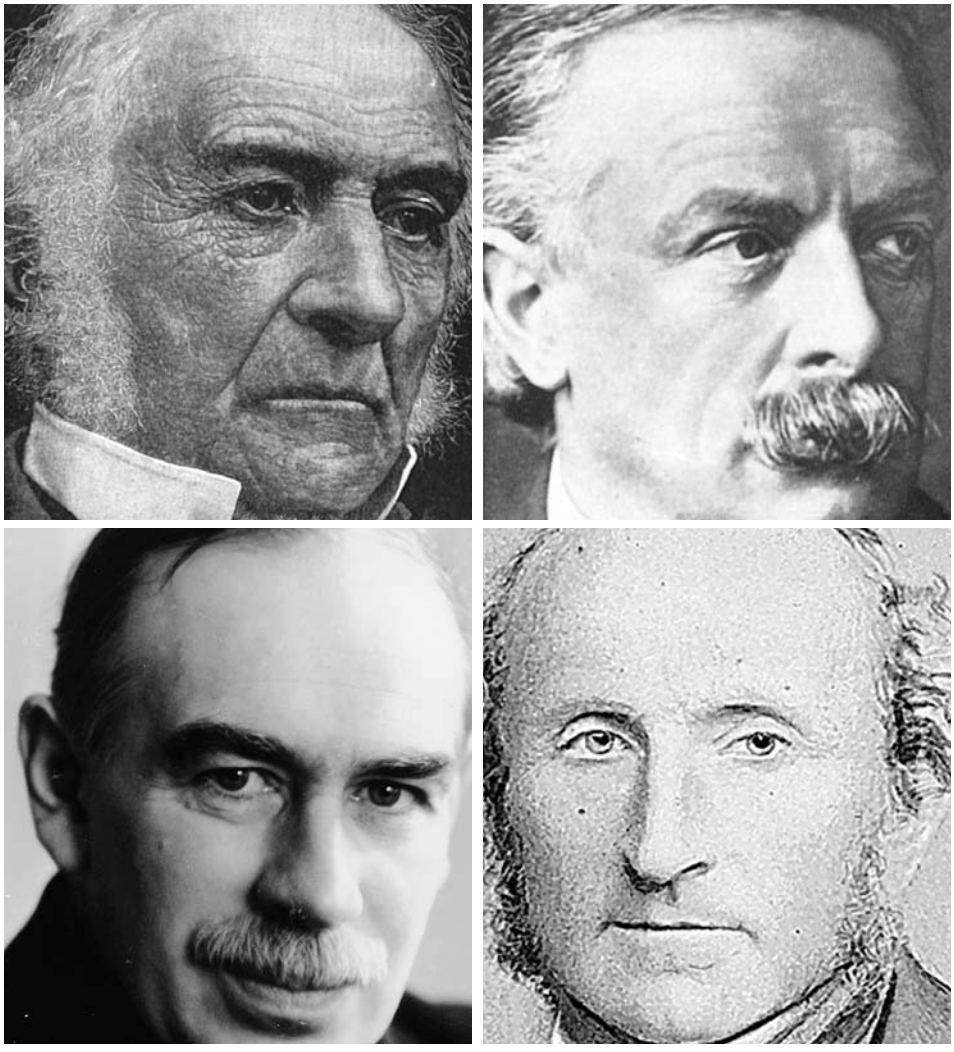
THE GREAT
JOHN ST

So who was the greatest Liberal, as voted for by History Group members and Liberal Democrats at the autumn party conference? By now, you know the winner was John Stuart Mill but when the packed hustings meeting at Brighton gathered to hear the candidates' champions, the question was very much still an open one. The meeting was one of the best the History Group has ever organised, not least because the speakers showed an enjoyable readiness to attack each other's choices, as well as defend their own. In order that readers who were not present can enjoy it to the full, the report below reproduces the speeches more or less verbatim, including interjections and asides. Report of fringe meeting, 19 September 2007, Brighton, by **Duncan Brack** and **Graham Lippiatt**.



TEST LIBERAL: TUART MILL

Four candidates were presented by leading academics and Lib Dems: Keynes, by Lord Tom McNally, leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords; Gladstone, by Lord Paddy Ashdown, leader of the party 1988–99; Mill, by Richard Reeves, a former *Guardian* journalist and author of a biography of Mill (see page 2 for a special offer for *Journal* readers); and Lloyd George, by Lord Kenneth Morgan, the distinguished historian. The meeting was chaired by Martin Kettle of *The Guardian*.

Martin Kettle: We've got four top speakers talking about four top Liberals, and the first one is going to be Tom McNally, who is putting the case for John Maynard Keynes.

Tom McNally: John Maynard Keynes

My claim that John Maynard Keynes is the greatest ever Liberal is based on both historical perspective and contemporary relevance. In the twentieth century it was Keynes who provided the theory, the practical policies and the intellectual firepower which allowed the political leaders of the democracies to offer a third way when faced with the totalitarian alternatives of left and right. Today he remains a beacon of sanity for those who do not believe that Adam Smith's hidden hand, or trickle-down, will either provide social justice or remove the blights of poverty, ignorance and disease from the world.

He also makes a direct claim on this audience as a party activist. We enjoy his inheritance to this day through the Liberal Summer School, which he founded and which today bears his name. He very nearly stood for Parliament in the party's interest on more than one occasion. He was the intellectual driving force behind the 'Yellow Book', still one of the most relevant policy documents published by any political party in British history, and he ended his days as a Liberal peer in the House of Lords. He was principal adviser to the Liberal Party when in 1929 it received 23 per cent of the vote and 56 seats, a result the party was not to achieve again for three-quarters of a century. What is more, historians now agree that the Keynes-inspired Liberal manifesto of 1929 was by far the most practical in addressing the economic crisis then facing the country.

Left: the final four – top: Gladstone, Lloyd George; bottom: Keynes, Mill

However, Keynes was not just right about the response to depression, slump and high unemployment in the 1930s. Long before he wrote *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, which was the embodiment of what we call Keynesianism, it is amazing to see how often Keynes made policy proposals which were rejected at the time only to be adopted later when other policies had failed.

