

Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



Champion of Liberalism

Dr J. Graham Jones

Eliot Crawshay-Williams Biography of the Leicester Liberal MP, 1910–13

Professor Barry Doyle

The rank and file and the Liberal government 'crisis' of 1912 A note

York Membery

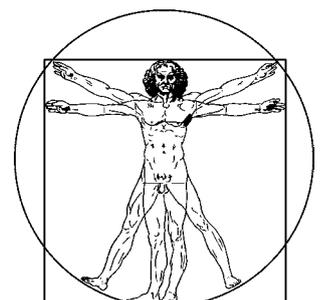
Jeremy Thorpe Interview with the former Liberal leader

Ian Ivatt

The 1908 Hastings by-election

Dr Philip MacDougall

T. H. Green Forgotten Liberal?



LETTERS

Ireland's Liberal MPs

As Berkley Farr implied, in his article ('James Wood: East Down's Liberal MP, *Journal of Liberal History* 58, spring 2008), the first Irish Liberal MP since the defeat of all the Irish Liberal candidates at the 1885 general election was C. N. Semphill, elected in North Tyrone at the 1895 general election. He held the seat until he was succeeded at a by-election in 1907 by Redmond Barry (Liberal Solicitor-General for Ireland from December 1905) who was in turn succeeded at a by-election in 1911 by Thomas W. Russell (a baronet from 1917) who held the seat until 1918. T. W. Russell had lost South Tyrone at the first general election in 1910.

T. W. Russell (1841–1920) was born, brought up and educated in Scotland and moved to Ulster in 1859, after being the unsuccessful Liberal candidate for Preston at the 1885 general election. He was elected as Unionist MP for South Tyrone at the 1886 election. He continued as a (sort of) Unionist MP for South Tyrone until being re-elected as a Liberal MP at the 1906 election. In the mean time he served (1895–1900) as Unionist Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board.

The successful candidates at the Ulster by-elections in 1902 and 1903 – James Wood in East Down and Edward Mitchell in North Fermanagh – did not stand as Liberals and are best described as 'Russellites'.

There were only two MPs elected as Liberals in Ireland at the 1906 general election, in North and South

Tyrone, as above, although R. Glendinning, the Independent Unionist MP elected in North Antrim, subsequently joined the Parliamentary Liberal Party.

Dr Alexander (Sandy) S. Waugh

The London record (1)

Unfortunately I missed the History Group meeting in February on local government in London since the 1970s; it sounded interesting. There is no greater expert on the subject than David Williams. That is why I was a little surprised to find in the report of his talk absolutely no mention of Richmond's GLC win in 1981. I freely acknowledge that the Richmond Liberals' experience of community politics was instrumental in getting me elected in the first place, but I would like to think that my five-year presence on the GLC helped to contribute to the Richmond Alliance group's massive victory over the Tories in the council elections of 1986.

Your report also refers to, and highlights, a remark from my 'memoir'. No memoir of mine has ever been published and it has only been read by six other people. It remains private, and I think it was therefore unreasonable to quote it, particularly out of context. Re Mike Tuffrey's splendid win in Vauxhall, the full text of what I actually wrote was:

Curiously it [the campaign against GLC abolition] included the decision of Ken Livingstone and three

other GLC Members to resign in protest and fight by-elections for their seats. The GLC Tories chose not to participate in this piece of gesture politics but, for all that we supported Livingstone in opposing abolition, we saw no reason why he should have a free run with the electorate.

We decided to contest all four by-elections. We did not come near to beating Livingstone in Paddington but we did win one of them – in Vauxhall where a very young Liberal called Mike Tuffrey stormed through to beat Labour. It was a minor triumph.

It was a wonderful win by Mike, and my comment was not half-hearted about his personal achievement in any way, but in the great scheme of things I fear that it *was* only a minor triumph. We were all abolished a year later.

Adrian Slade

The London record (2)

I read with the interest the report of the meeting on Liberals and local government in London (*Journal of Liberal History* 58, spring 2008). Although the meeting explicitly concentrated on the period from the 1970s, the report notes references to the period before that. Though it is correct to state that it was a fairly bleak picture, it is not entirely accurate for Mike Tuffrey to state that 'the revival came first in outer London'.

In 1962 Liberal councillors were elected in four inner London boroughs: three in Battersea, three in Hampstead, two in Stepney and four in Stoke Newington.

This mighty handful contained a number of

interesting personalities. In Hampstead the group comprised two novelists and an ex-MP! One of the novelists was Ernest Raymond who was charged with finding 'paper' candidates for the Town ward. He approached a Liberal friend, Pamela Frankau, who agreed to allow her name to go forward. As recounted in his memoirs, Ernest had the embarrassing task of telephoning Pamela Frankau to tell her she had been elected! Both of them faithfully attended my councillor training sessions and were assiduous councillors.

In Stepney a famous and long-serving local community campaigner, Edith Ramsay, was elected, carrying with her another local noteworthy, Michael O'Leary. Edith was a very formidable woman, as her biography demonstrates. She had been an independent councillor and would probably have been elected under any label.

In Stoke Newington Joe Lobenstein was the sole Liberal to win in the three-member Lordship ward. A very able politician, he later defected to the Conservatives – a somewhat contrary course of action in such an area – and led the tiny Conservative group for many years.

Perhaps the oddest Liberal presence was that of Edmund Hambly on the old London County Council. There had been no Liberal LCC member since Sir Percy Harris and Edmund Martell, who represented Bethnal Green from 1946 to 1949. Edmund Hambly was first elected as one of the Labour representatives for Lewisham South in 1946 and was elected at every

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Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of 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 of Liberal History* and other occasional publications.

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CHAMPION OF ELIOT CRAWSHAY

At Phillips's saleroom, London on 26 June 1986 the National Library of Wales was fortunate to have the opportunity to purchase the varied and interesting archives of two now largely forgotten Liberal MPs, a father and son – Arthur John Williams (1830–1911) and Eliot Crawshay-Williams (1879–1962).¹

Dr J. Graham

Jones discusses the political career of Eliot Crawshay-Williams (1879–1962), the left-wing Liberal MP for Leicester, 1910–13, who held posts under Churchill and Lloyd George



THE LIBERALISM: CRAWSHAY-WILLIAMS

ARTHUR JOHN Williams, Liberal MP for the Glamorganshire South constituency from 1885 until his defeat in 1895, a prominent member of the Liberation Society and a worthy patron of numerous Welsh causes, is now a largely forgotten figure, remembered simply as one of the principal founders of the National Liberal Club in 1881.² He was also a prominent barrister. He married in 1877 Rose Harriette Thompson Crawshay, the elder daughter of Robert Thompson Crawshay of Cyfarthfa Castle near Merthyr Tydfil in south Wales (the youngest son but principal heir to William Crawshay II, the so-called 'Iron King'). Crawshay's extreme displeasure at the marriage of his adored daughter to a politician is evident from a codicil to his will which ensured that no child born of the marriage would benefit from the Crawshay fortune.

One of the two sons of the marriage was Eliot Crawshay-Williams, born on 4 September 1879.³ Eliot was educated at Eton College and Trinity College, Oxford, where he graduated in 1900. While a student, he was already taking a keen interest in

political matters, especially in the affairs of the Liberal Party.⁴ He was commissioned into the Royal Field Artillery where he remained for some three years, one in England and two in India. In the Grand Durbar of 1903 he was awarded the highly coveted medal for special service. Having resolved to return home in the hope of taking up a political career, Crawshay-Williams returned to Britain by an overland route, travelling via Persia and Russia. Just before he began this journey home, he was accorded the privilege of accompanying Lord Curzon in the Viceroy's expedition up the Persian Gulf. On his return to England, he published a volume entitled *Across Persia*, based on his experience of an eight-month trek across the deserts of Iran, a tome which was generally highly praised in the press reviews.

On his return home in June 1904, he interested himself in domestic political life with vigour, becoming well known to the leaders of the Liberal Party within a short time. He was soon viewed as a zealous and aspiring politician of considerable perspicacity and, supported by his father, he was strongly encouraged to stand as a parliamentary

candidate. His father wrote to him at the beginning of July:

You had better let Herbert Gladstone [the Liberal Chief Whip] know that if a fairly hopeful opening offers, you are disposed to stand. But as I have already told you I think you should clearly explain your position. They must not suppose that you have anything but a very modest allowance or that we are rolling in riches. If you stand we shall have to make a serious sacrifice in order to find the money and can only look upon it as an investment of capital. Whether it will ever yield any return I am afraid is doubtful.⁵

Within days, clearly following a meeting with Crawshay-Williams, Gladstone himself wrote to the aspiring politician, urging him to seek the Liberal nomination for the Chorley division of Lancashire:

I am of the opinion that the Chorley Division is the most favourable constituency now open for your start in political life. The Lancashire people are very straight-forward and earnest and they take a real interest in politics. On what you said to

Eliot Crawshay-Williams in 1934

me, I think we could settle the financial side of the matter.⁶

Crawshay-Williams himself recalled in his autobiography, published in 1935:

On August 13th, feeling partly like a mountebank, and partly like a very small lamb among a horde of ravening wolves, I stood before the Chorley Division Liberal Council to testify to my political faith. I was not yet twenty-five, and had had merely the so-called education of a gentleman, plus a few years of soldiering and travel. My enthusiasm for Liberalism was great, my energy and determination were abundant, but my knowledge of political detail was practically nil. I had, moreover, scarcely opened my lips in public. All this, however, had already been discounted by the authorities, for this was a practically hopeless seat.⁷

The primary consideration seemed to be the raising of his election expenses. Having discussed the matter with his father, Crawshay-Williams told the Chorley Liberals that he was in a position to provide £500 towards his expenses, plus a further £50 per annum towards nursing the constituency until the next general election. It was estimated, however, that the election expenses could well exceed £1,000. The candidate was warned by his concerned father, 'We can only spend £500 on the Election and this you have, I understand, already explained. I don't know what previous elections have cost, but Mr Lawrence can tell you what his were, and I am sure they were considerably more than £500'.⁸

Crawshay-Williams's candidature at Chorley clearly gave rise to considerable enthusiasm within the ranks of the Liberal Party – although it was realised on all sides that the division was a fairly safe Conservative seat where Lord

Balcarres, the Conservative candidate, had enjoyed a majority of 1,428 votes at the recent by-election in November 1903. Not the least of Crawshay-Williams's supporters was Winston Churchill, originally elected the Unionist MP for Oldham in 1900, but who had in May 1904 crossed the floor of the House of Commons to sit on the Liberal benches. He wrote enthusiastically to the new candidate in September 1904:

I am v[er]y glad to hear that you are going to stand & I most heartily wish you all success. You are fighting a most-narrow minded & reactionary fellow & a v[er]y ill-mannered one. As for my coming to speak for you I cannot promise definitely at present. But during October I shall be a good deal in Manchester & if you could meet me there we might have a talk & I could try to fix a date.

