ephemeral, but investigations by the Official Receiver swiftly made them look terminal.

The whole edifice, it was quickly established, had been built on illusion. The celebrated profits were nearly all pure invention. Balfour had worked on the basis that if people thought you were highly successful and prosperous they would pump in the sums that in time would make you successful and prosperous. Under Balfour's accounting system, companies simply computed what dividends and bonuses would need to be paid to keep them looking healthy and commercially alluring, and then cooked the figures to fit. Fictitious transactions were engineered between Balfour companies (easily done, as the directors of company A would be much the same people as the directors of company B) to boost company balance sheets when results were due to be published and dividends fixed. Complaisant valuers and auditors devised and approved grossly inflated assessments of company assets. (At one point, one of the Balfour companies had as its auditors a retired Nonconformist minister and Jabez's tailor in Wallingford.) The money which trusting investors had committed to the Liberator to safeguard their futures had been shamelessly milked for other Balfourite purposes. Too late, they found that the man who paraded himself as their benefactor had robbed and betrayed them.

As the awful truth began to emerge, ruined shareholders and Liberator clients clamoured for recompense, even for vengeance. But at this point, their prey disappeared. For weeks there were rumours of sightings all round the world. In fact, he had fled to Argentina, which seemed a safe enough choice since no extradition treaty existed between that country and Britain (there had been negotiations, but no final version had ever been ratified).

Balfour had worked on the basis that if people thought you were highly successful and prosperous they would pump in the sums that in time would make you successful and prosperous.

Balfour established himself in Buenos Aires and then, when the press caught up with him there, in Salta, 800 miles up-country.

Here he was joined by a young woman he said was his wife, though in fact she was the daughter of an old business associate, who had been his unofficial ward after the early death of her father. His wife, Ellen, had long been out of the picture, confined to the Priory Hospital since a breakdown after the birth of her second child, with no expectation that she would ever recover. Ensnared in Salta, Balfour resisted all attempts to return him to London. He planned to do business there, and the local community was confident he would bring the place new prosperity. The great temperance champion negotiated to purchase a local brewery. Even when the extradition treaty was finally ratified, he thought himself safe, arguing that it could not be used retrospectively.

When the federal courts in Buenos Aires said that it could, he took up more time by appealing. He was adept in exploiting the angry resistance to central power then evident in much of the Argentine republic, claiming that federal attempts to send him home constituted an outrageous attack on the rights of the province. As soon as a ruling was given by the government or the courts of the capital, the authorities in Salta refused to accept it and asserted his right to stay. And even when that hope of escape appeared to be exhausted, he and his advisers discovered a provision in Argentine law which said that no one against whom a legal case was outstanding might leave the country; on which basis, they organised a roster of sympathisers to bring actions against him one after the other.

British officials in Buenos Aires began to warn London that hopes of ever getting him back were fading. In the end it took something close to a kidnap to bring him home. Scotland

Yard's extradition specialist, a redoubtable man called Frank Froest, hired a train and had it stationed in sidings near Salta. When, in April 1895, the latest ruling favouring Balfour's extradition was reported from Buenos Aires, he had Balfour aboard the train before the local courts could convene to declare this procedure illegal. With Froest on the footplate, the train steamed south-eastwards. But a posse of Salta officials and Balfour sympathisers caught up with it, and one of the officials rode on to the line in order to block the tracks. When the driver attempted to stop the train, Froest obstructed him, and the train mowed the horseman down. Later the British government paid \$50 in *ex gratia* compensation, stipulating that this was to cover both the man and the horse.

The outcome of the trial when it came was a foregone conclusion, and the sentence of fourteen years' imprisonment with hard labour, handed down on 28 November 1895, reflected less the largely technical charges he faced than the public outrage over the havoc the crash had created. Many hundreds were ruined. Some killed themselves; some went mad; some died from grief and despair. 'You will never' Balfour was told by the judge, a former Conservative MP, 'be able to shut from your ears the cries of the widows and orphans you have ruined.'

He served ten years and four months of his sentence. Released on 14 April 1906, he was hired by the Northcliffe Press to write an account of his prison experiences, which led the *Weekly Despatch* for twenty-six weeks and was later, in a slightly more muted form, published as a book: *My Prison Life*. Remarkably free from self-pity and self-exculpation, its revelations shocked middle-class breakfast tables. When the Northcliffe Press tired of him, he set himself up as a mining consultant, though that came to a halt with the outbreak of war.

A 'SINCERE, THOROUGH AND HEARTY LIBERAL'?

But still he would not give up. In August 1915, just short of his seventy-second birthday, he went out to Burma to take up a post at a tin mine. When his new employers realised how old he was, and contemplated what the heat of the place might do to him, they ordered him home. That decision, though well meant, was fatal; he returned to a bitter winter. He died on 23 February 1916, on a train to south Wales, where he was due to start a new job with a colliery company. 'A man of cold-blooded villainy', *The Times* had dubbed him in the moment of his disgrace, 'one of the most impudent and heartless scoundrels on record.' Yet now he was almost forgotten. It took some time for the authorities in Newport, where his body was removed from the Fishguard train, to establish who the dead man was. Obituarists over the next few days remembered him as a minor politician and major rogue.

Yet others who knew him suggested that had bad times not arrived when they did, he might have ended up knighted, possibly ennobled, even a member perhaps of the Privy Council. Had his companies survived through the crisis of 1892, they might possibly, some City observers maintained, have prospered to a degree where genuine profits would have accrued, his companies might have been put back on an honest footing, and those who became his victims would have been saved from penury. Some of his cherished projects, like the Hotel Cecil, would indeed make substantial money one day. And certainly, it was mordantly noted later in the City and in newspaper commentaries – the outstanding example of which, still richly readable, was that by J. A. Spender in the *Westminster Gazette* – there were those now occupying the high places to which Jabez Spencer Balfour had once aspired who had resorted to methods no

Perhaps the greatest mystery in Balfour's story is whether he was an honest man who went to the bad or whether he was bad all along.

less dishonest than his to make their businesses prosper; and got clean away with it. Bad though he was – and the sufferings he inflicted on his victims cannot be condoned or forgiven – he was not, even then, the worst of the bunch.

Perhaps the greatest mystery in Balfour's story is whether he was an honest man who went to the bad or whether he was bad all along. His mother had written to one of his older brothers when Jabez was five: 'he will either be good or evil – there is nothing negative about him'. Spender, who examined his rise and fall more closely than most, was never entirely sure. His development of the *Liberator* seems to have been coloured by a genuine commitment to enhance the daily lives of Nonconformist England – while also enhancing the lives of those who sat round the boardroom table. This Nonconformist Liberal was fully attuned to the kind of teaching more often identified with Adam Smith and for that matter Margaret Thatcher, which teaches that men fired with the urge for self-enrichment are often the most effective agents for the general improvement of the economy and of society. And

pious people, among whom he aspired to be numbered, could always shore themselves up with a precedent from 1 Chronicles 4:10, which suggested that God might approve of their hopes of becoming rich. 'And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he had requested.'