Keynes was advocating central-bank control of interest rates and money supply eighty years before Gordon Brown – unashamedly stealing Liberal Democrat policy – made it a reality.

As an adviser to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, after the First World War, he tried hard to persuade the Americans to stay in Europe and to use their strength and economic position to promote European reconstruction. Instead, and against his advice, a punitive peace was imposed which had within it the seeds of future conflict. In one of his first great contributions to policy development, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, he wrote: 'if we aim at the impoverishment of central Europe, vengeance, I dare predict, will not limp', and the assessment of his biographer Lord Skidelsky, is thus: 'The Second World War came after the Great Depression, which brought Hitler to power. The Great Depression in turn was brought about by the failure of economic leadership in the 1920s. Had Keynes's 1919 programme been carried out, it is unlikely that Hitler would ever have become German Chancellor.'

Alas, it was a quarter of a century later that Keynesian ideas underpinned the war aims of the democracies in the Second World War. Along the way, Keynes had seen his advice rejected in 1925 by Churchill, when as Chancellor of the Exchequer he made the disastrous decision to return to the Gold Standard; and, as I've already indicated, he again saw his advice rejected, this time by the electorate, in the 1929 general election.

A lesser man may have opted then and there for the academic life amidst the comforts of King's College, Cambridge, but already the storm clouds were gathering, as the Stalinist terror took hold in Communist Russia, and Hitler and the other fascist dictators began the crushing of democracy in Europe. Economic depression, mass unemployment and the collapse of world trade caused the question to be asked whether the economic models inherited from the nineteenth century were adequate to the new age. To put it bluntly, it was asked whether societies based on political pluralism, civil liberties and the rule of law could deliver economic prosperity and social justice. It was at this point that, to my mind, Keynes showed his true greatness. Keynes's response was *The General Theory*, a distillation of many of the ideas he had been proposing for thirty years.

Our modern world was created by that book. It enabled policy-makers after the Second World War to construct a more durable and lasting peace than had been made in 1919. It encouraged the United States to play its part in the reconstruction of Europe, from which it had retreated in the 1920s, by bringing forward the Marshall Plan. And along with another Liberal, Beveridge, Keynes provided Attlee's 1945 Labour government with the policy engine-room to make it, along with the 1906 Liberal government, one of the two great governments of social reform in the twentieth century.

And make no mistake: Keynes knew what he was doing and why he was doing it. Listen to what he wrote to President Roosevelt on 31 December 1931:

Tom McNally puts the case for Keynes; Paddy Ashdown behind, seated

> You have made yourself the trustee for those in every country who seek to mend the evils of our condition by reasoned experiment within the framework of an existing social system. If you fail, rational choice will be gravely prejudiced throughout the world, leaving orthodoxy and the revolution to fight it out.

Now I am well aware that for the last thirty years, neo-liberals, neo-conservatives, and various other neos have been in the ascendancy. As *The Financial Times* put it in an editorial on 24 December 1993, 'Adam Smith has vanquished Marx and immobilised Keynes'. Immobilised, but not vanquished – for I think there is a growing awareness that we may again have the need of Keynes and his wisdom. As George Monbiot wrote in *The Guardian* on 28 August 2007, 'Neo-liberalism, if unchecked, will catalyse crisis after crisis, all of which can only be solved by greater intervention on the part of the state' – something which has been amply illustrated this week.

Joseph Stiglitz, a former Chief Economist at the World Bank, put it equally bluntly: 'You cannot rely on markets to create societies that work'. And perhaps *The Guardian* headline of 28 August said it all: 'City bonuses hit record high with £14 billion pay-out. Executives fuel spiralling demand for luxury goods among growing inequality.' Faced with such everyday evidence before our eyes, it is absurd to claim that Adam Smith has triumphed while Keynes has failed. On the contrary, the wisdom of Keynes re-echoes in our own time with a new urgency.

It was Keynes who rescued economics, the dismal science, and made it the tool of social reform. It was he who realised that liberal democracy required not just the freedom which allowed each individual to develop his or her talent to the full, but also a commitment from society as a whole to provide every citizen with a certain quality of life.

In its obituary on his death in 1946, *The Times* called Keynes 'the most influential economist since Adam Smith', but it was the Labour Chancellor of the day, Hugh Dalton, who in his tribute summed up the essence of Keynes: 'he taught us to unite reason with hope'.

I always feel that you should end up with a quote from the lad himself, and for that reason I am grateful to Rachel Sylvester of *The Daily Telegraph*, who quoted Keynes in her column only the other day: 'This party has always included Whigs and Radicals. The Whigs are really just sensible Conservatives. The Radicals are just sensible Labour men. And the Liberals? – well, they're just sensible.'

Martin Kettle: Thank you very much, Tom.

There were many of us, I think, who slightly regretted that Paddy Ashdown didn't make the final four as one of the candidates. He appears to have been disqualified from that because he's alive – and I think on the whole we've definitely got the better of the deal, and he's going to talk now; he's going to put the case for W. E. Gladstone.

'This party has always included Whigs and Radicals. The Whigs are really just sensible Conservatives. The Radicals are just sensible Labour men. And the Liberals? – well, they're just sensible.'

Paddy Ashdown: William Ewart Gladstone

There's a sort of codicil to Martin's little story. Apparently there is somebody in this audience – a lady, I believe – who actually came up and complained that I was not on the list. If she identifies herself, I'll make sure she gets a peerage … oh, no, that would have been Lloyd George, wouldn't it?