Churchill subsequently urged the young Liberal candidate to hold his public meetings under the auspices of the Free Trade League:

I recommend you to hold your meeting under the Free Trade League. There is no reason why the local Liberal Association should not cooperate. But a non-party body is in every way more effective. You will get supporters otherwise beyond your reach. If you manage your campaign well you ought to poll every Liberal vote. But that will not win the Chorley division. You must gain adherents from the Tory & non-party elements. The Free Trade League will be a powerful missionary.⁹

In his autobiography Crawshay-Williams vividly recalled that 'of all my new political friends, [Churchill] showed me the most kindness ... What Winston ever saw in me I do not know'.¹⁰ Churchill addressed a huge

political demonstration at Chorley on 7 December 1904, and invited Crawshay-Williams to speak at a meeting at Manchester North-West.¹¹

Throughout the year 1905 there was a great deal of speculation about the precise timing of the next general election, the arrangements for campaign meetings and the raising of the necessary election expenses. By March Crawshay-Williams had suffered a minor breakdown in his health and he was constantly subject to considerable pressure, evoking the sympathy of rising Liberal star David Lloyd George.¹² He had evidently recovered by the summer, and his candidature continued to attract public attention. Thomas Burt, the working-class Liberal MP for the Morpeth division and prominent within the Trades Union Congress, hailed Eliot as 'a worthy son of a worthy sire' who was evidently 'going on so well', while former Liberal Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, much regretting his inability to address political meetings on behalf of Crawshay-Williams, commented, 'I only wish that Eton was less of a training school for Tories; and so I rejoice to see an Etonian Liberal like yourself'. The same month Churchill wrote to him, 'The Government seem to drag on from month to month in an extraordinary way, but after all the issue cannot now be long delayed, and I am quite sure we have profited by the delay'.¹³

Eventually, in the general election of January 1906, as widely predicted, Lord Balcarres defeated Eliot Crawshay-Williams by the comfortable margin of 1,387 votes. It was felt within the Liberal Party, however, that his total poll of 5,416 votes (44.3 per cent of those cast), the highest ever Liberal poll in the division and an increase of 618 votes over the Liberal total in the 1903 by-election, was highly creditable and reflected well on the novice candidate, auguring well

In his autobiography Crawshay-Williams vividly recalled that 'of all my new political friends, [Churchill] showed me the most kindness ...'

for the success of his future political career. It was widely felt that a ministerial career lay ahead. Churchill was sympathetic and supportive:

I am indeed sorry you were not successful. You made a v[er]y plucky fight, & the large reduction in the Protectionist majority is a substantial proof of your hard work & effective argument. I hope another chance will open to you before long. In so large a majority vacancies must be numerous: & if I can be of any service to you, or you think so, you should write quite freely.¹⁴

A substantial total of more than £1,291 had been spent in the Liberal interest during the election campaign at Chorley, only about £220 of which had been raised by the divisional Liberal Association.¹⁵

Less than a month later Churchill, recently appointed the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies in Campbell-Bannerman's new government, chose Crawshay-Williams to be his assistant private secretary:

The Treasury have consented to allow me one extra private secretary at a salary of £150 a year; but this will only be paid during the Parliamentary session – i.e. about six months in each year. I fear that the remuneration is scarcely more than nominal; but of course the fact that a government salary is paid makes the post an official one. If you care to undertake the work, which may sometimes be hard, and wh[ic]h will not always be dull, you will place me under a deep obligation to yourself. It would give me great pleasure to have your assistance, & I feel certain that your help will be most valuable to me. It occurs to me that as you are now living in London, & are anxious to keep in touch with the House of Commons & with political matters, the proposal

'I was invited to fill a small niche in the Government Establishment as Assistant Private Secretary to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies. In spite of the slightly Mikado-like flavour of its title the job was one to be jumped at, and I jumped.'

wh[ic]h I venture to make may commend itself to you.¹⁶

It was a marvellous opportunity for the aspiring young politician. As Crawshay-Williams recalled in his memoirs:

I was invited to fill a small niche in the Government Establishment as Assistant Private Secretary to the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies. In spite of the slightly Mikado-like flavour of its title the job was one to be jumped at, and I jumped. I was even given a salary – £135 a year. My duties were not of statesmanlike magnitude, being mainly, as Winston put it, to keep the flies off him. But the opportunities of coming into close touch with the machinery and personnel of government, with the questions of the day, and, more important than all else, with a brilliant and commanding political personality, were precious and unique ... My prospect of the future was changed from a vista of aimlessness to an outlook of interesting and important activity. Whatever hand had twisted the kaleidoscope, I was deeply grateful for the touch, and on February 23rd 1906, I took up my new duties.¹⁷

The appointment indicated personal favour from Churchill and a degree of acceptance within the Liberal Party, now back in government after ten years in opposition.

In April Crawshay-Williams was invited to stand again as the Liberal candidate for Chorley at the next general election, but demurred because of the necessity of spending long periods in London. He enjoyed a generally amicable working relationship with Churchill and kept some contact with Campbell-Bannerman, the Prime Minister. When Churchill fell ill in May, Crawshay-Williams readily stepped in to undertake some of his duties at the Colonial

Office, where he felt thoroughly at home.

His career was followed with great interest in south Wales, where Crawshay-Williams delivered a number of absorbing lectures to local Liberal associations and local history societies. Amidst repeated conjecture that Sir George Newnes, the little-known Liberal MP for the Swansea District, was about to be raised to the peerage, Crawshay-Williams was approached as a possible Liberal candidate should a by-election occur, though in the event, no by-election took place. In a personal letter of introduction to Lord Grey, the Foreign Secretary, Churchill recommended Crawshay-Williams: 'He has ... had access to confidential papers and may be thoroughly trusted as a person of discretion'.¹⁸

During September 1906, together with Hamar Greenwood, the Liberal MP for the York division and also a private secretary to Winston Churchill, Crawshay-Williams toured the dominion of Canada. He was impressed by a country wholly new to him and the unfailing warmth of the reception accorded them from coast to coast: 'More and more I see how important it is to anyone who aspires to help in the affairs of the Empire to have a personal knowledge of men and matters in our dominions beyond the seas'. He met a number of Canadian politicians, among them William Lyon Mackenzie King, recently appointed the Deputy Minister of Labour and already considered an up-and-coming politician. Following their meeting, Mackenzie King wrote in his diary, 'At lunch I met Mr. Crawshay-Williams, Secretary to Winston Churchill, & spent the afternoon with him at the Experimental Farm. ... He seemed to me an active, wide awake fellow, quick to grasp points, a little aggressive perhaps, and fairly self-satisfied, tho' pleasant in manner &

companionable, a great talker'.¹⁹ (Mackenzie King entered the Canadian Federal Parliament as a Liberal in 1908, served as Minister of Labour and then as Prime Minister of Canada from 1921 until June 1926, September 1926 until 1930, and again from 1935 until 1948.)

On his return to Britain Crawshay-Williams gave a large number of talks and lectures on his Canadian experiences, urging his audiences to visit the dominion. He also spoke on the 1906 Education Bill and on the pressing need to reform the House of Lords. He published substantial articles on political subjects in newspapers and journals. His name was mentioned as a potential Liberal candidate in several constituencies, including the Grantham division of Lincolnshire, where a prominent local Liberal wrote:

I cannot see how a prospective candidate is going to get off for less than £200 a year. Mr. Priestley [the Liberal MP for Grantham since 1900] says he has spent £500 a year since he became the Member. The Tory candidates spend much more than this and I am afraid Grantham had got into the way of expecting it. Mr. Crawshay Williams would be an excellent candidate but unless he was in the position to spend money fairly liberally he will be of no use whatever to Grantham.²⁰

As the year 1907 ran its course, Crawshay-Williams's attention was taken up increasingly with the need to reform the Lords, to build harmonious relations between the Liberal and Labour parties and the necessity of introducing electoral reforms such as proportional representation or the alternative vote. He spoke on the impact of socialism and relations between the Liberal and Labour parties. He spared no effort, too, in attempting to secure an honour such as a knighthood for his

ageing father, A. J. Williams, who coveted such recognition almost obsessively. At the end of the year he was appointed a JP for the county of Glamorgan, where his father was Deputy Lieutenant.

He was also anxious to retain some association with military life, an interest reawakened by the publication, by Arnold in January 1908, of his well-received volume of reminiscences, *Across Persia*. The next month he was informed that 'Chorley Liberalism' was 'in the dumps' and that the local Liberal Party had felt compelled to give notice to their paid political agent in January.²¹

In April came the news that the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, was resigning and had only a short time left to live. Crawshay-Williams was widely tipped as the ideal candidate for the ensuing by-election in the Stirling Burghs, a safe Liberal seat where Campbell-Bannerman had been returned unopposed in January 1906 – 'It was this comfortable and traditional stronghold of Liberalism which I was to inherit. If all went well.' On 9 April he received a telegram from the Master of Elibank, the Liberal Chief Whip, urging him to travel to Edinburgh for a snap meeting which went off exceedingly well, Elibank proclaiming, 'You've captured them, and I think It's as good as arranged'.²²

Campbell-Bannerman died on 22 April, but at the eleventh hour the Scottish Liberal Association, concerned at 'the premature disclosure' of Crawshay-Williams's name as the candidate, resolved that Arthur Ponsonby, the principal private secretary to the late Prime Minister and the defeated Liberal candidate at Taunton in 1906, should be the Liberal aspirant for the Stirling Burghs. There was anxiety to avoid an acrimonious contest for the nomination, and it was widely

Crawshay-Williams was widely tipped as the ideal candidate for the ensuing by-election in the Stirling Burghs.

felt that Ponsonby's long and close association with CB gave him a distinct advantage over Crawshay-Williams.²³

Within days of the Stirling rejection, however, Crawshay-Williams's name was mentioned in connection with the Liberal vacancy in Pembrokeshire caused by the elevation of the sitting Liberal MP J. W. Philipps to the House of Lords as Lord St Davids. The new baron warned him, however, that: 'Pembrokeshire [was] a very tricky place for an outsider. I don't think for a moment a stranger would be selected, and if he was, he would, at the best, enormously reduce the majority and have a very unpleasant berth. It is an extraordinary clannish county.' He urged Crawshay-Williams to seek nomination in a more congenial constituency.²⁴ Again the prize eluded him, and W. F. Roch was chosen as the Liberal candidate. But Crawshay-Williams was clearly much attracted by the appeal of Welsh politics and delivered a number of political lectures and speeches in south Wales at this time.

Other changes were taking place in the wake of Campbell-Bannerman's resignation. Churchill was moved from the Colonial Office to succeed Lloyd George, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, as President of the Board of Trade. In May, Crawshay-Williams announced his resignation from his position at the Colonial Office 'in order to enter upon active political work'.²⁵ He continued his search for a Liberal nomination and became more and more involved in the ongoing debate on parliamentary reform and the need for a parliamentary inquiry on the subject. Advocacy of the alternative vote system also engaged him.

On 23 July 1908 Crawshay-Williams married Alice Gay-Roberts, originally of Turlake in Devon, the daughter of James Henry Gay-Roberts. The newlyweds travelled extensively as part

of an extended honeymoon, and did not return to England until 3 December. During the same month Crawshay-Williams was pressed by the Liberal executive of the Wirral division of Cheshire to consider standing as their prospective candidate. Feelers came, too, from many other areas. By the beginning of 1909 he himself had resolved that he wished to be nominated 'not for a County Division, but for a Borough, where such extended and assiduous attention is not necessary as when a large area has to be covered'.

In February 1909, Crawshay-Williams – hailed locally as 'a radical to the core' – was chosen as the Liberal candidate for Leicester, a two-member constituency, as successor to Franklin Thomasson, who had indicated his desire to stand down. His adoption coincided with the escalating suffragette agitation and the mounting campaign to secure universal manhood suffrage in Britain, a theme which the new candidate tackled in his early speeches during February and March. On 9 March he addressed the Leicester Liberal Thousand and was formally adopted as the prospective Liberal candidate. In subsequent political meetings, he indicated his support for the introduction of radical social legislation and remained true to his long-standing support for the 'Votes for Women' campaign, while carefully distancing himself from the more militant wing of the suffragette movement. He also published a monograph advocating the nationalisation of the railways. In June his daughter, Alice, was born, and Eliot returned to part-time military duties at Croxton Park, Leicestershire.²⁶

As Winston Churchill readily agreed to address a meeting at Leicester in support of the candidature of his old friend, the threat of suffragette disturbances were in the forefront of his mind:



Campaigning in Leicester, 1909; centre, Eliot and Alice Crawshay-Williams

I hope you will see that all proper precautions are taken, that no women are allowed in the meeting unless vouched for, that all such women, except those who are so well-known as to sit on the platform, should be placed in one part of the building, and not mixed up with the men; that a sufficiency of stewards should be provided to deal with any disorder; that the building be

thoroughly searched before the meeting, the roof as well as all cupboards and recesses being properly examined; and, lastly, that the space in front of the building should be kept clear by the police, so as to prevent disturbance and attempts to rush the doors; this last has been a feature of previous meetings, and the police ought to know that it is their duty not to allow a crowd close

to the door as otherwise a disorder will ensue: it is better to keep the streets clear for one hundred yards outside the door during the meeting.²⁷

It was indeed an exciting time in political life. The House of Lords was debating Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' and was widely expected to reject it; on 30 November they duly threw it out by 250 to 75. In October two Conservative candidates were adopted at Leicester, while a joint conference of the local Labour Party and trades unions associated with the Leicester Trades Council resolved to re-nominate as the Labour candidate James Ramsay MacDonald, the holder of the second seat there since 1906. There was no mention, however, of the nomination of a second Labour candidate, a move which much enhanced Crawshay-Williams's prospects of success at the polls in the double-member constituency.²⁸