'Into the depths of human motives' wrote Spender 'what sure plummet can be cast? In the complexities of human character, who shall judge or decide?' These are questions that go much wider and deeper than the history of Jabez Balfour.

David McKie, a former deputy editor and chief leader writer of The Guardian, now in retirement, writes a weekly column, Elsewhere. His Jabez, The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Rogue, published in 2004, was shortlisted for the Whitbread biography prize. His Great British Bus Journeys: Travels though Unfamous Places appeared in March 2006.

Journal subscriptions

As noted in the last edition, the subscription rate for the *Journal of Liberal History* is increasing from the 2006–07 membership year, which starts with the next issue, number 53. This will allow us to increase the length of each issue and so publish the greater volume of material now being submitted. We have also taken the opportunity to simplify the rates structure, which is as follows:

Standard subscription (printed copies): £20.00 a year for individuals (£12.50 unwaged) and £30.00 for institutions. Overseas (non-UK) subscribers should add £5.00 to these rates.

Online subscription (no printed copies will be sent, but access is made available online to pdf versions of all current and past issues): £40.00 for individuals and £50.00 for institutions.

For payment details, see page 3. Payment is now possible by credit card via our website, www.liberalhistory.org.uk.

The subscription year for individual subscriptions starts on 1 October, but subscriptions commencing after 30 June continue until 30 September in the following year without further payment. Subscribers receive all issues of the *Journal* published during the subscription year; those joining before 1 July are sent any issued since the previous 1 October. The subscription includes membership of the History Group unless we are informed otherwise.

Institutional subscribers are invoiced at the start of the calendar year for the period until the following 31 December.

Standing order mandate forms are available on request from the Membership Secretary (see contact details on page 3).

Liberalism Reunited Continued from page 37

in 1929, Halifax in 1935 and Batley & Morley in 1945. Woodhead stood in Huddersfield in 1918, in Sheffield Hillsborough in 1923 and in Pudsey & Otley in 1924. Dodds was Liberal candidate in York in 1922 and 1923, in Halifax in 1929 and in Rochdale in 1931 and 1935. Granted their collective lack of electoral success, Mabane ridiculed the aspirations of his opponents. 'Although they have been given the pick of Liberal candidatures throughout the North of England, they have contrived not merely to reduce the Liberal vote but to put themselves very safely and successfully at the bottom of the poll.' *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, 1 April 1939.

5 *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 5 April 1939.

6 *Ibid.*, 17 July 1939.

7 The figures were Mallalieu 33,362, Mabane 24,496 and Harrod 11,199.

8 K.D.A., Mabane MSS, DD/WM/1/9, Hickman to Mabane 20 August 1945. Every effort has been made, but without success, to trace the holder of the copyright in the Mabane papers. If the holder would care to contact the author,

appropriate acknowledgement will be made in any future publications.

- 9 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/2/1, Borough Women's Liberal Association meeting 30 August 1945.
- 10 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/4/1, Borough Liberals meeting 30 October 1945.
- 11 K.D.A., Mabane MSS, DD/WM/1/9, H.V. Wood to J.D. Eaton Smith 6 November 1945.
- 12 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/1/5, Huddersfield Liberal Association Officers meeting 5 December 1945.
- 13 K.D.A., Mabane MSS, DD/WM/1/9, Hickman to Mabane 10 January 1946.
- 14 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/4/1, Borough Liberals meeting 29 January 1946.
- 15 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/4/1, Borough Liberals meeting 27 May 1946.
- 16 K.D.A., Mabane MSS, DD/WM/1/9, Mabane to Hickman 6 May 1946.
- 17 K.D.A., Mabane MSS, DD/WM/1/9, Hickman to Mabane 8 July 1946.
- 18 K.D.A., Mabane MSS, DD/WM/1/9, Hickman to Mabane 12 October 1946.
- 19 University of Birmingham, Avon MSS, AP 11/12/38, J.P.L. Thomas to A. Eden 29 May 1946. Thomas sent Eden a list of 'Liberal National constituencies' which included Huddersfield despite the fact that the seat had been lost in the 1945 general election.
- 20 K.D.A., Mabane MSS, DD/WM/1/9, Hickman to Mabane 12 October 1946.
- 21 K.D.A., Mabane MSS, DD/WM/1/9, Mabane to Hickman 11 October 1946.
- 22 *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, 23 November 1946.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 14 December 1946.
- 24 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/4/1, Borough Liberal Association executive meeting 26 November 1946.
- 25 *Huddersfield Weekly Examiner*, 23 November 1946.
- 26 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/2/1, Borough Women's Liberal Association members meeting 27 March 1947.
- 27 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/4/1, meeting of delegates of Huddersfield Liberal Association and Borough Liberal Association 28 April 1947.
- 28 K.D.A., WYK 1146/1/4/1, Borough Liberal Association A.G.M. 21 May 1947.
- 29 Report of meeting held on 15 June 1947 in *Hylites*, the newsletter of the Huddersfield Young Liberals Association.
- 30 *The Times*, 6 April 1956.

- 31 V. Bogdanor (ed.), *Liberal Party Politics* (Oxford, 1983), p. 254.
- 32 National Library of Wales, Cardiganshire Liberal Association papers, file 24.
- 33 West Yorkshire Archives Service, WYL 456/3, Yorkshire Liberal Federation meeting 22 May 1943.
- 34 *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 7 Oct. 1947. See also B. J. Evans and A. J. Taylor, 'The Rise and Fall of Two-Party Electoral Co-operation', *Political Studies* XXXII (1984), pp. 257-72.
- 35 K.D.A., DD/CS/dp/13, meeting of Liberal councillors 6 April 1948.
- 36 K.D.A., DD/CS/dp/13, meeting of Liberal councillors 1 November 1949.
- 37 *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, 5 January 1950.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 13 January 1950.
- 39 In Bolton a formal agreement was signed by the chairmen of the Liberal and Conservative Associations, allowing Arthur Holt a free run in Bolton West. This agreement lasted until Frank Byers contested a by-election for the Liberals in Bolton East in 1960.

British Liberal Political Studies Group Winter Conference 2007 Call for Paper Presenters

The British Political Liberal Studies Group winter conference will be held on the weekend of 19-21 January 2007 at Birmingham University's conference centre.