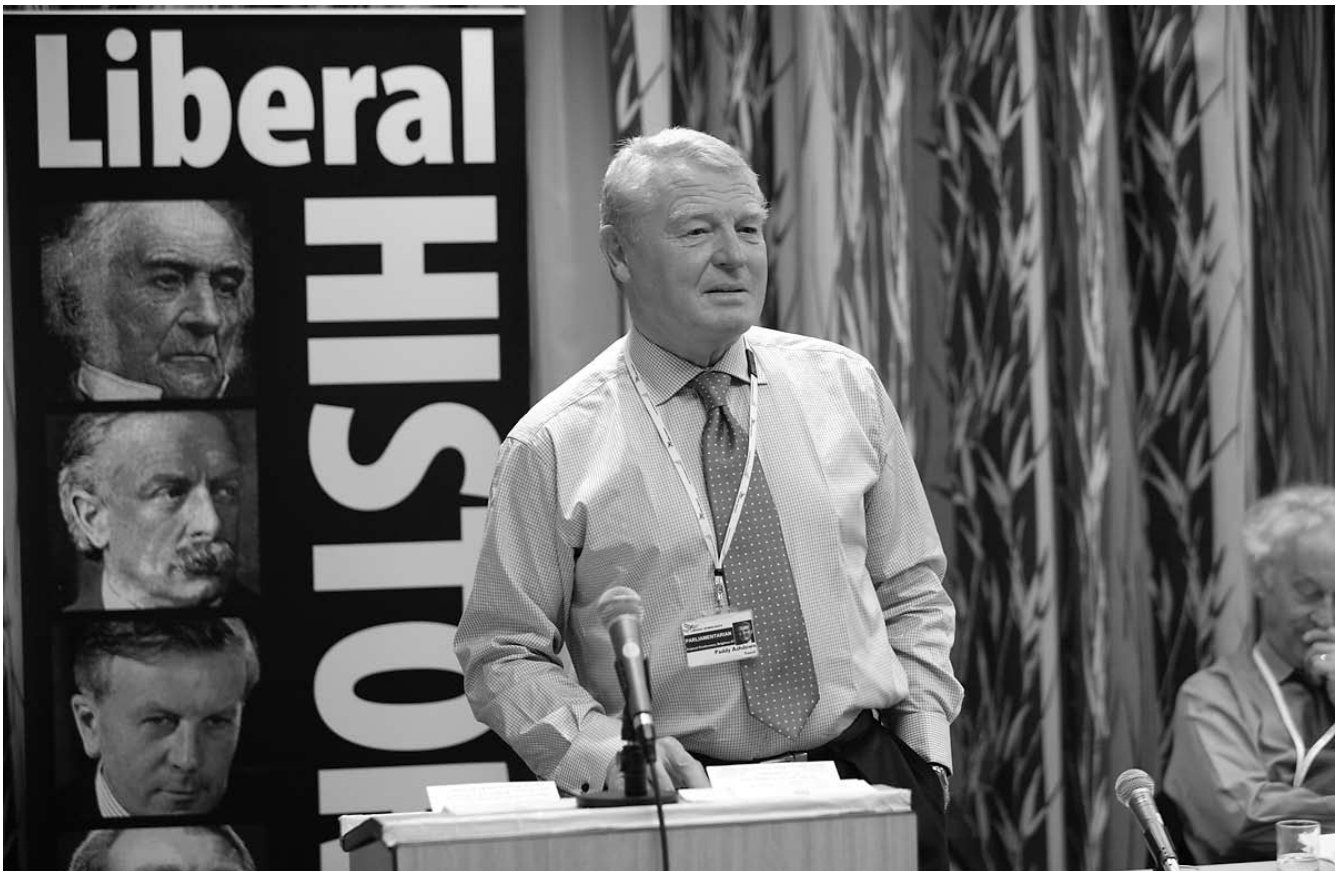
I have to say, you've asked me to do some tricky things in this party, but proposing to you Gladstone as the greatest Liberal is not the most difficult thing you have asked me to do.

I will not pretend to you for a moment that he was a perfect man. He started life, I have to tell you, as a Tory – but we all have our youthful indiscretions from time to time; I started off supporting Labour for a little bit, until I grew up.

He was not, I think, a bundle of laughs. His wife once said of him: 'Oh, William, if you were not such a great man you would be very boring.' (My wife has said similar things of me – without the kind bit at the beginning.) He was – how shall we put it? – quite obsessive. When he was Prime Minister, Downing Street was a gloomy place. (I guess it is now, too, under Gordon. I have this vision of our present Downing Street, you know, as Camelot turned into Gormenghast – a great pulsating palace of light under Blair, and Brown comes in, and all is darkness, and all you see is a single guttering candle shining out of a casement window. Well, it was a bit like that under William Ewart Gladstone.)

He would be, from time to time, a little – how shall we put it? – self-righteous; not, again, something wholly unknown in our recent Prime Ministers. One of his opposition, a man called Labouchere, exasperated with him in the House of Commons, said: 'I do not mind the Right Honourable gentleman pulling the ace of trumps from his sleeve, but I wish he would not pretend it was the Almighty who put it there.' So not entirely a man without flaws – though who is? But great he certainly was.

A great spirit, above all. Roy Jenkins, in his book, describes him even in old age as a force of nature, a man of magnificent presence, and a spirit larger than his times. He was seen across the whole of Europe as the spirit of liberty. He was seen as the person who gave inspiration not just to liberals but to a whole great liberal movement that swept across Europe and brought freedom and human rights. He was seen as a man who stood up for the underdog, who was



Paddy Ashdown puts the case for Gladstone; Kenneth Morgan, behind, seated

unquenchable in his admonition – his condemnation – of brutality.

I was driving across the plains of Hungary – that's a good line, isn't it? – in 1992. Karadzic had asked me to go and see him, because I'd just been to Sarajevo and I'd been complaining that the international community should intervene. Karadzic asked to see me, and I flew in with Russell Johnston. (You know, every Lord has to be named after something which is connected with their career, so we used to call him Russell Johnston of Heathrow Departure Lounge. I have been across customs posts in the farthest reaches of Europe, and people have said: 'your Russell Johnston just came through last week'. He is a great Liberal and a great man.) Russell and I were sitting in the car, and suddenly the local radio, the Serb radio, burst into life and I asked the driver what it said, and it said: 'we'd like to announce that the descendant of Gladstone has just entered Serbia' – more than a hundred years later.