As the general election grew closer, Crawshay-Williams again advocated the adoption of an alternative vote system of voting for county seats and a system of proportional representation for borough constituencies. He doggedly refused the offer of financial assistance from central party funds; in his memoirs he rejoiced that both he and Ramsay MacDonald 'conducted our campaigns with entire independence'. Indeed, they ran almost in double harness, 'working in amity, if not actually in co-operation'.²⁹ As the campaign gathered momentum, Churchill urged his old associate to 'try and poll as early as possible so as to influence the course of the conflict'. Asserting that the Budget League, a Liberal organisation formed to rally support for the contentious proposals embodied in Lloyd George's 'People's Budget', was 'alive and flourishing', he promised to ensure that more than a hundred large Budget League posters were

Although the outcome had been widely anticipated, the new MP was still surprised at his election as the 'senior MP' for the city of Leicester – 'slightly bewildered, but intoxicatingly happy'.

put up on various key hoardings in Leicester and to convene a Budget League meeting in the city. With regard to financial support from the Liberal Party centrally, Churchill proffered the following advice:

I think you take too stiff a view of the matter, as I certainly do not consider that the acceptance of assistance from party funds involves any loss of honourable independence. It seems to me that the small pecuniary aid accorded bears no proportion to the great political duties discharged. At the same time I think that the view which you take is very respectable, & you know my maxim – 'Never force little dogs to eat mutton'.³⁰

Generally the contest was conducted amicably and vigorously by the three political parties. Close to the poll, however, postcards were distributed by his political opponents attributing unacceptable views to Crawshay-Williams on betting and gambling issues; he was accused of supporting them over-zealously and of being reluctant to support legislation which restricted them. During the campaign, he played tennis each morning to remain in peak physical condition and gave up drinking alcohol. As Liberal Party mandarins considered Leicester a safe seat, very little outside assistance was available, and the candidate was himself compelled to address two or three meetings each day, all of them reported in detail in the local press. The eve-of-poll meeting was held at the Leicester Temperance Hall and was followed by a torchlight procession. An exhausted Crawshay-Williams toured the city's polling stations on the day of the poll, 17 January 1910.³¹

In the general election of January 1910 Eliot Crawshay-Williams just headed the poll at Leicester with 14,643 votes. Ramsay MacDonald polled 14,337, and the two Conservative

candidates trailed far behind. Although the outcome had been widely anticipated, the new MP was still surprised at his election as the 'senior MP' for the city of Leicester – 'slightly bewildered, but intoxicatingly happy'. He was hailed locally as a candidate who had given support to the aspirations of the Labour Party and he certainly remained on friendly terms with MacDonald.³²

From the outset of his parliamentary career, Crawshay-Williams was viewed as very much an individualist, with his own views on the political issues of the day – yet it was also recognised that he was keen to assume ministerial office. On 16 February the new MP took his oath in the House of Commons and, within just eight days, had delivered his maiden speech, on the government resolutions to be embodied in the Veto Bill designed to limit the powers of the House of Lords – 'a creditable performance' in Churchill's words.³³ On 11 March he was asked by Lloyd George, still Chancellor of the Exchequer, to become his parliamentary private secretary and was, at the same time, requested to return to a similar position at the Colonial Office. Perplexed, he turned to Churchill for advice. 'Of course you must go to [Lloyd] George' was his unambiguous advice.³⁴ The new position was an auspicious step up the slippery political pole.

Crawshay-Williams took up his new position in the midst of speculation that another general election might be necessary because of the constitutional crisis precipitated by the House of Lords' rejection of the 'People's Budget' and the subsequent debates over the supremacy of the Commons over the Lords. In April he introduced to the Commons his Parliamentary Elections (Alternative Vote) Bill, based on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform, while a constitutional conference was set up

to discuss relations between the Lords and the Commons. In July he voted for the second reading of the Conciliation Bill on women's suffrage and still displayed general support for the suffragette cause. In the autumn he introduced a bill calling for the reversal of the Osborne judgement by the House of Lords in 1909, which had outlawed the automatic payment of a political levy to the Labour Party by trades unionists.

A second general election duly took place in December 1910. Crawshay-Williams was again returned at the top of the poll at Leicester, again just slightly ahead of Ramsay MacDonald, with the sole Conservative candidate, a new aspirant, trailing badly in third place. His 5,691 vote majority, although slightly down from 6,095 in January, meant that Leicester was one of the safest Liberal seats in the country. During the course of the election campaign he spoke widely on behalf of a number of other Liberal candidates, addressing twelve major political meetings outside his own constituency, and was clearly regarded as a valuable electoral asset for his party, with a potentially glittering political career ahead of him – seemingly assured still further by his close links with both Churchill and Lloyd George.³⁵ He personally contributed no less than £1,270 towards his election expenses.

Crawshay-Williams was prominent at Westminster as he witnessed the final passage of the Parliament Bill, removing the Lords' power of veto, in March 1911. During the same month, at a time when the introduction of the payment of MPs for the first time was being keenly debated in political circles as a result of mounting pressure from the fledgling Labour Party, the senior Member for Leicester introduced a bill limiting to £50 annually the total subscriptions to local clubs, societies and organisations which MPs might

pay within their own constituencies. At the end of April, he introduced the Adult Suffrage Bill (promoted by the People's Suffrage Federation) which proposed to give the franchise to everyone of both sexes over the age of 21 years. This latter measure also provided that the residential qualification should be reduced to three months, that plural voting be abolished, and that the electoral registers be revised and updated every three months. Crawshay-Williams was viewed as a champion of electoral and franchise reform and a keen advocate of progressive legislation. He also pressed for the closer involvement of the overseas dominions in the management of imperial affairs, while always underlining his military experience.³⁶ In September he suffered the loss of his father, Arthur J. Williams, who had always encouraged him to pursue a political career and had given him a great deal of advice and practical support.

Crawshay-Williams participated actively in the Free Trade Lecture scheme and supported the work of the Free Trade Union set up to oppose the retention and imposition of protective tariffs. He delivered five major speeches in the House of Commons during the year 1911 (compared with three during 1910). He found that, on average, he received, as a MP, about a dozen letters a day, although it was noticeable that his postbag increased significantly during the parliamentary session (compared with the recesses). At the time of the introduction of the 1911 Insurance Bill, he was staggered to receive about thirty letters each day, and a total number of some 3,744 letters came to hand during the course of a year.³⁷

As 1912 dawned, Crawshay-Williams remained preoccupied with the necessity to introduce the alternative vote system in parliamentary elections. On 29 April he introduced the

Parliamentary Elections (Alternative Vote) Bill, remaining true to his long-standing conviction that such a system had many advantages over 'the old and cumbrous second ballot'. In March he resolved to vote against the second reading of the Conciliation Bill on women's suffrage (the measure was designed to grant the franchise only to certain groups of women) as a personal protest against 'the most recent acts of violence ... If, as I hope and believe will be the case, other members take the same course as myself, the lesson to the Suffragettes will, I trust, be obvious and effective.' He clearly felt strongly on the matter: 'The wanton and disgraceful attacks on the property of unoffending persons during the last few days ... appear to me to make it urgently necessary to show their perpetrators and, what is more important, those who are misguided enough to furnish them with funds, that they are by their folly defeating the ends they profess to serve'.

In the same month he put down a parliamentary question to H. H. Asquith, the Prime Minister, on the possible institution of a Royal Commission to inquire into industrial unrest in Britain. He insisted on raising the question in the Commons despite repeated requests from Asquith, who considered it 'inopportune', to withdraw it. This question aroused much public and parliamentary interest, and by May the government (tartly dismissing a full Royal Commission as merely 'a shelving expedient') had resolved to appoint a cabinet committee to investigate the problem of industrial unrest. Crawshay-Williams devoted considerable time and effort to the drafting of a Minimum Wage Bill, and he also lent support to the campaign to disestablish and disendow the Welsh church.³⁸

In June he put down an amendment to Clause 9 of the Irish Home Rule Bill, proposing

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that the Irish House of Commons should be elected on an adult suffrage basis, advocating that the qualifying age for males should be 21 years and for females 25. There was to be a three months' residential qualification, and the institution of his pet idea, the transferable vote. His amendment aroused considerable public interest and support. He was convinced that the Irish Home Rule Bill should be pushed through Parliament as quickly as possible, and had become convinced that a system of strict proportional representation was not really suitable in the UK or Ireland on the grounds that it was likely to result in a succession of relatively weak, unstable coalition or national governments. He remained a popular constituency MP at Leicester, where there was some talk of running two Liberal candidates 'in harness' at the next general election, partly as a result of growing local Liberal dissatisfaction with Ramsay MacDonald. Asquith was invited to address a public meeting in the city during the autumn.³⁹

During 1913, however, Eliot Crawshay-Williams's promising political career came tumbling down. In March he was named as co-respondent in a divorce case brought by Hubert Carr-Gomm, Liberal MP for the Rotherhithe division of Southwark since 1906 and a close political associate. As Crawshay-Williams later wrote in his autobiography, 'I recognised at once that under the then-existing circumstances of public life this was almost certainly the death blow of my career'. He resigned his Leicester seat amongst sadness and regret in local Liberal circles at this abrupt termination of a representation which, it had been anticipated, would have continued for many years to come. He announced his complete withdrawal from active political life, while expressing a wish to continue public service in some capacity.

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In July Carr-Gomm was granted a decree nisi – made absolute the following February – on the grounds of his wife Kathleen's adultery with Crawshay-Williams.⁴⁰ 'What made the case a bad one', recorded Lucy Masterman, wife of the former Liberal cabinet minister C. F. G. Masterman, was not just that Crawshay-Williams was married with two children, a daughter and a son, but that he was Carr-Gomm's long-term 'most intimate friend at school, college and in politics'. Mrs Masterman also noted that both Lloyd George and Churchill had become involved in the matter, the former making abortive efforts to bring the estranged couple back together, and the latter having made an attempt 'to frighten Carr-Gomm out of bringing the case, a proceeding which naturally made him angry'.⁴¹

The case aroused considerable public interest and disapproval; neither Crawshay-Williams nor Kathleen Carr-Gomm made any attempt to deny their adultery when the case came to court. Both Churchill and Lloyd George were said to have attempted to persuade their ally not to resign his parliamentary seat, and they apparently leaned on Carr-Gomm to pay an allowance to his ex-wife. He eventually agreed to make her an allowance of £500 a year, but protracted wrangling then ensued over the precise details of the payments. According again to Lucy Masterman, Lloyd George regarded 'an irregular love affair as a very trifling matter – even in a married woman', in clear contradistinction to Rufus Isaacs, the Attorney-General, who looked upon this episode 'very grimly'. At lunch one day as the drama unfolded, Isaacs denounced Crawshay-Williams's seduction of Kathleen Carr-Gomm, his own friend's wife, as 'unpardonable, absolutely unpardonable behaviour'. In a rather sheepish manner,

Lloyd George looked down at his plate 'feeling vaguely that he was being scolded, and said in a very meek voice – "I suppose it *was* rather wrong!"'⁴² It is tempting to speculate whether the exposure of the truth about Lloyd George's own extramarital infidelities would have brought his own political career to an equally abrupt end; and it is amazing that awareness of the potential risks does not appear to have deterred him, a serial adulterer for years past.

Both Lloyd George and Churchill remained involved in the Carr-Gomm case well into 1914, and both remained in close contact with Crawshay-Williams, who still took an interest in the course of political life. In 1915 Alice Crawshay-Williams was granted a divorce on the grounds of her husband's statutory desertion and adultery, and her former husband married Kathleen Carr-Gomm later the same year. This second marriage was to last until 1924, again ending in acrimonious divorce proceedings.

After the outbreak of the First World War Crawshay-Williams commanded the 1st Leicestershire Royal Horse Artillery from 1915 until 1917, witnessing active military service in Egypt and Palestine. From 1918 until 1920 he was attached to the Headquarters of the Northern Command, based mainly in Egypt, during which period he published three volumes of poetry and a well-received account of his military experiences, *Leaves from an Officer's Notebook*. He also wrote intelligent, informed commentaries on political developments for newspapers and journals, and he remained in contact with both Lloyd George and Churchill, forwarding copies of his various publications to both men. In July 1917 he approached the latter, by then Minister for Munitions, seeking employment within the ministry, but without success.