The conference is hosted by INLOGOV and is organised in conjunction with the Liberal Democrat History Group.

Panels

Proposed panels for papers include:

- The evolution of the Liberal Democrats and the current direction of the party
- Studies of local Liberal Democrat parties and campaigning
- Liberal Democrats in power and opposition

- The Liberal Democrats in the European Parliament
- The Liberal Democrats in local government
- Ideology of Liberalism and or policy creation
- The Liberal Democrats and issues of gender
- Liberal lessons from history
- Liberal leadership (particularly comparative)
- Liberal political figureheads or political trend-setters

Paper-givers are required to submit a 200-word summary of their paper to the Conference Convenor. If the paper is deemed of the required standard for the group then a space will be allocated for it on a relevant panel. Ideas for papers should be submitted as soon as possible, and the full papers by 13 October

2006. Please send ideas to the Conference Convenor, Dr Russell Deacon, who will then circulate them to the BLPSG executive.

Registration details

The registration fee for the conference, including accommodation, will be:

- Members of the British Liberal Political Studies Group or the Liberal Democrat History Group who are presenting papers: £148 for the weekend or £80 for a single night.
- Members of the British Liberal Political Studies Group or the Liberal Democrat History Group not presenting papers: £175 for the weekend or £85 for a single night.

- Non-members of the British Liberal Political Studies Group or the Liberal Democrat History Group: £198 for the weekend or £99 for a single night.

The Saturday night will also host a dinner with a guest speaker. Please contact Russell Deacon to receive a booking form. Due to limited space, bookings should be made early.

Conference Convenor

Dr Russell Deacon
British Liberal Political Studies Group

UWIC, Cyncoed, Cardiff CF23 6XR; email: rdeacon@uwic.ac.uk; tel: 02920 417102

REVIEWS

The 2005 general election

Andrew Geddes and Jonathan Tonge (ed.): *Britain Decides – The UK General Election 2005* (Palgrave, 2005)

John Bartle and Anthony King (ed.): *Britain at the Polls 2005* (CQ Press, 2005)

Dennis Kavanagh and David Butler: *The British General Election of 2005* (Palgrave, 2005)

Pippa Norris and Christopher Wlezien (ed.): *Britain Votes 2005* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Reviewed by **Tom Kiehl**

For the Liberal Democrats in the 2001–05 parliament there was something reminiscent of the sense of optimism and opportunity felt by the SDP/Liberal Alliance in the 1979–83 Parliament. In both cases the government had led the country into a controversial war based on questionable motives, the main opposition party was divided, ineffectual and stood little chance of winning an election and the main third party went into the general election anticipating a potential breakthrough following a string of sensational by-election results.

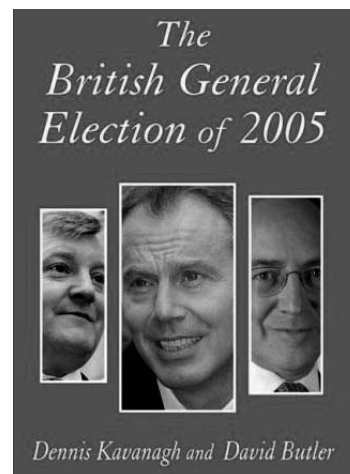
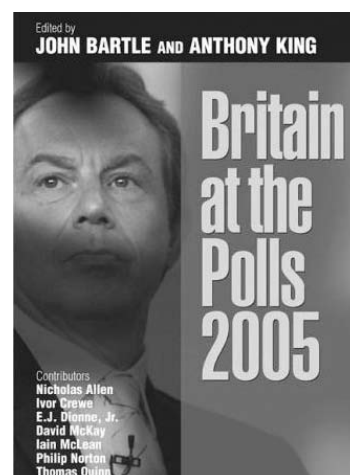
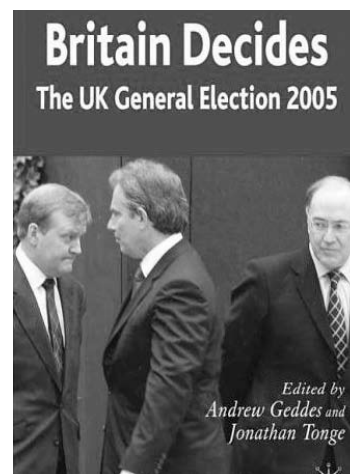
As was the case in 1983, the result of the 2005 general election was mixed. The percentage of the electorate prepared to vote for the Liberal Democrats in 2005 jumped from the teens to the twenties, as happened to the SDP/Liberal Alliance in 1983. However, a net gain of around a dozen seats in both contests did not quite give the main third party adequate grounds for proclaiming the breakthrough that the backing of a quarter, or thereabouts, of

the electorate may otherwise suggest.

As much a fixture of general elections themselves, numerous books are published in their aftermath to assess the campaigns, results and why the public voted in the way that they did. Four titles, to a greater or lesser extent, have attempted to get to grips with the question as to whether 2005 represented a success or a missed opportunity for the Liberal Democrats.

Although no specific tome focuses entirely on the Lib Dems, two have individual chapters on the Liberal Democrat campaign and the implications of the result for the party – *Britain Votes 2005*, edited by Pippa Norris and Christopher Wlezien, and *Britain Decides: The UK General Election 2005*, edited by Andrew Geddes and Jonathan Tonge. A third, *The British General Election of 2005*, by Dennis Kavanagh and David Butler, has a 'Lib Dem and the others' chapter, but this merely sets the scene ahead of the campaign proper. The fourth, *Britain at the Polls 2005*, edited by John Bartle and Anthony King,

Four titles ... have attempted to get to grips with the question as to whether 2005 represented a success or a missed opportunity for the Liberal Democrats.



has no specific chapter on the Lib Dems.

The two titles which have individual chapters on the party are the most useful for scholars attempting to interpret the result from a Liberal Democrat perspective. These are further enhanced by the fact that the chapters were contributed by Andrew Russell and Edward Fieldhouse, the authors of last year's excellent *Neither Left nor Right – The Liberal Democrats and the Electorate*.

Andrew Russell's piece in *Britain Votes 2005* is quite descriptive, though he makes some salient points. He argues that, had the party gained seats more evenly from the other parties instead of predominantly at the expense of Labour, this would have been preferable, even if the total net gain had remained the same. This is an interesting view that has not been heard much elsewhere. He also presents the party as looking more vulnerable to recovery on the part of either or both of the other main parties in a way not seen since 1997. His underlying concern is the party's strategic dichotomy and the fact that it has not yet demonstrated that it can appeal to both moderate Conservatives and those to the left of Labour in equal measure at the same time. Russell concludes that the logical future for the party may be to return to a long-term strategy of equidistance.