A great spirit – a great man in all senses of the word, but above all, a great Liberal. If you go to the National Liberal Club today, there, carved on the stone as you go in, in indelible letters, are these words: 'The principle of Liberalism is trust in the people, qualified by prudence. The principle of Conservatism is mistrust of the people, qualified by fear.' True then, true today.

A great Liberal. A great radical. He said this: 'a radical is a Liberal who is in earnest'. (Well, only up to a point.) And he was a great leader of our party. He formed it, he brought it to its most magnificent position in government – I'll come to that in a minute. He once said: 'What is a good leader for but to tell his party when they are wrong?' (I wish I could have come across that quote before!)

But it is for none of these reasons that I propose him to you. The truth is that this transcendental idea which we believe – the only idea which is relevant to our time – is useless, or nearly useless, unless it is brought to government, unless the thing that we believe in – the great idea of Liberalism – informs the governance of our nation. He was a great governor, a great Prime Minister. He brought these ideas that you and I adhere to, that we've committed our lives to – he didn't just articulate them, he didn't just inspire people with them, he governed this country according to them, and changed the face of Britain.

And that's what we have to do as a party. It's useless if we become a polite debating society. He made the compromises for power and for government, and he showed what could be done with them – and that's what we have to do. So he was a great governor, a great Prime Minister, our greatest; he governed well at home and he was respected across the world. And he governed with vision. Remember Ireland. Remember his call for Home Rule. Remember when that was voted down by the House of Commons, he understood the significance of that vote. 'If you do not

do this', he said, 'this country, and its genuine wish for freedom, will begin to haunt our future' – and so it has; he knew what was happening.

His voice, ladies and gentlemen, echoes down the years, as do his achievements. Listen to this, and here I will end, I don't need to say more. This is Gladstone, in the second Midlothian campaign; this is Gladstone speaking to Britain when he was in the opposition; this was Gladstone claiming to be a Prime Minister again, when Britain was gripped by jingoistic fervour no less violent than we have seen in recent years in the Falklands War; this is Gladstone saying that what we were doing was morally wrong. He had the courage to say it, and what is more the British people had the courage to elect him as Prime Minister as a result. He was speaking of a conflict of that time which is a conflict of our time. He was talking about the invasion of Afghanistan – not by coalition forces, not under a UN Security Council resolution, but by Britain, in the Second Afghan War. And he said this:

> Do not forget that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan amongst the winter snow is no less inviolate in the eye of Almighty God as can be your own. Do not forget that He who made you brothers in the same flesh and blood bound you by the laws of mutual love; and that love is not limited to the shores of this island, but it spreadeth across the whole surface of the earth, encompassing the greatest along with the meanest in its unmeasured scope.

Oh, that we had Prime Ministers today with that moral purpose, that moral vision. More important – more important – what he proposed was a proposition of morality for his time. In our interdependent world, those immortal words comprise in my view the only recommendation for survival in ours.

What he proposed was a proposition of morality for his time. In our interdependent world, those immortal words comprise in my view the only recommendation for survival in ours.

The greatest Liberal – can there be another?

Martin Kettle: I was a little worried when Paddy said he would finish with a quote from Gladstone, because, as you know, Gladstone's speeches could go on for many hours. That was marvellous; thank you, Paddy.

I was sorry when I saw the list of candidates that everybody voted for that the name of C. P. Scott didn't make the final four. After all, The Manchester Guardian*, which I represent here today, has an important role in Liberal history, I think for good and ill. However, we do have a former colleague of mine, Richard Reeves. He's the author of a shortly-to-be-released book on John Stuart Mill, and he is going to put the case for Mill.*

Richard Reeves: John Stuart Mill

Thank you, Martin. I wish that my publisher was here when I was trying to persuade him that there was a market for books about nineteenth-century Liberals; it was a difficult sell. If you all pre-order the book through Amazon, or Waterstone's, then it'll be a tearaway success. You don't actually have to buy the book – of course, it'll be the icing on the cake if you do choose to do so, but merely pre-ordering it apparently has a sort of electric effect on the publisher! It's published in the third week of November.

It's quite difficult following Paddy Ashdown on Gladstone – he's a tough act to follow – but I hope to be saved by the man for whom I am speaking, John Stuart Mill.

I think we all agree, so far, anyway, that greatness is about impact. It's about effecting change in the world: changing economies, changing ideas, changing political structures, changing societies. It's about the impact both in their own day and their legacy too. So we seem already to be agreeing what greatness is. Mill had a similar view; he was contemptuous of those who, he quoted this: 'strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage', and he had an unbounded contempt for all those lives 'who made a great noise in their day, and leave the state of mankind no better than it was when they found it'.

Of course, we're not only looking for greatness, we're looking for a great Liberal. I wasn't planning to go negative so early in the debate, but everyone else is, so … Keynes, I think, is fairly easily dispensed with. Yes, a very influential economist, but a *Liberal* economist? Tougher argument, I think. I'd argue actually that Mill was a better Liberal economist than Keynes, and when you hear the kind of paean from his speaker for state intervention then I think you know something's gone awry if we're describing him as a great Liberal. And to close the case against Keynes, he wrote an essay in 1925 – a lovely essay, actually, but it's entitled: *Am I am Liberal?* And you have to ask, you know, if he didn't know, then …

So we're not after just the best Liberal economist, or Liberal politician, Liberal political activist, Liberal orator, or even Liberal philosopher, but the greatest Liberal – and that's a much tougher demand, and that's where I think Mill can strike his claim. Of course, as the greatest Liberal intellect, or philosopher, his claim's pretty irrefutable; it's hard to argue against it. His masterwork *On Liberty* remains the gospel of Liberalism. Published in 1859, the same year that the Liberal Party was born, it's never been out of print since. It was published across the world within two years and is argued over to this day, not only in seminar rooms but in the House of Commons and on television. Chris Huhne quoted John Stuart Mill when he was asked about

the smoking ban in public places during the leadership campaign. (Mill was also quoted on the other side of the debate, by the way, which would have pleased him, but Huhne had the better of the Mill scholarship, for the record.)