As the war drew to a close, Crawshay-Williams seriously considered re-entering political life, but now through the Labour Party. He approached Arthur Henderson, the party's secretary:

I regret that, if I come back into politics, it will mean dissociation from many friends whom I respect; but, as I told you, I have been brought to believe that not only more far-reaching reforms, but a more live and vigorous spirit are needed today than can be hoped for from either of the parties who have hitherto governed this country. If, therefore, I am to take part in politics ... it will have to be either as an independent politician, or, if there be room for me under your new constitution, as a member of the Labour Party, with whose aims, even when I was an orthodox Liberal I was so far in agreement as sometimes to involve me in difficulties with my own supporters.⁴³

As the Liberal MP for Leicester before the First World War, Crawshay-Williams had certainly taken a left-wing, quasi-Socialist stand on many issues and had formed a close rapport with his fellow-MP Ramsay MacDonald.

Further legal proceedings at Leeds crown court in 1918–19, however, rendered impossible a political come-back, and a dejected Crawshay-Williams turned to pursuing his literary endeavours for the rest of his days. In the autumn of 1921 he produced a Grand Guignol play entitled *E. and O.E.*; further Grand Guignol plays (dramas that emphasised the horrifying or the macabre) appeared in 1924 and 1927.

But he found it impossible to escape from some involvement in politics, following excitedly the course of the November 1922 general election and speculating on how the use of an alternative

vote system would have benefited the Liberal Party, which was still split into two warring camps. He wrote to congratulate some Labour and advanced Liberal candidates on their re-election to parliament. He wrote at some length to his old ally and chief Winston Churchill who, against all the odds, had just been defeated at Dundee, which he had represented since 1908:

I was very sorry to see the news about Dundee – not sorry politically, but sorry on general grounds because you ought always to be in the full stream of politics. ... I often think with a rather pathetic pleasure of those days at the Colonial Office, and afterwards in the House, when we were more or less together, and with gratitude of all your kindness to me. Now I am busy on work which is more peaceful, if less important, than that I had hoped to do; but some times there still comes upon me the ache to be doing something in the old sphere of action. However, I set it resignedly by.⁴⁴

In the general election of October 1931, held in the wake of the formation of the National Government, although asserting his continued adherence to the Liberal Party and the cause of free trade, Crawshay-Williams lent support to Ramsay MacDonald 'in his fight for economy and financial stability' in order to 'avoid a disaster such as it is difficult for us in this country to conceive'. He felt in consequence that it was the patriotic duty of British electors 'to put aside party and vote first for those who are committed to maintain the national credit'. He offered to support the candidature of Sir Thomas Jones, the 'National candidate' (really a Conservative) in his south Wales home constituency of Ogmere, against the sitting Labour MP.⁴⁵ He even planned to speak at Jones's final eve-of-poll meeting

During the 1930s Crawshay-Williams remained in touch with Churchill, for whom he clearly felt much admiration, and also kept up other contacts in political circles.

at Bridgend. In the event Ted Williams, the Labour candidate, easily romped home at the top of the poll.

During the 1930s Crawshay-Williams remained in touch with Churchill, for whom he clearly felt much admiration, and also kept up other contacts in political circles. In February 1939 he sent the ageing Lloyd George a copy of his new novel, *Votes and Virgins*; he had already forwarded a proof copy of the text to Churchill the previous month, with a request for him to write a foreword to the book – predictably, the request was refused 'in the present pressure of events'. Following the fall of Paris in June 1940, when the outlook looked bleak for the Allied war effort, he wrote at some length to Churchill, then some six weeks into his premiership:

It does seem to me, and, I know, to others, that 'if and when' an informed view of the situation shows that we've really not got a practical chance of actual ultimate victory, no question of prestige should stand in the way of our using our nuisance value *while we have one* to get the best peace terms possible. Otherwise, after losing many lives and much money, we shall merely find ourselves in the position of France – or worse.

Churchill's reply was blunt: 'I am ashamed of you for writing such a letter. I return it to you – to burn & forget.'⁴⁶

In 1943 Crawshay-Williams lent support to the demand for the appointment of a Secretary of State for Wales. But his main preoccupation by this time was as a writer, of poetry, prose fiction, film scripts and a memoir.⁴⁷ His political acumen and talents were never put to any further use, although he still continued to write articles on political matters, Welsh affairs, the Territorial Army, colonial developments and an array of

other subjects. Among his best-known novels in the 1930s were *A Night in the Hotel* and *Stay of Execution*. He was to devote his later years primarily to the writing of light fiction which generally sold well and earned him a fine reputation as a creative writer. His autobiography, *Simple Story*, published in 1935, was a moving document of considerable human interest.

He spent much of the Second World War at his Welsh home, Plas Coed-y-Mwstwr, near Bridgend in Glamorgan, and from 1941 until 1943 acted as the Chief Civil Defence Officer at the Great Trading Centre and Estate at Treforest, near Pontypridd. During the later stages of the war he lectured extensively to members of HM Forces, and immediately after the war he chaired the Coed-y-Mwstwr (Approved) School, a social and educational experiment of great interest. Having suffered from increasing blindness during his last years, Eliot Crawshay-Williams died on 11 May 1962 at the age of 82.

Crawshay-Williams was a talented and natural politician, the son of a Liberal MP, whose popularity was reflected in the large number of local Liberal associations which wished to secure him as their parliamentary candidate. He won the support of both Churchill and Lloyd George, and a good future, possibly even a ministerial position, clearly lay ahead of him within the Liberal Party – though given his distinct left-wing leanings, he would probably eventually have joined the Labour Party, like Haldane, Buxton and Ponsonby, among many others. Yet he sacrificed his career as a result of his unacceptable personal life. His experience readily invites comparison with that of Sir Charles Dilke whose promising political career was also effectively terminated in 1885 following a notorious and well-publicised divorce case.

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- 1 See *NLW Annual Report, 1986–1987* (Aberystwyth, 1987), p. 64.
- 2 The only extensive account of A. J. Williams's political career is J. Graham Jones, 'Arthur J. Williams MP (1830–1911)', *Morgannwg*, Vol. XLIV (2000), 105–28.
- 3 There is a helpful overview of his career in his obituary in *The Times*, 12 May 1962, p. 10. There is also a useful potted biography of Eliot Crawshay-Williams in the column 'Political personalities', *The Planet*, 8 October 1910.
- 4 See National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B1/1, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to EC-W, 4 May 1899.
- 5 Ibid. B2/11, Arthur J. Williams to EC-W, 8 July 1904.
- 6 Ibid. B2/13, Herbert Gladstone to EC-W, 14 July 1904.
- 7 Eliot Crawshay-Williams, *Simple Story: an Accidental Autobiography* (London, 1935), p. 50. *The Times* had announced on 30 July the decision to recommend the adoption of Crawshay-Williams at Chorley.
- 8 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B2/18, A. J. Williams to EC-W, 9 August 1904.
- 9 Ibid. B14/3, Churchill to EC-W, 12 September 1904 (copy); B14/6, Churchill to EC-W, 6 October 1904 (copy); B14/7, Churchill to EC-W, 9 October 1904 ('Private') (copy).
- 10 *Simple Story*, p. 52.
- 11 See T. W. Killick to Churchill, 4 October 1904, in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Vol II, Companion, Part 1, 1901–1907* (London, 1969), p. 363.
- 12 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B3/9, D. Lloyd George to EC-W, 16 March 1905. See also the interesting letters from Arthur J. Williams to his son in file B3.
- 13 Ibid. B3/26, Thomas Burt to EC-W, 6 September 1905; B3/27, Lord Rosebery to EC-W, 10 September 1905 ('Private'); B14/4, Churchill to EC-W, 2 September 1905 (copy).
- 14 Ibid. B14/19, Churchill to EC-W, 25 January 1906 ('Private') (copy).
- 15 Ibid. B4/11, Arthur W. Adkins, election agent, to EC-W, 5 February 1906.
- 16 Ibid. B14/20, Churchill to EC-W, 18 February 1906 ('Private') (copy).
- 17 *Simple Story*, p. 60. The appointment is noted in *The Times*, 26 February 1906.
- 18 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B14/23, Churchill to Lord Grey, 23 August 1906 (copy), endorsed by EC-W, 'Copy of W. S. Churchill's introduction for me to Lord Grey'.
- 19 *Chorley Standard*, 22 September, 13 October and 1 and 15 December 1906; *Lancashire Daily Post*, 6 December 1906; *Manchester Dispatch*, 11 December 1906; National Archives of Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, diary material, p. 255, diary entry for 12 September 1906. (I owe this last reference to the kindness of Dr Richard Toye, Cambridge.)
- 20 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B5/43, letter from J. Handley Parker of Grantham to Jesse Herbert, 16 March 1907.
- 21 Ibid. B6/5, Arthur W. Adkins, election agent, to EC-W, 5 February 1908.
- 22 *Dundee Advertiser*, 17 April 1908; *Glasgow Evening Times*, 17 April 1908; *Simple Story*, pp. 73–74.
- 23 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B6/24, Alexander Murray, the Master of Elibank, Scottish Liberal Association, to EC-W, 29 April 1908 ('Private'); ibid. B6/27, Arthur Ponsonby to EC-W, 1 May 1908.
- 24 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B6/39, J. W. Philipps to EC-W, 7 May 1908; *Western Mail*, 11 May 1908; *South Wales Daily News*, 11 May 1908.
- 25 *The Times*, 20 May 1908.
- 26 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B7/4, EC-W to F. H. Jones, 13 January 1908 (copy) in relation to an approach from the Stamford division; *Simple Story*, pp. 84–88; *Leicester Daily Post*, 17 February 1909; numerous press cuttings in NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers, vol. J5, pp. 1–34.
- 27 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B14/40, Churchill to EC-W, 24 August 1909 (copy). See J. Graham Jones, 'Crawshay-Williams,

- Churchill and the Suffragettes: a note', *National Library of Wales Journal*, Vol. XXX, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 447–54.
- 28 *Leicester Daily Post*, 22 October 1909.
- 29 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B7/93, EC-W to Churchill, 2 December 1909 (copy); *Simple Story*, pp. 95–96; see also the friendly tone of the communication from Ramsay MacDonald to EC-W, 27 December 1909, in NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B14/52 (copy).
- 30 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B14/50, 52 and 54, Churchill to EC-W, 13 and 22 December 1909 and undated [?December 1909] (copies).
- 31 *Simple Story*, pp. 95–96.
- 32 *Ibid.*; *Leicester Daily Post*, 18 January 1910.
- 33 See Churchill to King Edward VII, 24 February 1910, cited in Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Vol II, Companion, Part 2, 1907–1911* (London, 1969), p. 976. Churchill here described EC-W to the King as 'a young man who was formerly an artillery officer'.
- 34 *Simple Story*, p. 103.
- 35 See the highly complimentary portrait of EC-W in *The Young Liberal*, December 1910, p. 14.
- 36 *The Times*, 30 March and 28 April 1911.
- 37 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B18/4, note on 'number of letters received and answered', [c. 1911].
- 38 *The Times*, 29 April 1912; EC-W to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in *The Times*, 13 March 1912; NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B10/17, draft of letter from EC-W to the press, [? March 1912]; *The Times*, 1 April 1912.
- 39 *The Times*, 6 June 1912; correspondence in the NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers, file B10.
- 40 *Simple Story*, pp. 123, 135 and 137; *The Times*, 11 June and 29 July 1913 and 10 February 1914; correspondence in the NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers, file B11.
- 41 University of Birmingham Library, Special Collections Department, Masterman Papers 29/2/2/2, Lucy Masterman diary entry for 18 June 1913, cited in Richard Toye, *Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness* (London, 2007), p. 99. I am most grateful to Dr Toye for providing me with a typescript transcript of relevant materials from the Masterman Papers at Birmingham and photocopies of relevant correspondence from the Churchill Papers held at Churchill College, Cambridge.
- 42 Churchill College, Cambridge, Churchill Papers CHAR 1/107/11–13, EC-W to Churchill, 23 September 1913; University of Birmingham Library, Special Collections Department, Masterman Papers 29/2/2/2, Lucy Masterman diary entry for 18 June 1913.
- 43 NLW, Eliot Crawshay-Williams Papers B12/41, EC-W to Arthur Henderson, undated [autumn of 1918] (draft).
- 44 *Ibid.* B14/83, EC-W to Churchill, 17 November 1922 (copy).
- 45 *Ibid.* B13/41, EC-W to Sir Thomas Jones, 20 October 1931 (draft); B13./42, Jones to EC-W, 23 October 1931.
- 46 *Ibid.* B14/92, EC-W to Churchill, 27 June 1940 ('Personal') (copy); B14/93, Churchill to EC-W, 28 June 1940 (copy).
- 47 See the interesting portrait in the 'Literary Profiles' column in the *Western Mail*, 4 June 1952.