In his chapter in *Britain Decides: The UK General Election 2005*, Edward Fieldhouse, along with David Cutts, paints an even grimmer view of the election result and future prospects for the party. The overall tone of this chapter is that the election was more of an opportunity lost in an uneven performance for the Liberal Democrats. The chapter is not a direct attack on a poor campaign and makes it clear that it would be harsh to blame the Lib Dems for not making a breakthrough, given the electoral system. Yet there is a sense here that had

The overall tone of this chapter is that the election was more of an opportunity lost in an uneven performance for the Liberal Democrats.

the party not taken such a centre-left stance on most issues, success may have been more forthcoming. Fieldhouse and Cutts concede that there were positives for the party to draw from the result – the Lib Dems are clearly the only challenger to Labour in the big cities, and the real story in this election is in non-Lib Dem seats where the party increased its share by 4.3 per cent on average. However, what is striking about the Fieldhouse and Cutts piece are the numerous references to the Lib Dems running at a high-water mark or to a 'ceiling effect' in traditional areas and seats they already hold. The impression given is that the Lib Dems have now been boxed into a corner where they face a huge strategic dilemma and that the only rational response would be consolidate what they have got and hope for incremental gains.

Having Russell and, in part, Fieldhouse contribute these chapters acts as a fitting addendum to *Neither Left nor Right*, which was always going to suffer from being published so close to the 2005 general election.

Overall *Britain Decides: The UK General Election 2005* is preferable to *Britain Votes 2005*. Both dissect the election with individual chapters on the effect of the leaders, media and issues; however, in *Britain Decides* the robust conclusion by the editors of the book is a particularly powerful rallying call for voting reform. The style of *Britain Decides* is also more accessible. Several constituency contests are highlighted for closer inspection at the end of each chapter – six involving Lib Dem battles; five of them are Lib Dem victories and one Lib Dem loss. The book might have also benefited from an analysis of one or two near-misses – either where the party expected to gain (Orpington) or where they came from nowhere almost to take the seat (Islington South & Finsbury).

Both *Britain Decides* and *Britain Votes 2005* have their fair share of useful statistics and tables to mull over, though if this is what you are looking for then you should undoubtedly choose *The British General Election of 2005*. Taking the same format as they have done for many years, Kavanagh and Butler's style is the most identifiable to readers and, unlike the other books, is helped by being written almost entirely by the two principal editors. Although the Liberal Democrats rarely come under special attention in this book, it does make good observations about their campaign. It suggests that the party had the clear support of *The Independent* newspaper, a paper which gave the most positive coverage of the election and also one of the few to increase its circulation during the month. One could take the view that the party's slight improvement during the campaign may in some way be attributed to this. However, *The British General Election of 2005* makes the criticism that the party needs to improve its national campaign to complement its well-established targeting. John Curtice, Stephen Fisher and Michael Steed are brought in at the end of the book to analyse the results. They highlight potential new trends in favour of the Lib Dems amongst Muslims, students and tactical-voting Conservatives while also emphasising the opportunity offered by 2005's substantive growth in the number of second places.

Of the four books, *Britain at the Polls 2005* is the least useful for those wanting to analyse the election from a Lib Dem perspective. The whole feel of this text is that it is aimed far more at an American market where the idea of three-party politics is quite alien. This book is more of a collection of essays about disparate topics grouped loosely under the umbrella of the 2005 general election. Still, some interesting ideas are addressed

REVIEWS

in a couple of the chapters. Anthony King, in 'Why Labour won – again', contains a beautiful illustration of the diversity of the UK national picture and its no longer being about uniform national swings, by comparing the contrasting fortunes of the Lib Dem 2001 gains in Cheadle and Guildford. In his chapter, 'New Labour's Hegemony: Erosion or Extension?', Ivor Crewe provides the most damning indictment of the Liberal Democrats' campaign and its result to be found in any of these books. Yet he does concede that, provided there is a change in overall strategy, the party has put itself in a position whereby it could make its much-vaunted breakthrough at the next election.

At the beginning I implied that you could be forgiven for feeling a sense of *déjà vu* on

the morning of 6 May 2005. Of course, 2005 was better than 1983. Achieving sixty-two seats in a night made up largely of gains is better than winning twenty three seats in a night mainly of losses. However, the sense on the one hand of moral victory and on the other of total exasperation is one that has not been felt in the same way since 1983. There is enough information and advice in all four books to ensure that the Liberal Democrats do not have to wait another generation for their potential breakthrough to come about again. Party strategists would do well to read these books and take heed of them.

Tom Kiehl works in the Liberal Democrat Whips' Office in the House of Lords, and is Deputy Reviews Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.

He does concede that ... the party has put itself in a position whereby it could make its much-vaunted breakthrough at the next election.

when the dispossessed burst the silence 'by the only power at its command'.

The Village Labourer caused a sensation when it was first published in 1911, selling over a thousand copies in the first six months. It caught the wind of the public debate on the 'flight from the land' which had found its precursors in F. G. Heath's *The English Peasantry* (1874) and G. C. Brodrick's *English Land and English Landlords* (1881). More importantly, it added to the debate surrounding the land reforms of the Liberal government, particularly after the publication of *The Land* in 1913, the report of Lloyd George's Liberal Land Enquiry Committee. Upon reading *The Village Labourer*, Arthur Clutton-Brock claimed never to have seen so powerful an argument for 'democracy in all its aspects'. A. E. Zimmern thought the style 'quite Thucydidian' and Graham Wallas praised its 'over-mastering sense of dramatic force'.¹ G. M. Trevelyan felt that if a cheap version of the book were made available to the poor, Britain might face a revolution.

Formal academic opinion, however, has been less kind to the Hammonds. The assault started with J. H. Clapham, who disliked the bias against the upper classes. For him, enclosure was necessary to increase productivity, and he criticised the Hammonds for the naivety of their statistical analysis. This gave rise to one of the longest running historiographical debates of the twentieth century, the so-called 'standard of living' controversy.