In *On Liberty* there's this sentence: 'The only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over another member of a civilised community against their will is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.' This famous principle – the harm principle – the only reason you can regulate my behaviour is to stop me harming somebody else – is the most quoted sentence in the history of philosophy, and there is no newspaper columnist who doesn't have it somewhere as a kind of save that they can plop into any column on the regulation of personal behaviour. The harm principle remains the cornerstone of the Liberal faith.

So he's still argued about, he still provokes and irritates, and he still inspires. Goethe, who Mill had a sort of passing admiration for, said that the true test of the greatness of a man is his posthumous productivity. (I rather like that; so Paddy, you know, all is not lost; don't take your own mortality too much to heart.) Posthumous productivity? Well, it seems to me, you know, Mill's been dead for a hundred and thirty-four years, but he's still a very busy boy; he's still quoted everywhere, and his words still echo.

So that's the case for him as an intellectual – but I have a much bigger case for Mill, which is that he wasn't just a philosopher; he was an activist and a firebrand too. He supported the freedom to choose birth control – at a time, of course, when that was still illegal. At the age of seventeen, on the way to work, he's crossing St James's Park and he finds a dead baby wrapped in a bundle under a tree – not an uncommon occurrence in 1823. Mill didn't go and write about it; Mill toured the streets of London with a friend, distributing literature on birth control, for which he was arrested and thrown in jail. He spent at least two nights in jail as a result of this crime, which was then hushed up, for the rest of his life, because it was seen as something that would reflect badly on him – but today, it can only be seen as a true testament to his greatness. How many of his competitors tonight were jailed – at least, deliberately – for their beliefs in Liberalism?

He wrote, in *The Subjection of Women*, one of the finest polemics for gender equality, still today considered by feminist academics to be one of the greatest testaments to feminism. But he didn't only do that. As an MP, he introduced the first bill to give women the right to vote, in 1867. He proposed an amendment to change one word in the 1867 Reform Bill – one word to make it gender-neutral, to change the word 'man' to the word 'person'. He got 73 votes to his side – which wasn't bad, in 1867 – and he was described by Millicent Fawcett as the true originator of the British suffrage movement. Here's what William Gladstone – seeing as we're going negative …

[Tom McNally: this is his Guardian *training, of course. Martin Kettle: it's called balance, Tom. Paddy Ashdown: just don't talk about fallen women. Richard Reeves: I said negative, not cheap – though, actually, they didn't charge him, did they?]*

… this is what William Gladstone said about women's suffrage in 1892. He opposed women's suffrage, because he was afraid of what would happen to women if they got involved in politics. He said: 'it would mean inviting her – woman – unwittingly to trespass upon the delicacy, the purity, the refinement, the elevation of her own nature which are the present sources of her power.' Well, that's Gladstone twenty-five years after Mill tried to introduce absolute equality.

In *On Liberty*, Mill wrote the best argument for free speech ever written; but he also, as an MP, fought Disraeli to a standstill and ensured that, after reform demonstrations in 1866, the Royal Parks would be available to public protest. A corner of Hyde Park, to this day, is a testament to his memory.

As a politician he was good at rhetoric – good at partisan rhetoric – during his period in Parliament. He is known as having described the Conservatives as 'the stupid party', but to really feel the full force of his political ability you have to hear the whole quote. This is what he said in Parliament when he had been criticised by the Conservatives:

> What I stated was that the Conservative Party was by the law of its constitution necessarily the stupidest party. Now, I do not retract this assertion, but I did not mean that Conservatives are generally stupid; I meant that stupid persons are generally Conservative … I do not see why honourable gentlemen should feel that position at all offensive to them, for it ensures their always being an extremely powerful party. There is a dead solid force in sheer stupidity such that a few able men, with that force pressing behind them, are assured of victory in many a struggle; and many a victory the Conservative Party have indeed owed to that force.

'I did not mean that Conservatives are generally stupid; I meant that stupid persons are generally Conservative.'

That's Mill on stupidity. His prescience about political trends – of course, on women's rights, but also he anticipated that unless the Liberal Party (and he tried to persuade Gladstone to this effect) supported working-class candidates that they would go somewhere else. He supported George Odger, for example, who was forced by the Liberals to withdraw his candidacy from the seat of Chelsea, and went

off, in a bit of a huff, to form something called the Labour Representation League instead. The rest, of course, is history. So he saw that the Liberals were in danger of being eclipsed once full suffrage came.

And he also advocated proportional representation. He was the first MP to produce a bill for proportional representation, also in 1867. He said that proportional representation would be the sheet-anchor of democracy, and the principle of fair play to all parties and all opinions without distinction.

So he was ahead of his time. He described himself as an 'advanced Liberal'; by his own admission, he was advanced. He was a feminist. He was an anti-racist – on Governor Eyre, and on the civil war in the States – and he was a strong proponent of proportional representation. How can anybody who wasn't all of those things seek the mantle of the greatest Liberal?

And at the heart of his vision is an unquenchable optimism about the power of individual men and women to lead good lives of their own choosing. In *On Liberty* he wrote:

> The worth of a state, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it … A state which dwarfs its men, in order to make them more docile instruments in its hands, even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished; and that the perfection of machinery to which it has sacrificed everything will, in the end, avail it nothing, for want of the vital power which, in order that the machine might work more smoothly, it has preferred to banish.

John Stuart Mill brilliantly articulated a Liberal vision and how that would apply – in philosophy, in economics, in politics, in society – which remains iconic and inspirational to this day.

At the heart of his vision is an unquenchable optimism about the power of individual men and women to lead good lives of their own choosing.

More importantly, he fought for that vision with all the tools at his disposal, from his teenage years until the day of his death in 1873.

He would not seek this prize. He had no Westminster Abbey funeral, no honorary doctorate; he eschewed all of those prizes, but despite the fact that he would not have sought it we must surely award it to him, because in John Stuart Mill you see not only the best evidence of Liberalism's great past, but the best hope for Liberalism to have a great future.

Martin Kettle: Thank you very much, Richard.