Letters (continued from page 2)

election up to and including 1961. However, in 1962, he defected to the Liberal Party and became the sole Liberal member of the LCC until its demise in 1964. Hambly was a surgeon and a Cornishman; he claimed to be last person left who spoke Cornish. He had to be dissuaded from resigning to fight a by-election in Lewisham, which he would certainly have lost!

In outer London, although it could be claimed that the Liberal control of Finchley Borough Council had certain demographic similarities with Richmond, that was certainly not the case with the early Liberal victories in West Ham, led by David Brooke and Norman Phillips.

I don't disparage the value of oral history as evinced by

such meetings but it does have a tendency to slip into the 'How we won Abercromby' mode. The intellectual rigour of the Liberal Democrat History Group and its journal need to be safeguarded by careful attention to the context.

One final curiosity of the 1960s in London was that the only comprehensive book of the 1965 London Borough election results was published by the Liberal Party's Local Government Department. The new Greater London Council had its own information department but at the time it took a narrow view of its terms of reference and would only publish the GLC results. I took the view as the party's Local Government Officer that the borough results should be published

and that it would be a minor coup if the party did it. We duly did so and the book was for a very long time the only available comprehensive source.

Michael Meadowcroft

Great Liberals?

I am glad that in his letter Professor Vernon Bogdanor (*Journal of Liberal History* 58, spring 2008) has tempered the recent hagiographies of David Lloyd George with a reminder of the great man's Achilles heel – that that of his penchant for autocratic leaders, coupled with his admiration of Hitler. Certainly Lloyd George advocated, and in office introduced, admirable reforming measures, but his actions in supporting the Black and Tans in Ireland

and in dealing with strikes through the Emergency Powers Act, and his opposition to a limited franchise for women, are only three examples of decidedly illiberal policies.

Is it not a fact that Lloyd George's opportunism almost destroyed the Liberal Party itself, and most certainly provided the circumstances through which the Labour Party was able to replace the Liberal Party as the major opposition to the Conservatives?

Not one biographer of Lloyd George has been able to explain his admiration for Hitler – an admiration that largely ignored Hitler's persecution of the Jews and his murder of opponents of the Nazi regime, evidence of

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THE RANK AND FILE GOVERNMENT 'CRISIS

1912 was a stormy year for Asquith's government, facing industrial unrest, problems with the suffragettes and the gathering storm of the crisis over home rule for Ireland. Through a recently unearthed letter, **Barry Doyle** offers a rare glimpse of the activist's reaction to the key issues facing Liberals at the time. What did they think of the New Liberal programme the government was trying to implement? Was the government losing its traditional middle-class supporters?



E AND THE LIBERAL SIS' OF 1912: A NOTE

SINCE THE 1930s, attempts to explain the remarkable collapse of British Liberalism have paid particular attention to the Edwardian era. The stunning victory of the party in the 1906 election and the wide range of social and constitutional reforms which the governments of Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith instituted have been juxtaposed with the emergence of an electoral and industrial challenge from Labour, the eruption of constitutional turmoil in Ireland and militant action by women seeking the vote.¹

The fact that this was followed by a four-year modern war from which the party emerged divided and defeated has raised important questions about the health of Liberalism and the Liberal Party in 1914.² Historians of the left have consistently argued that Edwardian Britain was in the throes of a crisis from which Liberalism could not recover,³ with their position further weakened by the rise of Labour, especially in the industrial north.⁴ This position has been challenged by those who

tend to point to the war itself as the main culprit in the Liberal collapse.⁵ Within this tradition, disagreement has centred on the extent to which the electorate was realigning along class lines – either between the Liberals and Labour or between progressives and conservatives – in the years before the First World War.⁶

Although these debates remain largely unresolved, there is agreement that in the years following the December 1910 election, the Liberal government struggled to retain its popularity and that it experienced by-election defeats, bad press and considerable reversals in local government.⁷ In particular, in 1911–12 ‘the Liberals went through one of their deepest troughs of unpopularity’,⁸ alienating both their traditional middle-class supporters and the increasingly volatile working-class electorate with a range of policies which were often interpreted as unnecessary and costly interference.⁹ That the Liberals were unpopular in 1912 is not in dispute – although Packer suggests that the land campaign may have reversed the trend as early as May 1912¹⁰ – but what is more

relevant is whether their actions were causing irredeemable damage to the party amongst its core middle-class supporters.¹¹

Initial assessments of the effects on Liberal Party support focused on the parliamentary party and some sections of the rank and file, especially in Lancashire and London. From this Emy, Blewett and especially Clarke deduced that the New Liberalism was mainly adopted by and attractive to the metropolitan, professional middle class – journalists, educationalists and those from the less established branches of the traditional professions.¹² Such ideas were less popular amongst the provincial, urban, Nonconformist middle class who filled the ranks of the party at both local and national level and who Clarke and Bernstein believe were fundamentally alienated by the switch to social politics.¹³ However, subsequent studies of both parliamentary and local politics by Searle, Packer and Doyle have argued for a more nuanced approach, which suggests that the Edwardian party was broadly behind the government, if occasionally disappointed with its priorities.¹⁴

The letter-writer and the recipient: Sydney Vere Pearson and Noel Buxton MP

In addition to studying the reactions of MPs to the legislation of this period,¹⁵ historians have used two further types of evidence to assess its impact in the country: election results – by-elections and municipal contests¹⁶ – and press reaction.¹⁷

Amongst the problems besetting the government in 1912 was a revolt by doctors over the newly instituted system of National Health Insurance.¹⁸ This legislation was also criticised by workers, who objected to the compulsory deduction of 4d a week – a greater contribution than either the employers or the state were making.¹⁹ As the worst of the opposition to National Insurance began to die down the government was plunged into renewed crisis in March 1912 by a national coal strike for a minimum wage. Although generally opposed to state support for able-bodied adult males, Asquith's cabinet utilised the precedent of the Trade Boards' Act of 1909, which had brought in minimum wages for the sweated trades, to help meet the miners' demands. Although stopping short of a national rate, the government did introduce regional wage boards, initially on a temporary basis and in the face of some opposition from moderate and business Liberals.²⁰

Early 1912 also saw the government begin the process of introducing the long-promised third Home Rule Bill and continue to grapple with the thorny problem of women's suffrage. On neither count could the party really rely on a strongly positive response from the British electorate, and both may have offended some parts of the Liberal rank and file.²¹ On the other hand, attempts to deal with traditional concerns, such as education, temperance and land reform, had proved no more effective following the curtailment of the power of the House of Lords than they had before.²² However, land reformers,

including supporters of the ideas of Henry George, did experience something of a golden summer on the back of Lloyd George's land campaigns launched in the summer of 1912.²³

Clearly each of these issues could and did affect the party's popularity in the country and may have helped to turn both middle- and working-class supporters away to either Labour or, more likely, the Conservatives. The Liberals lost a number of seats to the Unionists in by-elections during 1911–12 and suffered considerable setbacks in the municipal elections of November 1911.²⁴ Moreover, the Liberal press was ambiguous in its response to some of the bolder aspects of government policy. Certainly most provincial newspapers were uncomfortable with the miners' minimum wage, while some were ambivalent about home rule, hostile to land reform and broadly supportive of female suffrage but bitterly opposed to the militant tactics of the Women's Social & Political Union. Only on the National Insurance Act did they wholeheartedly support the government.²⁵

This evidence has often been taken as proof that what the Liberals were facing was more than just mid-term blues. Despite Labour's limited success in elections (they polled no more than 30 per cent in any of the by-elections they contested and actually lost four seats they were nominally defending²⁶) historians have pointed to Unionist and Labour advances in municipal contests, and the wavering of the press, as proof of a profound ideological and electoral malaise within Liberalism.²⁷ Yet very little evidence has been presented as to how conventional rank-and-file activists felt about the direction Liberalism was taking, or their views on the key issues of the day.²⁸ The rest of this article will examine a detailed letter from a prominent north Norfolk Liberal activist to his MP in March 1912, providing his

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personal views on each of the important questions highlighted above. In particular, it will present background information on the author and recipient and the constituency in which they were actively involved.

The author of the letter²⁹ was Sydney Vere Pearson, a physician who specialised in tuberculosis. Pearson obtained an MA and MD from Cambridge and MRCP from London³⁰ but his career as a consulting physician was curtailed by a severe bout of pulmonary tuberculosis. Following sanatorium treatment in Germany, he returned to Britain in 1905 and became Medical Superintendent of a small private sanatorium in Mundesley on the north Norfolk coast.³¹ He built the business up with the help of increasing government support for sanatorium treatment, especially under the provisions of the 1911 National Insurance Act. He continued to run the Mundesley sanatorium until after the Second World War, chaired numerous TB-related committees at local and national level, including the Joint Tuberculosis Council of Great Britain, and wrote extensively on aspects of TB cause and cure.³²

Pearson was also active in politics, and particularly as a follower of Henry George, in support of the taxation of land values (the 'single tax').³³ He played a very active role in Liberal constituency politics prior to the First World War, organising a full calendar of events and speakers and providing leadership in an area dominated by rural labourers and petit-bourgeois elements. He was a Vice President of the North Norfolk Liberal Party and chaired Mundesley Liberal Association until the First World War when, in 1915, his pacifism led him to join the Independent Labour Party (ILP). He became a voluminous propagandist for the single tax between the wars, writing many articles and letters for the left-wing press,³⁴ and a string

of books in the 1930s which focused on the issue of over-population.³⁵ He seceded from the ILP in 1933 over their more militant stance following their disaffiliation from the Labour Party,³⁶ and though he stayed a Labour supporter for the rest of the 1930s, by the mid-1940s he claimed to have abandoned politics altogether. He published his autobiography in 1946 and died a few years later.³⁷

The recipient of Pearson's letter, Noel Buxton, later Lord Noel-Buxton, was also on the left of the Liberal Party. According to the great Liberal journalist, A. G. Gardiner, Buxton was 'not an orator, for he is too cautious in the use of words for that, and he is not a popular politician, for he has no touch of the demagogue in him'.³⁸ Prior to the Great War his main political interest was in foreign affairs, and in particular the Balkans. He founded the Balkans Committee and chaired it until 1913, acting as a special advocate for the demands of Macedonia, leading Gardiner to note: 'Parliament contains no one who brings to the consideration of international affairs a wider vision and a saner judgment than the man who for ten years has fought the battle of Balkan freedom with the single-minded devotion of a Knight-errant'.³⁹

He visited Bulgaria for the Balkan War Relief Fund, writing up his experiences in a book published in 1913, and he played an important part in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons. First elected for the Yorkshire fishing seat of Whitby, he won North Norfolk for the Liberals in January 1910 and held the seat until the election of December 1918, when he was defeated as a Liberal. He regained the seat in 1922 as a Labour candidate and held it until 1930, serving as Ramsay MacDonald's Minister of Agriculture in 1924 and again in 1929–30. He was elevated to the Lords in 1930 as Lord Noel-

Buxton and remained active in politics until his death in 1948.⁴⁰ He was succeeded in North Norfolk by his wife, Lucy, who lost the seat in 1931 and contested it unsuccessfully in 1935 before returning to Parliament in 1945 as one of the two Norwich Labour MPs. She stood down in 1950 and died in 1960.⁴¹

Their constituency was, on the face of it, unusual Liberal territory. One of five agricultural seats in Norfolk, it was amongst the safest Liberal seats in the south of England, remaining in the party's control even in 1886 when many similar constituencies fell to Liberal Unionism.⁴² Representation had been dominated by the Cozens-Hardy family of Holt, Methodist squires and connections of the Norwich Colmans,⁴³ whilst Buxton had distant family links to the area. Dominated by large estates dependent on grain production, the area had suffered badly during the great agricultural depression of the 1870s and 1880s. There were relatively few smallholders and large numbers of labourers, whilst some of the landlords, like the Marquis of Hastings of Melton Constable, were known to act in a hostile fashion towards Liberal voters.⁴⁴ Most of the towns were small, and many of those on the coast were replacing their former dependence on fishing with a growing holiday trade.⁴⁵ Non-conformity was relatively weak, though Primitive Methodism was practised by many of the labourers, whilst the Cozens-Hardy family promoted United Methodism from their chapel in Holt.⁴⁶ Although less representative of the type of seat which has dominated discussion of the Edwardian period, this constituency may have represented the future for Liberalism, and it retained its radical credentials into the 1920s, when it was won by Noel Buxton for Labour at every election.