On the one hand were ranged the 'catastrophic school' epitomised by the Hammonds and the Webbs and continued by E. P. Thompson. On the other side were the economic historians, such as Clapham and – later – Chambers and Mingay, who stressed the effectiveness of enclosure in stimulating industrial growth and feeding a growing population. Like

The radical soul of liberalism

J. L. & Barbara Hammond: *The Village Labourer*

(Nonsuch, 2005)

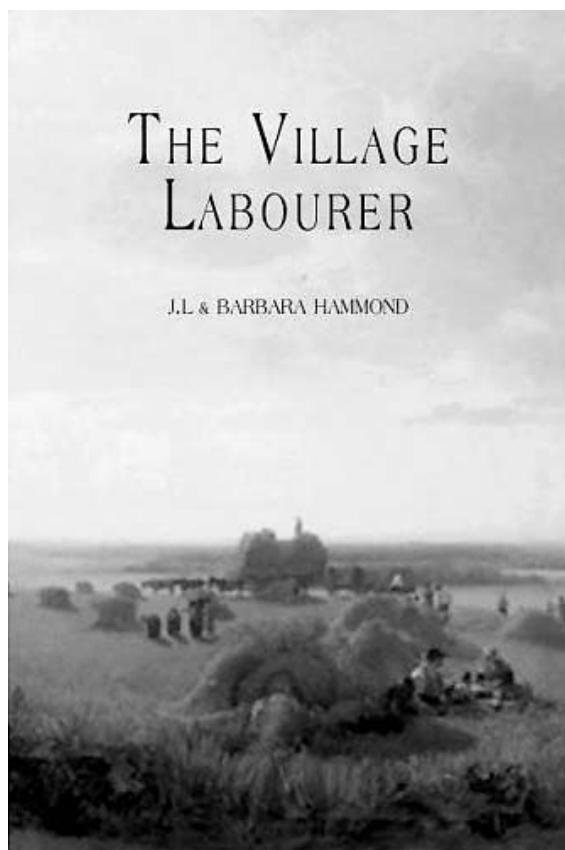
Reviewed by **Tom Villis**

The conventional view of the enclosure movement, today as in 1911 when the *Village Labourer* was first published, is that it provided for the modernisation of agriculture, helped feed a growing population and kick-started industrialisation. Changes in agriculture can often be analysed in rather abstract ways: in terms of rising labour productivity, for example, which made a surplus of labour available for manufacturing. What Barbara and Lawrence Hammond remind us – and we cannot be reminded too often – is that such 'efficiency' was achieved at the cost of immense suffering and the degradation of the rural poor. The authors do not deny

that enclosure made England economically more productive. However, in a series of chapters written in Lawrence's powerful prose and backed up by Barbara's scrupulous research, the reader is shown how enclosure was in effect a series of legalised thefts perpetrated by a parliament which acted only in the interests of the landed gentry. These acts, the Hammonds argue, stripped the village labourer of his common land and his economic independence. In an attempt to alleviate the distress which followed, the Speenhamland system of poor relief merely institutionalised pauperism. The final part of the book then describes the swing riots of 1830

many such debates, however, it has generated as much heat as light. Some qualifications to the Hammonds' catastrophic vision are useful, notably that the Speenhamland system was not as systematic as they have indicated. Nevertheless, as E. P. Thompson famously pointed out in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), it is perfectly possible to maintain that a slight improvement in average material standards was accompanied by intensified exploitation and greater insecurity. Lawrence in private expressed his irritation with 'the new school which argues that if only one paid attention to statistics it wd become clear that everything went well at the Ind. Rev.'² It is testament to the Hammonds' continuing importance that their work remains the starting point for these debates nearly a hundred years later.

Above all, one senses, it was the mixture of moral and scientific language which jarred on the ears of Clapham and subsequent professional historians.



Even E. P. Thompson takes issue with their 'outraged emotion' and their attempt to moralise history. Yet this overtly moral standpoint gives the book its enduring appeal. This is not to say the substance of the historical evidence has been entirely discredited; Peter Clarke for one has shown that the empirical part of their research has stood the test of time surprisingly well.

The Hammonds, however, explicitly wrote the book to effect change in the present. It forms, therefore, part of the Whig historiographical tradition in its tone, style and intended popular audience. Indeed, many of the preoccupations of traditional liberalism are evident in the book. The original subtitle was 'A Study in the Government of England Before the Reform Bill'. This was dropped from subsequent printings, restored in 1987, but dropped again for the present edition. Nevertheless, this subtitle was evidence of the Hammonds' continuing faith in constitutional reform in the Whig tradition. Enclosure had been passed by an unreformed parliament; the Hammonds had not lost faith in the power of liberal constitutional reform to provide for the resolution of social injustice. The book itself was intended to further the constitutional struggles of the early twentieth century. If the process by which land had been acquired in the past could be shown to be questionable, it therefore ceased to be authoritative justification for arrangements in the present. This became an important argument for the taxing of landed wealth in the People's Budget of 1909 and the constitutional crisis which followed.

Nevertheless, one of the attractions of the Hammonds' book is the way one sees this traditional Whig belief in the power of constitutional reform in tension with the rights of the poor labourer. Despite

the attempts of some to fit the Hammonds into a proto-Marxist tradition, they never entirely lose faith in traditional liberalism. Unlike the Webbs, their outrage is always with untrammelled capitalism rather than with capitalism itself; unlike Hilaire Belloc, their problem is with unreformed parliament rather than with parliamentarism in general. In contrast to Marxist approaches to the subject, shades of grey abound in the Hammonds' account. Like true liberals, they cannot completely dismiss the gentleman class which had been the driving force behind English constitutional development:

... it is only just to record that in other regions of thought and conduct they bequeathed a great inheritance of moral and liberal ideas: a passion for justice between peoples, a sense for national freedom, a great body of principle by which to check, refine, and discipline the gross appetites of national ambition. (p. 268)

The great service of the Hammonds' book is to show us that this class, so admirable in so many respects, could be so morally bankrupt with regard to those less fortunate than themselves.

However, the most striking part of the *Village Labourer* is the way in which the dispossessed are not treated as a mere abstraction but allowed to speak with their own voice. This was the first time that the long-forgotten riots of 1830 were exposed to the reading public. Lawrence had come across the disturbances while leafing through old editions of Cobbett's *Political Register*. For readers at the beginning of the twenty-first century as much as those at the beginning of the twentieth, this final section on the riots which spread over southern England and the brutal repression with which they were met make compelling reading. The historical concern

REVIEWS

with the governed as well as the government, which is illustrated so effectively in this book, becomes part of an academic tradition taken up by Rudé, Hobsbawm and Thompson. One of the tragedies from the Liberal Party's point of view is that this moral outrage has been hijacked so effectively by the socialist left. We can remind ourselves in this book, however, of the radicalism which still nourishes the soul of British liberalism.

Tom Villis lectures in history for the University of Cambridge, the Open University and Webster University. He is the author of Reaction and the Avant-Garde: the revolt against liberal democracy in early twentieth-century Britain (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

- 1 S. A. Weaver, *The Hammonds: A marriage in history* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 111–12.
- 2 P. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 246.

society than a country governed centrally from Westminster' (p. x). Using Lloyd George's own early correspondence and diaries and those of his political contemporaries, and a great deal of searching through national and local newspapers over many years, the author has quarried a large amount of evidence to support his contentions.