I noticed that Richard didn't have time to get on to the subject of David Lloyd George and women – perhaps our next speaker will be able to do so. No discussion of the history of Liberalism in this country can possibly be allowed to develop without a Welsh dimension. Kenneth Morgan is one of Britain's great historical biographers – he's recently published a terrific biography of Michael Foot – and he is going to put the case for David Lloyd George.

Kenneth O. Morgan: David Lloyd George

Chairman and friends, it's relevant to first mention, I think, the foreword that Alan Taylor wrote in a biography that I wrote of Lloyd George thirty-odd years ago: 'our greatest ruler since Cromwell'. So he was; he was the greatest Liberal of them all, and in peace and in war arguably a greater Prime Minister – about to join in Parliament Square, I gather, a whole range of Tory Prime Ministers – Canning, Peel, Derby (God knows why he's there), Disraeli, Churchill, and another Tory, George V.

There are two main reasons why Lloyd George should unquestionably receive your vote. The first is that he, and he alone, added a social dimension to the idea of Liberalism. Liberalism – the Liberal Party – scarcely had a meaningful social philosophy before him. Gladstone, who was born in 1809, simply didn't understand the sociology of politics. Mill, with all respect, had no real view of society; his main interest in freedom, which is very important, of course, was freedom of thought, not other kinds of freedom. Keynes said, explicitly, that he wasn't interested in social justice at all; it is, he said, 'the best possession of the party of the proletariat' (there's the Cambridge man for you).

In 1906, Lloyd George alone linked the old Liberalism of civic justice with the New Liberalism of social reform. Nobody else could do that in that government; not Asquith, not Grey, not Haldane; he was the most important Liberal ever.

Secondly, Lloyd George combined vision and dynamism with artistry in the uses of power. In peace and in war, the Liberal danger – I'm not a member of your party, so I say this, possibly causing offence – the Liberal danger is high-mindedness, intellectual elitism, distaste with power; there's plenty of that in both Mill and Keynes, in my view. Lloyd George was different (and so was Gladstone, as Paddy has said) – he transformed society, he helped to win a war, he redesigned our world, from Northern Ireland to Palestine.

Neither Mill nor Keynes – wonderful men – ever handled power. Neither of them was at ease with democratic power. Mill, like Tocqueville, was very worried about the democracy for which he voted. It's very characteristic, I think, that he supported the secret ballot before it happened, and then opposed it after it had happened, because, he said, people should use independence of judgement. I don't think you could imagine this wonderful man, John Stuart Mill, ever actually running anything – nor, I suspect, in those respects could Keynes, who was a Cambridge don (as an Oxford

don, I know the limitations of that breed).

Lloyd George led a coalition, but he was always a Liberal. We've heard about Gladstone – he wasn't just a Conservative, he was a very right-wing Conservative; he was called the 'hope of the stern, unbending Tories', and throughout his career he was committed to traditional institutions: the landed aristocracy, the Church, Oxford University, the most reactionary college in Oxford University. He called himself an 'out-and-out inequalitarian'. And so it was, as we've heard, in relation to women. A very interesting case is the American Civil War, where Gladstone supported the South; he said that Jefferson Davis had created a nation. He placed no particular imperative on the abolition of slavery, and it is worth saying – Paddy has gone, I'm sorry that he can't answer – that Gladstone's own family made their money from slave labour in Jamaica. I never recall Gladstone ever uttering one word of regret or shame about that – it's not in Roy Jenkins's book, and I don't think Paddy could find any example either. Lloyd George's hero, whose bust is there in his home in Llanystumdwy, was Abraham Lincoln, the great emancipator, the great hope of liberalism.

Lloyd George was always a Liberal: in 1918, in 1931. As we've heard, Keynes wrote this famous essay, *Am I a Liberal?*, and on the whole the answer seems to be no. He said he wasn't in favour of social justice, or many of the things Liberals supported, so I think Lloyd George was far more consistent.

Lloyd George's career at every stage enhanced a dignified Liberalism. In his early period, up to 1906, he supported devolution, and the claims of Wales, which was very prophetic. He was a tremendous opponent of the Boer War – quite as courageously as anything we've heard about Gladstone. He persuaded Campbell-Bannerman to meet Emily Hobhouse, and she imposed the words 'methods of barbarism'. We've had methods of barbarism in Iraq; Lloyd George is the inspiration for those of us who stood up in Parliament on the Labour side and criticised and attacked and condemned the treasonable and criminal attack on Iraq, and Lloyd George was our inspiration, as a young man who represented a marginal constituency; if anyone showed guts, it was Lloyd George on that occasion.

Lloyd George combined vision and dynamism with artistry in the uses of power.

At the Board of Trade and at the Treasury, in the Liberal government, he proclaimed a new vision of social citizenship: pensions, national insurance, the basis of the modern welfare state, as has rightly been said by Tom. The People's Budget was financed by taxing the rich (your leader is in favour of hammering the rich; if you're in favour of your leader you should vote for Lloyd George!) and this approach to government carried on right through to 1914. He and that other great man, Herbert Asquith, are a tremendous partnership not only in pushing through the welfare state but in taming and neutralising much of the House of Lords as an obstacle to reform. (It's very comic, incidentally, that three of us come from that House this evening.)

As a war leader – and Liberals are very difficult to lead at a time of war – he was quite an inspiration. With Churchill, he made many key contributions to the winning of the war; as Minister of Munitions, in starting the convoy system to protect the merchant fleet; in sustaining morale. He was not a chauvinist man; there was no Vansittart Plan from Lloyd George in 1918 to destroy Germany. He focused above all on the purposes for which the war was being fought, and in his view they were Liberal purposes. As Prime Minister, even during wartime there was a considerable impetus for social reform, for national insurance, for education (with the great Liberal historian, H. A. L. Fisher), starting the Ministry of Health, the beginning of subsidised housing, and votes for women – Mill courageously began the campaign for votes for women, but it was Lloyd George, in power during the war, who brought it to a conclusion and gave women the vote, and unlike Gladstone he always, always, supported female suffrage.