Thus, although the letter from Pearson to Buxton did not

emanate from a traditional urban Liberal, it does provide a rare glimpse of the political views of a prominent rank-and-file activist. On its own it is insufficient to allow for radical conclusions, but it is suggestive of a number of possibilities. Looking back to the early debates about the social basis of support for New Liberal ideas, it tends to confirm the view that Liberal social policies were popular with educated, professional groups – what might be termed 'progressives'.⁴⁷ Pearson's involvement with an evolving state apparatus for health and welfare through his tuberculosis work helps to identify him closely with the type of newly positioned professional behind much of the social intervention apparent across the western world at the turn of the century. Yet in Pearson's case this progressivism was rooted in traditional Liberal concerns and issues. His position on votes for women and Ireland were consistent or a little ahead of most Liberals at the time, whilst his personal commitment to the views of Henry George reflected a coherent strand in radical Liberalism since at least the 1880s. Even on social issues his views reflected nineteenth-century values of equity and efficiency as much as the twentieth-century view of a new social politics, whilst in foreign affairs he shared the disapproval felt by many advanced Liberals, including Noel Buxton, for the policies of Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary.⁴⁸

The letter also shows that even a committed radical like Pearson could find a number of areas where he disagreed with the government on policy, priorities and direction. Yet these differences do not suggest any major break with the party, the contents of the document tending to confirm the view that 1912 was just a bad year for a Liberal government, experiencing a severe case of mid-term blues, rather than evidence of a 'strange death of Liberal England'.

Looking back to the early debates about the social basis of support for New Liberal ideas, it tends to confirm the view that Liberal social policies were popular with educated, professional groups – what might be termed 'progressives'.

On the other hand, Sydney Pearson was not typical of the rank-and-file activists who have captured the attention of historians of Liberal decline. He was a professional rather than a businessman, rural, not urban, and not a practicing Nonconformist – and thus it could be argued that his views were not representative. Yet he does offer a rare glimpse into the mind of the activist at this key moment, and his prominent position as a Vice President of the constituency party and chair of a small town committee point to him holding mainstream views broadly in line with those of other local activists. Overall, this snapshot points to greater support for the government in the constituencies than has been revealed by studies of elections or the press, suggesting it was indeed the war, and not pre-war government policies, which led Pearson and others like him to abandon the party to left and right.

~

[Typewritten draft copy of letter from Sydney Vere Pearson, M.B., M.R.C.P., Medical Superintendent, Mundesley Sanatorium, Norfolk and President Mundesley Liberal Association]

To Noel Buxton [in pencil]
March 21st 1912
My dear Buxton, –

I owe you an apology for not acknowledging your letter of the 28th of last month.⁴⁹ First let me answer your question with regard to the further distribution of some Insurance pamphlets. I have had the offer of some Cobden Club pamphlets “The Hungry Forties” for distribution.⁵⁰ I am going to see Wakelin⁵¹ in the course of the next few days on this matter, and, after seeing him, I will let you know what seems best with regard to distributing more Insurance Act pamphlets. I certainly think that the more knowledge which is spread of this Act, the better

for us. I think the temporary set-back Liberalism has received has been almost entirely due to the discreditable conduct of the Tories in this connection.⁵² But it is a relief to feel convinced that this will bring discredit to themselves alone in the long run.

I think at present, bye-elections are best avoided – even in Norfolk. I believe for at least as long as the rest of this year, hardly any Liberal seat can be considered really safe.⁵³

I hope the present stormy time will be weathered. Of course, I think any able bodied, willing worker should get a living wage for his work. But I certainly in principle do not approve of a minimum wage being fixed by statute for any industry. At the present minute, however, almost any [‘thing’ scored out and replaced by ‘temporary measure’] which can bring an end to the Coal Strike is legitimate.⁵⁴ I am, to a considerable extent, a follower of the economics of Henry George, and I believe that the taxation of land values would bring about a cessation of unrest in the industrial world. Of course, I recognise that this cannot be done at once, and that any steps in this direction must be undertaken somewhat [‘cautiously’ scored out and replaced by ‘gradually’]. I have an idea that the report which the [‘present’ scored out] commission now sitting to consider the relationship between Imperial and Local taxation will bring forward will have in it useful suggestions [‘presently’ scored out].⁵⁵ But the time is not quite ripe for them, nor, should I imagine, is their report wanted by the Government just at present.

The meeting on Monday night, at which Mr. Oglesby spoke, was not very full. It was a wet night. I think it is unfortunate that the Home Rule Bill had not appeared before these meetings,⁵⁶ and that the Coal Strike distracts attention from this subject. But, in any case, I

think the average Englishman’s interest in Irish Home Rule is somewhat limited, and not to be compared to that which it takes in the Insurance Act.⁵⁷ I am firmly of the conviction that the great majority of Englishmen now want Ireland to be granted Home Rule. There are only certain places, such as Liverpool and its neighbourhood, where keen interest and controversy on this subject remain.

I was glad to see that the Parliamentary Section of the Foreign Relations Committee had you for their Chairman the other day. I am afraid I am one of those Liberals who has rather weak faith in Sir Edward Grey.⁵⁸

Lest the sentiments expressed in the letter which you read in “The Nation”⁵⁹ were contrary to mine, I hasten to tell you that I have not written any letter which has appeared in “The Nation”. I do not see this paper. I take in, and read as a rule, so many dailies that I have not time to read also any weekly. The only letter I have written to the public press in recent months is one which did not see the light. It was a short letter to “The Daily Telegraph” attempting to show up the ignorance of Sir Ray Lancaster⁶⁰ about the Insurance Act, and about the task set the recently appointed Tuberculosis Committee. I think this Committee is an excellent one, and, naturally, I am much interested to hear their doings. Some of these reach me.⁶¹

When present troubles are over, undoubtedly we have not altogether finished yet with the stupid members of my own profession. It is very unfortunate that so many [amended to] prejudiced, conservative and often quite unfair obstacles should be placed in the way of this beneficent Act.

With regard to the Suffrage question: I am in favour of gradually getting to the condition of [‘establishing’ scored out] Universal Adult Suffrage. As a step towards this, I favour Woman Suffrage.⁶²

These differences do not suggest any major break with the party, the contents of the document tending to confirm the view that 1912 was just a bad year for a Liberal government, experiencing a severe case of mid-term blues, rather than evidence of a ‘strange death of Liberal England’.

[In pen] I apologise for the length of this [illegible].

I remain, Yours sincerely
SVP

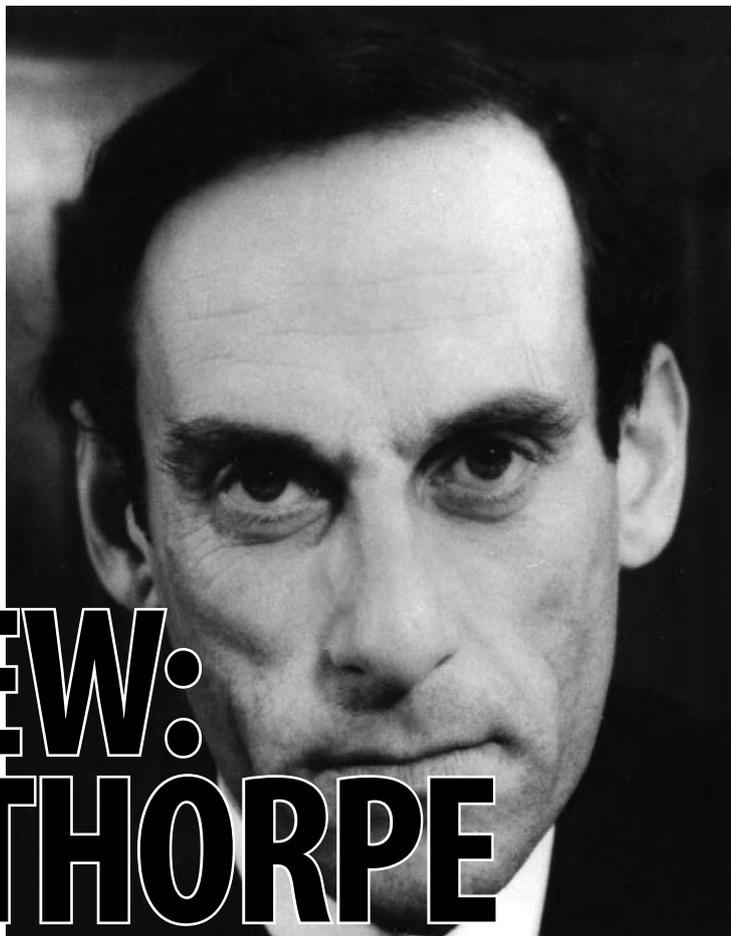
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Overall, this snapshot points to greater support for the government in the constituencies than has been revealed by studies of elections or the press.

- 1 George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London: Paladin Reprint 1970, first published 1935); Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections, 1885–1910* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1967); George L. Bernstein, *Liberalism and Liberal Politics in Edwardian England* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1986); *Journal of Liberal History* 54 (Spring 2007), special issue on 1906.
- 2 Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–1935*, (London: Fontana, 1966); Roy Douglas, *A History of the Liberal Party, 1895–1971* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971); Ian Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905–15* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); G.R. Searle, *The Liberal Party: Triumph and Disintegration, 1886–1929*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2nd ed. 2001).
- 3 Dangerfield, *Strange Death*; Pelling, *Social Geography*; Bernstein, *Liberalism*.
- 4 Keith Laybourn, 'The Rise of Labour and the Decline of Liberalism: The State of the Debate', *History*, 80 (1995), 209–26; Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910–1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); David Powell, *The Edwardian Crisis: Britain, 1901–1914*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996).
- 5 Wilson, *Downfall*; Douglas, *Liberal Party*; Packer, *Liberal Government*; Michael Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice, 1868–1918* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987); Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
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- 7 Roy Douglas, 'Labour in Decline, 1910–14' in K.D. Brown (ed.), *Essays in Anti-Labour History Responses to the Rise of Labour in Britain*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974); Bernstein, *Liberalism*; Chris Cook, 'Labour and the Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1906–14' in Alan Sked and Chris Cook (eds.), *Crisis and Controversy*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976), 38–65; Ian Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: The Land Issue and Party Politics in England, 1906–1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2001).
- 8 David Brooks, *The Age of Upheaval: Edwardian Politics, 1899–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 140.
- 9 Pat Thane, 'The Working Class and State Welfare in Britain, 1880–1914', *Historical Journal* 27 (1984), 878–97.
- 10 Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and Land*, 81–82.
- 11 See especially, P.F. Clarke, 'The End of Laissez-faire and the Politics of Cotton' *Historical Journal* 15 (1972), 493–512.
- 12 H.V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892–1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (London: Macmillan, 1972); Clarke, *New Liberalism*.
- 13 Clarke, 'End of Laissez-faire'; Bernstein, *Liberalism*.
- 14 G.R. Searle, 'The Edwardian Liberal Party and Business', *English Historical Review* 98 (1983), 28–60; Ian Packer, 'The Liberal Cave and the 1914 Budget', *English Historical Review* 111 (1996), 620–35. For local activists, Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism'.
- 15 Packer, *Liberal Government* for the most recent analysis of attitudes within Parliament to government policy.
- 16 Douglas, 'Labour in Decline'; P.F. Clarke, 'The Electoral Position of the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910–14' *English Historical Review* 90 (1975), 828–836; Laybourn, 'Rise of Labour'; Cook, 'Downfall of the Liberal Party'; George L. Bernstein, 'Liberals and the Progressive Alliance in the Constituencies, 1900–1914: Three Case Studies' *Historical Journal* 28 (1983), 617–640.
- 17 Bernstein, *Liberalism*.
- 18 Norman R. Eder, 'Medical Opinion and the First Year of National Health Insurance in Britain' *Albion* 11 (1979), 157–171.
- 19 Bernstein, *Liberalism*, 129–30; Thane, 'Working Class and State Welfare'.
- 20 Bernstein, *Liberalism*, 136–8; Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and Land*, 78; Powell *Edwardian Crisis*, 124–3.
- 21 Bernstein, *Liberalism*, 150–63; D.W. Bebbington, 'Nonconformity and Electoral Sociology, 1867–1918' *Historical Journal*, 27 (1984), 636–56; Stephen Koss, 'Wesleyanism and Empire' *Historical Journal* 18 (1975), 105–18; Asquith himself was a strong anti-suffragist, Powell, *Edwardian Crisis*, 83–4.
- 22 See Bernstein, *Liberalism*, pp.140–47 for the effects of this failure on the rank and file, but also D.W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel Politics, 1870–1914* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982).
- 23 Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and Land*, 96.
- 24 Cook, 'Downfall of the Liberal Party'.
- 25 Bernstein, *Liberalism*, ch.7.
- 26 Powell, *Edwardian Crisis*, 111–12.
- 27 Bernstein, *Liberalism*, 149–50; Cook, 'Downfall of the Liberal Party'.
- 28 For rank-and-file MPs in this period, see Searle, 'Liberal Party and Business'; Packer, 'Liberal Cave'. For local activists, Doyle, 'Urban Liberalism'; Doyle, 'Conflict of Interests'.
- 29 The letter is in a collection of four news cuttings books assembled by Sydney Vere Pearson during the course of his life. Though not entirely themed, vol. 4 is mostly medical and biographical material, focussing particularly on his books