The volume is consequently a thorough and detailed account of Lloyd George's political career in a Welsh context before his election as the Liberal MP for the Caernarfon Boroughs in a by-election in April 1890, and his record as a MP until about 1899. This is followed by a brief closing chapter which examines the Lloyd George legacy to Welsh life in the twentieth century. There is much fascinating material on Lloyd George's intervention in the politics of Merionethshire in 1886 when he came close to selection as the Liberal candidate for the county, eventually happy to stand down in favour of his young radical associate Thomas Edward Ellis (1859–99). This is followed by detailed accounts of Lloyd George's contribution to the tithe and disestablishment debates, his founding of the short-lived newspaper *Udgorn Rhyddid* (throughout his career LG was always fully aware of the potential power of the press), and the battle to secure the Liberal nomination for the six highly disparate boroughs within the Caernarfon District in 1888–89. Some new material emerges of Lloyd George's firm commitment to labour issues and the welfare of the Welsh language even at this very early stage of his career.

A full analysis ensues of the closely contested by-election in the Boroughs in April 1890 when Lloyd George secured election to parliament by a wafer-thin majority of just eighteen votes. After he had arrived at Westminster Lloyd George remained true to his commitment to Welsh home

The young Lloyd George and Wales

Emyr Price: *David Lloyd George* (University of Wales Press, 2006)

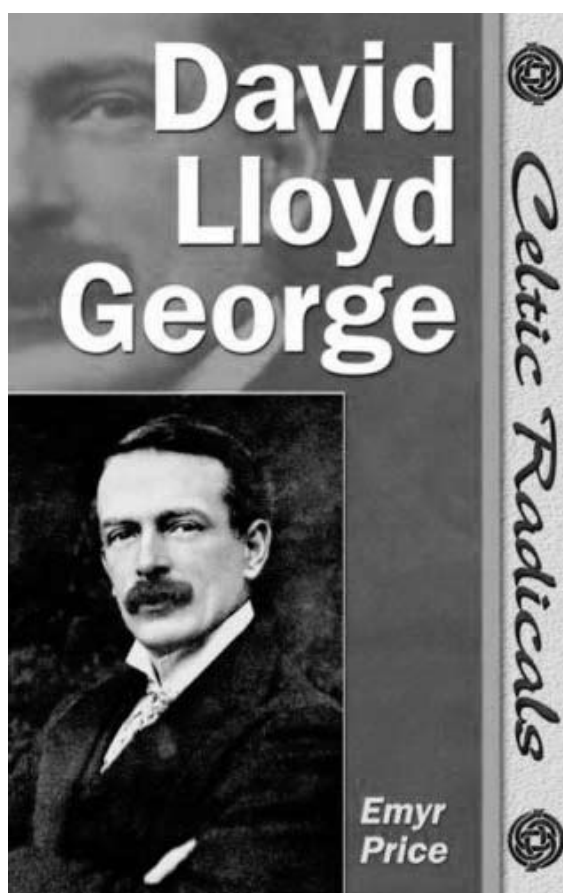
Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

With the publication of this important volume, the new 'Celtic Radicals' series recently launched by the University of Wales Press and edited by Dr Paul O'Leary (senior lecturer in Welsh History at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth), has got off to an auspicious start. The author, Emyr Price, is well known in Wales as a prolific author, lecturer and broadcaster and as one of our acknowledged experts on the life and career of David Lloyd George. Indeed, his preoccupation with Lloyd George now extends back more than three decades, beginning with a pioneering MA thesis 'Lloyd George's Pre-parliamentary Career', presented to the University of Wales as long ago as 1974. Since then he has published a substantial number of monographs and scholarly articles which have enhanced our understanding of Lloyd George. A few years ago he published the well-received Welsh volume *Lloyd George: y Cenedlaetholwr Cymreig: Bradur neu Awyr?* (Gomer Press, 1999). In two reviews published in

Welsh journals at the time, the present reviewer expressed the hope that the author would soon adapt his work for an English audience.¹

To some extent the present volume is an English version or adaptation of the Welsh volume published seven years ago. In both volumes Emyr Price confidently challenges head-on the view of other biographers of Lloyd George – such as Bentley B. Gilbert, the late John Grigg and Kenneth O. Morgan – who tend to interpret Lloyd George's early career as a relatively insignificant precursor to his success as a radical British politician from 1905. Their argument tends to be that during his early career Lloyd George paid little more than lip-service to the national rights of Wales as a convenient stepping-stone towards stardom and career success as a radical British politician at Westminster. Mr Price takes a totally different line. In his opinion, 'Lloyd George had a committed and visionary view of a self-governing Wales which could create a vibrant, more progressive and a more equal

Price confidently challenges head-on the view of other biographers ... who tend to interpret Lloyd George's early career as a relatively insignificant precursor to his success as a radical British politician.



rule, disestablishment and devolutionary solutions. This important volume includes much valuable information on the neglected *Cymru Fydd* movement, its significance, the reasons for its eventual breakdown and failure in 1895–96 and the half-hearted attempts to revive it during subsequent years.

By far the least satisfactory part of the book is the rather brief epilogue-like Chapter XI, 'The British-Welsh Politician, 1899–1945, and the Legacy of Young Wales' (pp. 186–208) where Price valiantly attempts to look for evidence to support the view that Lloyd George still sought to safeguard Welsh interests from 1900 onwards. Even less convincing is his effort to portray devolutionary successes in the second half of the twentieth century, culminating in the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales in 1999, as the direct legacy of LG's devotion to Welsh issues. On the very last page of the text (p. 208), we read that the Welsh politicians who oversaw the

creation of the Welsh Assembly, individuals as diverse as Ron Davies (Labour), Richard Livsey (Liberal Democrat) and Dafydd Wigley (Plaid Cymru), were 'the inheritors of the Lloyd George mantle of Young Wales'. As Kenneth Morgan rightly wrote in a review of this volume's Welsh language predecessor, 'The effort to make his hero more of a consistent Welsh nationalist than previous historians have done smacks of the devolution enthusiasm of the 1990s rather than the Liberal politics of a hundred years earlier ... The author's wider speculations on the movements of the time owe as much to his patriotic heart as to his head'.²

It is especially pleasing that the author has provided this volume (unlike the Welsh version) with helpful scholarly footnotes, but disappointing that these often fail to give the full call numbers of the documents cited. This is true of important archival sources like the Lloyd George Papers, the William George Papers and the Sir John Herbert Lewis Papers in the custody of the National Library of Wales. Indeed, I am surprised that more use was not made of the William George Papers which contain a great deal of extremely valuable source material relating to the themes outlined in this book. To some extent the volume has a rather dated air and smacks of research undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s and not subsequently updated in the light of archival collections which have become available and listed in the meantime. To some extent, the author is happy to cite from published materials rather than consult the original documents himself.