At the Paris Peace Conference he was a Gladstonian, championing Balkan nationalism, and afterwards he was the one man who tried to moderate the excesses of Versailles. Tom, in his interesting and selective range through the writings of Keynes, mentioned *The Economic Consequences* of 1919, accurately and correctly, of course. He should also have quoted *A Revision of the Treaty* by Keynes in 1922, who said that in fact over the intervening three years, Lloyd George had been carrying out many of his ideas – most of his ideas – about reparations, about trying to re-establish trade and commerce in Europe, and so on.

Ireland – Ireland is not to his discredit; he produced a permanent settlement in Ireland. Pitt, Peel, Gladstone, Asquith – all failed. Lloyd George produced a solution – not a perfect solution, but it has brought more peace to that unhappy island than we have known over the last one hundred years.

And in the inter-war years, he was, I think, Tom would agree – or perhaps he wouldn't? – anyway, he was the first politician to see the point of Keynes. He took up Keynes. *We Can Conquer Unemployment*, the Yellow Book – these are Lloyd George's creative crystallisations of what Keynes believed. And he remained a constructive, radical man – very appropriate that his last vote was in 1943 on behalf of the Beveridge Report.

Lloyd George's impact went far beyond the Liberal Party. He

is a world figure. Churchill and Bevan (as I know because I've spoken to them both), Michael Foot and Harold Macmillan all regarded him in many ways as their political hero. Overseas, Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt, and their the new nationalism, and New Deal, owed a great deal to Lloyd George; and John F. Kennedy was another one who frequently cited LG. He achieved things that nobody else could: the welfare state, a fuller democracy, a vision of a new world order based on reconciliation.

He could spin – nobody used newspapers better than Lloyd George; he even tried to buy *The Times* on one occasion – but essentially, unlike Tony Blair, he worked with men and women of ideas: Beveridge, Rowntree, Hobhouse, Masterman, Keynes, Henderson, Ramsey Muir, and indeed, C. P. Scott of *The Guardian*, who was, in peace and in war, a tremendous ideological support for him. It was said, by C. F. G. Masterman after 1923, 'when Lloyd George returned to us, ideas returned to the Liberal Party'.

Gladstone, Mill and Keynes all had privileged backgrounds – they were all wealthy people. Lloyd George was an outsider; the Liberal Party championed outsiders. He was Welsh in an English world; he was a Baptist; he was a relatively poor man, with very little education. He was a natural democrat, he was one of the great mass leaders, and yet personally, as they said, he could charm a bird off a bough.

In my view, Lloyd George's career was Britain's moment of maternity. He belongs to the ages, and most certainly, sure as hell, he belongs to this party conference.

Discussion

After the proposing speeches, a number of points from the floor were made both for and against the candidates. Several interventions pointed out the difficulties in comparing men of ideas and men of action; some speakers felt that it was ideas that mattered more, and at least one preferred the philosopher to the economist as a matter of principle.

In Keynes's defence it was pointed out that Keynesian economic policies had not been discredited; the fault lay with those politicians who had tried to apply them in circumstances (high levels of inflation) in which Keynes himself had warned that they would not work. On the other hand, Keynes's penchant for silk dressing gowns was felt to cast a negative light on his claim to the title.

Gladstone was praised for his support for Home Rule, for his giving away bits of the Empire in his search for international collaboration, and for his clear moral vision, for example over the Turkish atrocities in Bulgaria. On the other hand, his first speech in Parliament had been in support of slavery.

Lloyd George was praised as an inspiration, a brilliant orator and debater. He was credited with being one of the first to warn of the dangers of Hitler. The debit side included a mixed record on Ireland (for example, over the brutality of the Black & Tans), his sale of peerages ('at least it raised money for the party', as someone pointed out), his willingness to abandon Liberal principles in order to win the war, and his splitting of the party in 1916–18. One speaker felt that he could have supported Lloyd George if he'd died in 1918.

While Mill was lauded for his Liberal vision, it was pointed out that he was a supporter of capital punishment. One speaker, however, revealing that Mill's books had helped change his own mind, pointed to the influence he had, reaching far beyond the Liberal tradition and making people more sympathetic to the Liberal cause to this day.

Lloyd George was attacked for his sale of peerages ('at least it raised money for the party', as someone pointed out).

Unfortunately, Paddy Ashdown had had to leave before the end of the meeting (for a clashing engagement), but summing-up speeches were given by the remaining three speakers.

Tom McNally: Keynes

First of all, I should have explained that I didn't indulge in either the cheap populism or the personal attacks of the other three speakers – because I went first, and I didn't realise that in this high-minded gathering that was fair game! But let's face it – all four of them would have had problems with *The Sun* and the *News of the World* at some stage during their careers.

We've had that very interesting split between the men of ideas and the men of action, and it's a perfectly fair one, but why I back Keynes is because what he did in the 1930s was to give politicians in the democracies the confidence and the intellectual firepower to take on totalitarianism.

In the twenty-first century, we have another challenge: whether we can retain our civil liberties, our human rights, against attacks from terrorism and organised crime. I believe that what Keynes showed is that the political systems could work.

There are those that tell us that globalisation takes many things out of the control of the political machines, the forces of democracy, the accountability to Parliament. I think that Keynes's enduring gift to civil liberties and to politics is that he showed us the way that politicians could use the machineries of government to defend civil liberties in a liberal democracy. It's his enduring legacy.

Yes, he is an economist, and we know that economists are men trained to predict the past – which we've seen again this week – but he was more than an economist; he was one who believed in the ability of people,

Great Liberals: final-stage result

Candidate	*First preferences*	*Eliminate Keynes*	*Eliminate Lloyd George*
Gladstone	192	+ 20 = 212	+ 96 = 308
Keynes	69	–	–
Lloyd George	187	+ 22 = 209	–
Mill	274	+ 24 = 298	+ 96 = 394
Non-transferable		+ 3 = 3	+ 17 = 20
Total	722	722	722

through the political process, to control their destinies for the common good. And I think that is a legacy which makes him the greatest Liberal of them all.