- of the 1930s and 1940s; vol. 1 relates largely to his earlier life, mostly the period 1910–20; whilst vols. 2 and 3 are concerned mainly with his involvement with left-wing and land reform organisations during the later 1910s and the 1920s. The four volumes are in the possession of the author.
- 30 Typescript biography dated 10/1939, probably for publicity purposes whilst in the United States. Copy in Pearson Newscuttings vol. 4, 84.
- 31 Drawn from reviews of his autobiography. Pearson Newscuttings, vol. 4, 121–7.
- 32 Typescript biography, Pearson Newscuttings vol. 4, 84. This volume also contains numerous articles on TB.
- 33 Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and Land*, 30; A. Offer, *Property and Politics 1870–1914: Landownership, Law Ideology and Urban Development*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 34 Pearson Newscuttings vols. 1–4.
- 35 S. Vere Pearson, *The Growth and Distribution of Population* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935); S. Vere Pearson, *London's Overgrowth and the Causes of Swollen Towns* (London: C.W. Daniel and Co, 1939).
- 36 *Eastern Daily Press*, 5 May 1933 in Pearson Newscuttings vol. 4, 24.
- 37 S. Vere Pearson, *Men, Medicine and Myself* (London: Museum Press, 1946).
- 38 A.G.G. 'Mr. Noel Buxton: A Character Study', *Daily News* 26 April 1913.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 M. Stenton and S. Lees (Eds.), *Who's Who of British Members of Parliament: A Biographical Dictionary of the House of Commons Based on Annual Volumes of 'Dod's Parliamentary Companion' and Other Sources*. 4 Vols. (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976–1980): vol.3, 53–54.
- 41 Ibid., vol.4, 278–79.
- 42 Michael Kinnear, *The British Voter: An Atlas and Survey since 1885*. (London: Batsford, 1968).
- 43 D. Cannadine, *Aspects of Aristocracy: Grandeur and Decline in Modern Britain* (Yale University Press, 1994), 184–210.
- 44 Pam Barnes, *Norfolk Landowners since 1880* (Norwich, 1993); Pelling, *Social Geography*, 98–99.
- 45 J.K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000).
- 46 Kinnear, *British Voter*; C. Binfield, *So Down to Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity, 1780–1920* (London: Dent, 1978).
- 47 P.F. Clarke, 'The Progressive Movement in England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Ser., 24, (1974), 159–81.
- 48 Packer, *Liberal Government*, 28–36.
- 49 Unfortunately this letter is not available, so some references in Pearson's letter are a little opaque.
- 50 The Cobden Club, named in honour of the leading free trader of the mid-nineteenth century, remained a key propaganda tool of free traders into the twentieth century. During the Tariff Reform controversy of 1903–13, the Club produced a number of pamphlets, *The Hungry Forties* being particularly popular in rural areas. Anthony Howe, 'Free Trade and the Repeal of the Corn Laws', http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/item_single.php?item_id=16&item=history&PHPSESSID=32f74420ec33, accessed 16 July 2007; Alan Sykes, *Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903–13* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
- 51 Secretary, North Norfolk Liberals.
- 52 Eder, 'Medical Opinion'; E.H.H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: The Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880–1914; Trade and the Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 53 Within six weeks the party was plunged into a by-election in North-West Norfolk, following the death of Sir George White, the Norwich businessman who had held the seat since 1900. In a famous campaign by the single taxer E.G. Hemmerde, the seat was held easily, giving a further boost to Lloyd George's land campaign plans. For White, see Barry M. Doyle, 'Modernity or Morality? George White, Liberalism and the Nonconformist Conscience in Edwardian England' *Historical Research* 71 (1998), 324–40. For Hemmerde, Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and Land*, 81.
- 54 This appears to have been the standard position amongst Liberals at this time, see Bernstein, *Liberalism*, 136–8.
- 55 The committee was set up to review changes in local taxation since the Royal Commission on Local Taxation reported in 1901 but took on a particular brief to address the thorny issue of rating valuation. *Final Report of the Departmental Committee on Local Taxation* [CD 7315] (HMSO, 1914).
- 56 The Bill was introduced on 11 April 1912. Bernstein, *Liberalism*, 158.
- 57 Packer presents evidence from leading Liberals that this was the case, though Bernstein argues that, in 1912 at least, Home Rule was still popular in the provinces. Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and Land*, 79–80, Bernstein, *Liberalism*, 159. For sectarianism in Liverpool see P.J. Waller, *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool, 1868–1939* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1981).
- 58 For general radical disapproval of Edward Grey, Packer, *Liberal Government*, 31–32.
- 59 The *Nation* was a radical/new Liberal weekly newspaper founded in 1907, owned by the Rowntrees and edited by H.W. Massingham. Key New Liberal thinkers such as L.T. Hobhouse contributed extensively to its pages and also helped to inform Lloyd George's land enquiries of 1912–13. Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: An ideology of Social Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986 reprint with corrections); Peter Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land*, 81.
- 60 An eminent zoologist. A copy of the unpublished letter is in Pearson cuttings vol. 1.
- 61 The National Insurance Act allowed for sanatorium treatment for TB sufferers. See Linda Bryder, *Below the Magic Mountain A Social History of Tuberculosis in Twentieth-Century Britain*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- 62 This rather half-hearted response betrays Pearson's own weakness on this topic. While an undergraduate at Cambridge he had publicly opposed the awarding of degrees to women. Pearson Cuttings vol. 1.

Thirty years after being charged with conspiracy to murder Norman Scott, former Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe gives a rare interview and talks frankly about the party, his role in its history and much more besides. Interview by **York Membery**.



INTERVIEW: JEREMY THORPE

THE YEARS have clearly taken their toll on Jeremy Thorpe but few politicians have had to endure such trauma in their lives. Forced to step down as Liberal leader following the whirlwind that erupted following allegations made by a male model, he lost his seat at the 1979 election, and was subsequently struck down by Parkinson's Disease. While he is treated with due respect by the party establishment – Nick Clegg recently attended a low-key 79th birthday party at his London home – his reputation has never fully recovered from being charged with conspiracy to murder Norman Scott in 1978, even if he was subsequently acquitted.

Given his Parkinson's, it is not altogether surprising that he looks his age. Despite the disease robbing him of much of the power of his speech, however

– he speaks in short sentences in a barely audible whisper – it is soon apparent when we meet at his elegant Georgian house near Kensington Gardens in London that his brain remains sharp.

This once formidable campaigner, who led the Liberal Party to its best post-war result in the February 1974 election, when it polled an impressive six million votes, nearly 20 per cent of the poll, is a lifelong Liberal, despite being the son of John Henry Thorpe, and a maternal grandson of Sir John Norton-Griffiths, both of whom were Conservative MPs.

Educated at Eton and then at Trinity College, Oxford, where he studied law, he became Chairman of the Liberal Club, and subsequently President of the Oxford Union in 1951. 'I joined the Liberals because the other two parties were polarised between Left and Right,'

he says. 'I'd also been lucky enough to know both Megan Lloyd George – who was a huge influence on me – and her father David, of whom I was an enormous admirer. The Conservative Party never held any appeal for me.'

At Oxford he learnt the importance of public speaking and still believes that the Oxford Union is 'vital grounding for those wanting to go into politics'. Despite proving a natural on the platform, he goes on to reveal: 'I was terrified the first time I stood to make a speech at a Liberal Assembly.'

Adopted as Liberal candidate for the Conservative-held North Devon constituency in 1952, he managed to halve the Conservative majority at the 1955 general election, before going on to narrowly win the seat in the 1959 election, which saw Harold Macmillan's Tories win a near-



Jeremy Thorpe in 2008 (photos; York Member)

landslide. 'I captured the seat thanks in part to its Liberal tradition', he says modestly although in truth to win in 1959 was just as much a tribute to Thorpe's outstanding campaigning skills. The 1950s saw the Liberal Party reach a nadir in its fortunes, with the Conservative and Labour parties hogging the central ground in politics, and as a result many called into question the Liberals' continuing existence. And with just a handful of MPs, Thorpe readily admits: 'We came very close to extinction during the decade.'

While the 1960s saw the Liberals triumph at the Orpington by-election, and go on to win over three million votes in 1964, almost double the 1959 figure, under Jo Grimond's leadership, the decade ultimately proved disappointing – even if from a personal point of view, it saw Thorpe make rapid progress through the party ranks, in 1965 becoming Party Treasurer and, following Grimond's resignation in 1967, party leader, with the support of six of the twelve Liberal MPs.

Somewhat surprisingly, Thorpe takes what could be interpreted as a bit of a swipe at Grimond (Liberal leader 1956–67), the inspirational figure who is widely credited with helping to revive the Liberals' post-war fortunes. 'He was a great ideas man,' says Thorpe. 'But the organisation was a shambles when I took over the party – and you know, I played a part in just about every by-election campaign that we won in the sixties and early seventies.'

However, for all Thorpe's youthful dynamism, and assorted Edwardian suits, waistcoats and trilby hats, which undoubtedly raised his public profile, the 1970 general election proved a disaster for the party. Its number of MPs slumped from thirteen to six, resulting in opponents joking that 'the entire parliamentary party could fit into a taxi'. It was a grim time, admits Thorpe.

'The party nearly died in 1970', he says. 'It was a close run thing. And if I hadn't survived as an MP – my majority had been slashed – I really don't know if there would still be a Liberal Party.' What would he have done if he had lost his seat? 'Perhaps gone into television,' he muses.

As it happens, Thorpe survived, if by the narrowest of margins, and the next three years saw him lead the party to a string of by-election victories at Rochdale, Sutton & Cheam, Ripon, the Isle of Ely, and Berwick. Those successes paved the way for his moment of glory: the general election triumph of February 1974, when he won the party six million votes (19.3 per cent of the vote) even if it only ended up with a paltry fourteen seats.

Following the inconclusive February 1974 general election, which produced a hung parliament, Heath even invited Thorpe to join a Conservative-led coalition government, offering him a position in the Cabinet as Home Secretary, in a desperate bid to stay in power. Tempting though the offer must have been, Thorpe turned it down, knowing that to accept would have torn the party apart. 'It was a pointless exercise anyway because even with our support Heath wouldn't have had a parliamentary majority', observes Thorpe.