The general standard of accuracy is high. It is clear that Price has fully mastered the minutiae and detail of his subject's early life and career. Factual slips are few. But we read (p. 53) that LG's younger brother William shared 'much

of the financial burden of Lloyd George's pre-parliamentary and parliamentary career up to 1911', the date of the introduction of the payment of MPs, whereas of course LG began to draw a (relatively generous) ministerial salary from the time of his entry into the Cabinet as President of the Board of Trade in December 1905. The Liberal Party did not 'emerge triumphant' 'throughout Wales' in the first county council elections in January 1889 (p. 67), as Brecknockshire fell to the Conservatives. Stuart Rendel, the Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire from 1880 until his retirement in 1894, is described (p. 127) as 'the unofficial leader of Welsh Liberals', but, in fact, he had been elected the chairman of the Welsh Parliamentary Party in 1888. Frank Edwards MP represented not Brecknock and Radnor (p. 138), but simply Radnorshire. In 1920, LG urged Welsh devolutionists to seek, not 'Welsh Home Rule' (p. 187), but 'federal Home Rule'. Mair Eluned's death in 1907 did not 'cause the beginning of the long estrangement' (p. 190) between Lloyd George and his wife Margaret; there had been severe difficulties in the relationship ever since LG had first entered parliament back in 1890. Finally, the propaganda body launched by Lloyd George to accompany his dramatic 'New Deal' proposals in 1934–35 was the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction, not the Council for Economic and Social Reconstruction (p. 204). While the volume has a number of attractive photographs, all of these are well-known and most have been published many times before in earlier volumes.

In conclusion, this important volume must be warmly welcomed as the latest addition to the ever-growing body of literature on David Lloyd George. It is especially valuable for the focus which it provides on LG's early career within Wales and his abiding commitment to Welsh causes. Not all historians

REVIEWS

will accept Emyr Price's emphasis and arguments, but he has certainly produced a volume which is stimulating, thought-provoking and highly original. It will be eagerly received.

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh

Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

- 1 *Journal of the Merioneth Historical and Record Society*, Vol. XIII, no. IV (2001), 407–08; *Transactions of the Caernarvonshire Historical Society* 61 (2000), pp. 135–38.
- 2 *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 21, no. 1 (June 2002), p. 205.

David and Frances

John Campbell: *If Love Were All ... The Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George* (Jonathan Cape, 2006)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Mr John Campbell first earned our eternal gratitude and commendation almost thirty years ago with the publication of the volume *Lloyd George: The Goat in the Wilderness, 1922–1931* (Cape, 1977), an authoritative, pioneering study of LG's so-called 'wilderness years', which has stood the test of time and has never been superseded. Since then he has published substantial, well-received biographies of a host of eminent political figures, among them F. E. Smith (Earl Birkenhead), Roy Jenkins, Aneurin Bevan, Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher. The publication of *If Love Were All* reflects the recent upsurge of interest in Lloyd George. Previously the Lloyd George industry seemed rather to have run out of steam since its conspicuous heyday in the late 1960s and 1970s when works seemed to pour from the presses.

The present offering is probably the most substantial. The main theme of the book is, of course, familiar enough. In 1911, David Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, employed Frances Stevenson,

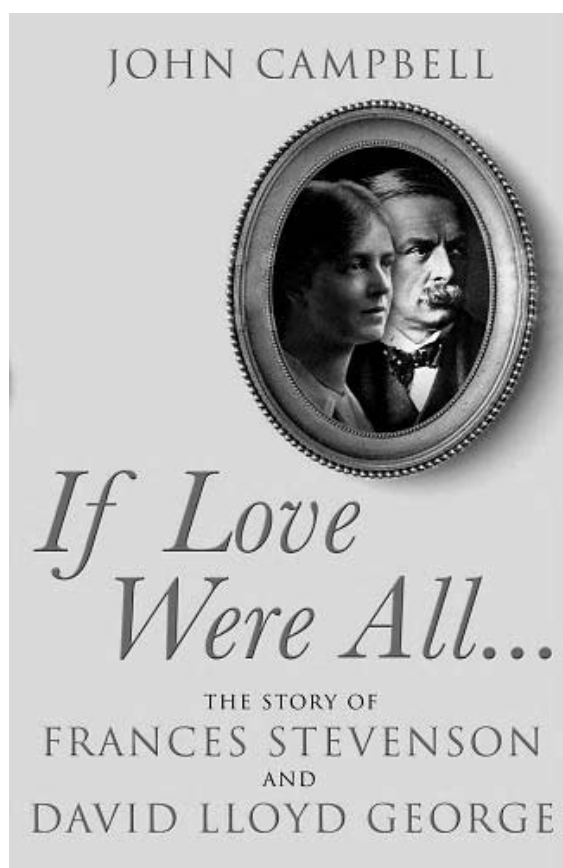
a twenty-two year old recent classics graduate, as a temporary tutor for his youngest daughter Megan, who had received but little formal schooling. Frances was intelligent, organised, highly attractive, feminine and ambitious. She immediately caught the Chancellor's roving eye, was appointed his private secretary in 1912 and the following year became his long-term mistress. As A. J. Sylvester, LG's trusted 'Principal Private Secretary', noted in an interview decades later, 'No one would suspect her of a sexual relationship with anybody. You'd take her to be a prim schoolteacher.' John Campbell shows how the 'restless schoolteacher, following politics only through the newspapers' was dramatically catapulted into a position where she enjoyed regularly 'the company of Cabinet ministers, Prime Ministers, generals and foreign statesmen' at No. 11 and subsequently No. 10 Downing Street (p. 15). From 1913 until 1922 she lived out her life at the hub of British politics.

This bizarre situation continued for more than thirty years – while the press and the media unfailingly observed a

tactful silence. After LG fell from power in the autumn of 1922 (forever, as it happened), he set up home with Frances at a new house called Bron-y-de near Churt in Surrey. Thereafter Frances's long-term role was 'still in public LG's devoted secretary, still in private sharing him with Maggie, the eternal mistress still subordinate to the wife and obliged to make herself scarce whenever Maggie came out of Wales – even when she came to Churt' (pp. 254–55). Eventually, after the death of his wife Dame Margaret in January 1941, he made an honest woman of Frances by marrying her in October 1943. In January 1945 he accepted an earldom and she thus became a countess. Less than three months later he was dead. Not long afterwards Frances left north Wales to return to Surrey where, as the Dowager Countess Lloyd-George of Dwyfor, she outlived him by more than twenty-seven years, eventually dying in December 1972 at the age of 84.