Richard Reeves: Mill

I reject the distinction between men of action and men of ideas, at least as far as Mill's concerned. My whole case is based on the fact that actually he was both. Of course, today we remember him mostly through his writing, but when Mill died, and there was a memorial fund to establish a statue to him – which did eventually rise up on the Embankment – there was such a row about his radicalism, on land reform, in particular, and on contraceptive issues, that Gladstone, who had publicly supported the memorial, had publicly then to withdraw his support from it, because Mill was seen as too controversial a figure for him to support. So lose this whole idea of Mill as sitting in a study, churning out books.

Those books remain powerful and resonant now, but at the time he was a radically engaged partisan, and it is that, I think, that makes him great. So he is the one that straddles this divide between men of action and those of ideas. Two months before his death he was ejected from the Cobden Club, a free-market club that he'd been a member of, because he was supporting significant increases in inheritance tax on landowners. He came to a strong view that there was a distinction between unearned wealth and earned wealth; he said, of those who earned their wealth simply through the fact of being landowners, that their money 'fell into their mouths as they sleep'. I think that today he'd be worried about the people who are the money-owners, the ones who are making money simply because they've already got so much money, and are reshaping the capital markets as a result. It was that radicalism that forced him to be publicly thrown off the books of the Cobden Club, two months before his death. This was not an ivory-tower philosopher. The Land Tenure Reform Association remains radical to this day.

Vote for Lloyd George or Gladstone if you wish to revel in your glorious past. Vote for Mill if you wish for a glorious future.

Yes, Gladstone was good on Ireland, but Mill was ten years ahead of him. Yes, Lloyd George introduced legislation to give women the vote, but not equal rights; only women over the age of thirty were able to vote. It wasn't until 1928 that women got the right to vote on the same basis as men – and after watching that vote from the House of Commons gallery, Millicent Fawcett, perhaps the best feminist campaigner in our history, led a delegation of women – where? She led them to the statue of John Stuart Mill on the Embankment to lay flowers in his memory, as the man who had started that battle which had finally been won.

John Stuart Mill died in Avignon, where his wife was buried. She was an inspiration to him, but after her death he continued to write, he continued to work; his last words, to his step-daughter, were: 'you know I have done my work'. When he was buried, there were only four people present – because, of course, Avignon was a long way away in those days – there were four at his funeral, but as Charles Dickens said, the more truly great the man, the smaller the ceremony.

There were only four people at Mill's graveside, but the very fact that he can change your mind, sir, through reading his pages – if you read Mill today, it reads as if he's talking about us, not the nineteenth century.

Vote for Lloyd George or Gladstone if you wish to revel in your glorious past. Vote for Mill if you wish for a glorious future.

Kenneth O. Morgan: Lloyd George

The unique case for Lloyd George is the case for democracy, for democratic citizenship. He is the only one of these four who is really a democrat.

Gladstone, as I've said, believed in inequality. He talked about trusting the people, but he only trusted very few of them; 'trust the people' is a very misleading slogan for Gladstone. John Stuart Mill had many fine qualities, but was afraid of mass public opinion, the tyranny of the majority. Much of his writings are concerned with the dangers that democracy would bring. Keynes said that in the class war, he was on the side of the educated bourgeoisie.

Lloyd George alone accepted the imperatives of the democratic age. Like Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom he greatly resembled, he was at ease in putting dynamic ideas into practice, through what he also called the 'new deal'. In so doing he also recognised the importance of the public intellectual – Rowntree, Beveridge, Fisher, Scott, and, I have no doubt, had he been alive, John Stuart Mill; he and Lloyd George would have made a wonderful partnership in getting those additional women the vote.

Lloyd George was a unique inspirational force, like no one

else in our country, over thirty years. He was a fierce partisan, a Liberal partisan in making Britain a more equitable society – and he was far more radical than any Labour Prime Minister has been. He believed in disestablishment: disestablishment of the church, disestablishment of special interests, disestablishment of the privileged groups in society – yet he also could work for consensus. That is what led so many Liberals to criticise what happened in 1918, but somebody had to come to grips with the problem. Asquith had nothing to offer: he was offered a job in 1918 – the Lord Chancellorship – and he turned it down.

Lloyd George brought in Labour from the cold, he worked with progressive businessmen, he worked towards a planned society on Keynesian lines, while always being committed to the individualist ethic and civil liberties. Internationally, after 1918 – I do not agree that the record after 1918 is so bleak – he was perhaps the only one of the peacemakers who grasped the revolution created by the First World War, the collapse of the great empires of Hohenzollern and Habsburg and Romanov. He alone fought for moderation and for European security. Afterwards, and as someone from the floor said, he was a devastating critic of the National Government in its failures of appeasement, right down to 1940.

One last point: Lloyd George would have been the best company. Beaverbrook once was asked to compare Churchill with Lloyd George, and he said Lloyd George would have been more fun. So vote for Lloyd George, vote for fun, vote for inspiration, vote for the greatest Liberal who ever lived, and ruled this country.

Volunteer Assistant Editor wanted

The Liberal Democrat History Group is looking for a volunteer to help with editorial work on the group's website.

The Group promotes the discussion and research of the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party and SDP, and of Liberalism. We do this through meetings, our quarterly *Journal of Liberal History*, occasional books and our website, **www.liberalhistory.org.uk.**

Originally established to carry news about our activities, the website has since grown substantially through the ongoing *Liberal History Online* project. As far as we aware, nothing anywhere else on the web makes available such a wide range of pages, links and electronic documents covering major topics and personalities in British Liberal history. We need someone to help us develop *Liberal History Online* by:

- Reviewing and editing the existing material
- Working with the committee to identify gaps and additional material required
- Commissioning further materials for the project

A background in modern British history would be helpful, but even better would be experience in editing and proof-reading internet publications. No special technical knowledge is necessary other than basic familiarity with computers and the web. This is an interesting voluntary position with the scope for further involvement with the activities of the Group and its *Journal*.

Please apply to Mark Pack at mark.pack@libdems.org.uk.