The backbone of Mr Campbell's sources is the private diaries of some of the leading actors involved in this bizarre saga: those of Frances herself at the Parliamentary Archive at the House of Lords, together with those of Lord Hankey at Cambridge, Lord Riddell at London and A. J. Sylvester at Aberystwyth. These are supplemented by the voluminous correspondence between Lloyd George and Frances at the House of Lords and the Lloyd George family correspondence and papers at Aberystwyth. In every case there are existing published volumes containing edited and annotated selections from each of these sources, but John Campbell has in each case used the original source materials himself, meticulously transcribing and re-interpreting with a fresh eye the mass of intricate information they contain. In so doing, he draws attention to the many omissions, transcription errors, misinterpretations and

This bizarre situation continued for more than thirty years – while the press and the media unfailingly observed a tactful silence.



misjudgements of the existing published texts. Where the sources are thin, Campbell uses considerable skill and imagination in piecing together the complex, involved course of events, occasionally even making use of an unpublished novel penned by Frances.

Adopting a strictly chronological approach and an unfailingly lively, engaging writing style (which immediately captivates the reader), Mr Campbell has arranged this mass of material into thirty-eight relatively short, easily digestible chapters. While not refraining from exposing the numerous, untold skeletons in the Lloyd George family cupboard, he deals sensitively and tactfully with themes like the fraught relationship between Lloyd George and members of the Stevenson family, or the shock discovery by Megan Lloyd George in 1920 or 1921 that Frances was rather more than her father's secretary and confidant. The latter revelation he attributes to Frances's very prominent role at Chequers – 'the first Prime Minister's

lady to preside there' (p. 193). Other writers have argued, convincingly, that by this time Dame Margaret felt that her youngest daughter was now old enough to be told the whole truth and thus spilled the beans.

The author also sensitively describes the long relationship between Frances and Colonel T. F. Tweed, a member of LG's staff at Liberal Party HQ, and discusses openly the still vexed, contentious question of Jennifer Longford's paternity. Perhaps the most striking revelation in the book is the disclosure of the intimate, highly embarrassing relationship between LG and Roberta, the first wife of his eldest son Richard (pp. 374–75).

The author has made use of a wide range of primary and published source materials in researching and writing this monumental tome. He has, however, shunned the use of journal articles and chapters in published volumes – a decision perhaps inevitable given the massive existing Lloyd George bibliography. Nor has he conducted formal interviews with surviving members of the Lloyd George family such as the present Earl Lloyd-George (b. 1924), Dr W. R. P. George (b. 1912) and Viscount Tenby (b. 1930), all of whom remember well Lloyd George, Dame Margaret and Frances Stevenson and have unique reminiscences of the events described in the latter part of the book. He has, however, undertaken his research and writing with the blessing and full collaboration of Jennifer Longford (Frances's daughter, born in 1929) and Ruth Nixon, Jennifer's daughter and a historian in her own right. He has also made full use of the private papers still in the family's custody, referred to as 'Ruth's box' in the footnote references in the volume.

John Campbell's detailed knowledge of the minutiae of the political history of the period is impressive. Very rarely does he slip up. But it is

surely very wide of the mark boldly to assert (p. 352) that there were 11.3 million unemployed in Britain in 1929. And picture 26, captioned 'LG and Megan in the 1930s', was in fact taken during their North American tour in 1923.

Throughout most of the volume the discussion is very full and extremely detailed. Only from 1941 onwards does the pace noticeably quicken – the war years, the death of Dame Margaret, the second marriage to Frances, the final return to north Wales in September 1944, the (? reluctant) acceptance of an earldom in January 1945 and LG's final pathetic weeks. The last chapter – no. 38, 'Occupation: Widow' – deals with Frances's life after her husband's death in rather less than seven pages and outlines only the major turning points in her long story. The volume contains a large number of fascinating photographs, some well known and published many times before, some completely new and fresh. They add very much to the appeal of the volume.

Occasionally, one felt that the very long quotations, especially from Frances's copious diary entries, and from the voluminous correspondence between Lloyd George and Frances, could sometimes have been abbreviated a little – with advantage for the flow of the narrative which runs to no fewer than 557 pages. As it is, Mr Campbell can rest assured that he has left no stone unturned and that he has written what is surely the last word on one of the greatest love stories of the twentieth century.

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

1 In an interview with Mervyn Jones, 1989: Jones, *A Radical Life: the Biography of Megan Lloyd George, 1902–66* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 34.

YELLOW BOOK VERSUS ORANGE BOOK IS IT TIME FOR A NEW NEW LIBERALISM?

A hundred years ago, the Liberal landslide victory in the 1906 election opened the way for a period of radical social reform based on the social-liberal ideology of the New Liberalism.

British Liberalism changed decisively from its nineteenth-century Gladstonian inheritance of non-interventionism in economic and social issues to a much more activist role for the state, exemplified by the introduction of graduated income tax, old-age pensions and national insurance. With a few exceptions, the party adhered to this social liberalism throughout the remainder of the century.

In 2004, the authors of the *Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* challenged this 'nanny-state liberalism' and argued that the Liberal Democrats needed to return to their nineteenth-century heritage and 'reclaim economic liberalism'.

Which way now for the Liberal Democrats? What can we draw from the lessons of history? Debate the question with **Paul Marshall**, co-editor of the *Orange Book* and its successor, and **Ed Randall**, co-editor of the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought*.

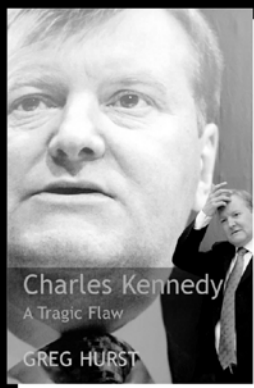
12.45, Wednesday 20 September 2006

Library, Hilton Metropole Hotel, Brighton

NEW BOOKS THIS AUTUMN



The Westminster
Bookshop



Charles Kennedy

A Tragic Flaw
by Greg Hurst
£18.99 Hardback

A compelling and authoritative biography of one of the most talented and troubled politicians of our times

President Gore

... and other things that never happened
Edited by Duncan Brack
£14.99 Hardback

A selection of nineteen highly structured and entertaining political 'What If...?'s presenting fascinating alternatives to important historical events



Available from our stand at the Party Conference in Brighton

Visit our London shop at 8 Artillery Row, SW1P 1RZ

Opening Hours 9.30am - 6pm Monday to Friday, 11am - 4pm Saturday

Or order online at www.westminsterbookshop.co.uk