There had always been rumours about Thorpe's sexuality and in 1975, Norman Scott, who claimed that he had had a homosexual affair with him, was confronted by Andrew Newton, a former airline pilot, who shot and killed the dog Scott was walking and then allegedly pointed the gun at Scott himself. The subsequent scandal engulfed Thorpe and forced him to step down as leader in 1976. His political career was effectively over and three years later he lost his seat at the 1979 election, a week before his trial.

For all his personal tribulations, Thorpe has continued to

take a keen interest in the Liberal Party and, following its merger with the SDP in 1988, the Liberal Democrats – and is clearly buoyed by the party's strong showing in this year's local elections, when it won more votes than the Labour Party. So how does he think the party and its leader Nick Clegg are faring? 'The party is much stronger now than when I was leader,' he says, despite its failure to stem the Tory surge in Crewe & Nantwich which resulted in a headline-grabbing Conservative by-election win, albeit the party's first for twenty-five years. 'It's better organised. It has more MPs and more councillors. And I think Nick's doing well ... although it takes a bit of time to settle into the job.'

What of the recent storm in a teacup when Clegg admitted during an interview that he'd had 'less than thirty' sexual partners? 'It will soon be forgotten,' he says with a shrug, obviously regarding it as a trivial matter. What would Thorpe advise the party's young leader if he is asked something similarly risqué again? 'Just be tough – and if he doesn't particularly want to answer something, ask himself "Do I really want to answer this question?"', whispers Thorpe.

He readily admits to being unhappy about the way the party treated Charles Kennedy, who like him, was forced to step down as leader. 'I think he was treated very badly,' says Thorpe. 'Drunkenness is not a permanent disability. It can be treated.'

Despite David Cameron and the Tories' current double-digit lead in the polls over Labour, and their Crewe triumph, Thorpe believes 'a political realignment of the "left" is still very much on the cards' in the years ahead. 'The Labour Party is increasingly becoming a two-strand party – of socialists and social democrats,' he says, 'while the Tories are similarly divided – between "liberals" and the more hardline, right-wing Tories.

There's everything to play for, in my opinion.'

If the Lib Dems were indeed to hold the balance of power after the next election, what advice would Thorpe have for his successor in the ensuing negotiations? 'We've simply got to take a tougher approach to negotiating – something I think we could have done in the days of the Lib-Lab Pact [1977–78] too,' says Thorpe. 'But with so many more seats, today's party is much better placed to take a more robust approach and negotiate that bit harder on electoral reform among other things.'

It is clear that Thorpe looks back sentimentally on his time as Liberal leader (even if it saw the death of his first wife Caroline in a car crash) – at least until the Norman Scott affair blew up and sent his career crashing down to earth. 'I enjoyed leading the party enormously and if I could have carried on doing so I would have done but it just wasn't possible,' he says quietly, his voice trailing off.

I am about to raise the Scott affair when, perhaps reading my mind, he pre-empts me. 'Of course, you know Norman Scott has been discredited,' he says before adding quietly: 'Although the affair had a very serious effect on my career ...' Not to mention his health. For Thorpe goes on to suggest that 'the terrible stress and strain' of those dark days helped trigger the onset of his Parkinson's Disease.

The old politician is clearly tiring and it seems an appropriate time to wrap up our interview. As we walk slowly down the stairs he asks if there is anything else I'd like to ask. What does he think about Robert Mugabe, I say, knowing he's always taken a keen interest in African affairs? 'I think he is a ghastly, wicked man,' whispers Thorpe. 'He should be assassinated.' 'Sorry?', I ask, seeking clarification. 'He should be assassinated,' he reiterates – something which is not Liberal Democrat policy as far as

So what is Thorpe proudest of, I ask? 'Helping the party win six million votes – and putting us back on the electoral map'.

I'm aware, although it's a view that many people of all political shades probably secretly share.

And what about the European Union, I ask? Has he changed his views in any way? 'I think Europe has grown too powerful,' says Thorpe to my surprise, for he played a prominent role in the pro-Europe campaign in the 1975 referendum to decide whether Britain should stay in the EEC. And perhaps too unaccountable as well? He nods in agreement.

So what is Thorpe proudest of, I ask? 'Helping the party win six million votes – and putting us back on the electoral map', he says with just the slightest hesitation – and the glimmer of a smile. But does he ever think that he and his accomplishments have, to an unfair extent, perhaps been written out of the party's history as a result of the Norman Scott affair, I ask as sensitively as possible? He appears not to hear me. I'm about to repeat the question when I catch his eye and sense that he's heard me but would simply prefer not to answer. And given his fragile state of health, now is clearly not the time for a Paxo-style grilling. So instead I thank him for his time, shake his frail hand and make my way out.

Few politicians in modern British political history can have been condemned to such a harsh fate as Thorpe: to lose a wife, and then suffer disgrace, political ignominy and the slow living death that is Parkinson's. Furthermore, he will almost certainly never be accorded the late-life accolade of a peerage or knighthood like so many of his peers. Perhaps posterity will treat this most intriguing if tragic of political figures, who in his heyday was perhaps the most popular party leader and brilliant campaigner in the land, more kindly.

York Membery is a journalist and a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

THE 1908 HASTINGS

Hastings Bye-Election.

A MEETING in support of
Mr. R. V.

HARCOURT

THE
Liberal and Free Trade Candidate,

After the 1867 Franchise Act, and the emergence of mass politics, by-elections became a frequent source of analysis and – with the support of the popular press – a subject of interest even

approaching that of major sporting events. David Butler makes this point in his study of by-elections (essentially post-1918) to emphasise the national factor: ‘there was nothing to compete with

by-elections as indicators of how the political tide was flowing’.¹ Equally interestingly, Jaime Reynolds has referred, in this *Journal*, to the ‘Spectacular Victories’ achieved in more modern

times, after 1958, by sizeable swings in the region of ten to twenty per cent to the Liberals, whilst ‘the opponents’ [vote share] plunges dramatically’.² **Ian Ivatt** analyses the Hastings by-election of 1908.

INGS BY-ELECTION

HISTORIANS OF Edwardian politics have spent much time analysing the dry bones of by-elections in their period, though they have given more attention to those that cast light on the relative strengths of the Liberal and Labour Parties than to those that point to the relative fortunes of Liberals and Unionists. One of the latter was the by-election at Hastings on 3 March 1908, the first such contest to be fought since the introduction of the Liberal government's 1908 legislative programme.

The ancient town of Hastings, one of Henry Pelling's 'fashionable watering places', and a non-industrialised borough³ does not fit neatly with the general trend in Edwardian politics, having fallen to the Liberals in 1900 and then been won by the Unionists, against the flow, amidst the landslide Liberal victory in 1906. Hastings itself represented a social mixture of those living off their own means, those engaged in the hotel trade and ordinary working men, these last invariably involved in the building and property repair sectors. Electorally, the parliamentary borough had had mixed fortunes since 1885, the seat being shared between the Unionists and Liberals. Liberals had the personal allure of the influential Lord Brassey to aid them, a member of the Hastings elite noted for his local activities and generosity.⁴

The 1908 by-election saw a lower turnout than at the

previous (1906) election and at the subsequent 1910 elections, but at 91.6 per cent it was quite in keeping with the generally high turnouts at Edwardian elections, and certainly high enough to make the result of psephological interest. In his study of regional political consciousness, Trevor Hopper records policy quarrels between the Hastings 'Labourists and the Liberalists', following, in part, a national trend, although no Labour candidate entered the fray.⁵ Not so unexpectedly, Hastings retained its Unionist majority in 1908, at an enhanced level, for a number of reasons, and these are the subject of this article.

It is important to remember that whilst by-elections reflect public opinion at the time, either for or against the government of the day, it would be wrong to assume that any such local results would, multiplied many times over all constituencies, be representative of a nationwide outcome. Voting behaviour is simply not that consistent. Undoubtedly, national considerations play a part, and in the Hastings case none more so than the vexed question of Free Trade or Tariff Reform. Unionist hopes were buoyed up by the theory that, had the case for Tariff Reform been promoted fully at the South Leeds by-election only a month before, the seat might have gone the Unionist way. Unusually, this had been a three-cornered fight with Labour included, and the Liberals retained the seat by a mere whisker, at 41.7 per cent of the total poll, whilst the

Unionists achieved 38.9 per cent, and the Labour candidate 19.4 per cent. However, at Hastings, there were other factors at work, which I shall consider later.

Historically, Liberal strength in the county of Sussex had always been weak, with the previously-mentioned Hastings seat as the sole victory in 1900, followed by an unexpected Liberal win at the nearby Rye by-election in 1903. The 1906 general election, with its huge swing away from Unionism to Liberalism, changed all that. Liberal victories took place at East Grinstead, Eastbourne and the two Brighton seats. Thus, while the Liberals held one solitary seat in 1900, gaining that of the by-election victory at Rye⁶ in 1903, in 1906 they gained four new seats, holding half of the possible total of eight (Rye, along with Hastings, returning to the Unionist fold in 1906). With both seats at Portsmouth also gained in 1906, plus the Isle of Wight, the transformation in Liberal representation on this part of the south coast looked almost miraculous.

Liberal aspirations after 1906 were, in the main, blunted by a more unified Conservative/Unionist group, greatly buoyed up by their successes in the November 1906 municipal elections, and they were separately thwarted by the connivance of Unionist members of the Commons in the Lords' non-acceptance of the government's flagship bills on education and licensing. Furthermore, at least outside Parliament, there was

The by-election at Hastings on 3 March 1908 was the first such contest to be fought since the introduction of the Liberal government's 1908 legislative programme.

THE 1908 HASTINGS BY-ELECTION

little enthusiasm for abolishing the plural voting system – always an arguably unhelpful factor in Liberal electoral calculations.

A new underlying strength, in the shape of a vigorous approach to Tariff Reform, at least by early 1908, was beginning to be evident in the Unionist ranks. Conversely, the Liberals hoped for successful new legislation that year, especially pertaining to licensing and education. Furthermore, as Blewett records, when referring to the national liquor trade interest, which campaigned wrathfully and indefatigably against Liberal-imposed licensing changes, mobilisation of the brewery interests undoubtedly aided the Unionist electoral recovery in 1908. Hastings had no breweries but Brighton, a few miles along the coastline to the west, did. Blewett also comments on opposition to the Liberals' Licensing Bill being 'formidable and skilfully organised' and notes how it could 'doubtless cause the loss of many votes, even seats to the [Liberal] government'.⁷ This strength was to grow throughout the year and was reflected in by-elections. In January 1908, the Mid Devon seat at Ashburton, Liberal since 1885, fell to the jubilant Unionists, their man, Morrison-Bell, being a dedicated Tariff Reformer. Eve, the resigning Liberal, who was appointed to the High Court, had held the seat since January 1904, with a near-59 per cent share of the poll. Now the Unionist share grew by ten per cent, with the Liberal tally falling away by the same margin.⁸

In March 1908, the Liberals suffered a further blow, losing Peckham, which had been gained by Clarke for the Liberals in 1906. This was a seat the Unionists would always have expected to retain, but a huge swing to the Liberals of in excess of twenty per cent in the landslide year of 1906 had wrested it from their grasp; the 1906 turnout had been well up on 1900, and the eligible electorate was larger. In

the subsequent by-election, the tables were turned, with a return swing to the Unionists of almost virtual parity.

In the same month, Hastings was involved in a similar contest, although here, as already stated, in 1906 the seat had been won by the Unionists, much against the run of play. Nevertheless, local Liberals considered their chances good in what was, effectively, a marginal borough seat. The Brassey family interest still counted for something, and the 1906 Unionist majority was, after all, only 413 votes. Hastings was undoubtedly 'never an obscure town', as was implied in one local newspaper;⁹ yet neither was it terribly prosperous. There were two Liberal clubs in or around the town, so on the surface there was some semblance of a local Liberal organisation.

Hastings Liberals were, as they vociferously claimed, quite unprepared for the sudden resignation on 'health grounds' of the sitting Unionist, Harvey Du Cros, a descendent of a notable Huguenot family. Hastings Unionists speedily adopted his son Arthur, a local man (albeit born in Dublin in 1871), as their candidate. Du Cros's earlier connections with the candidature of Bow & Bromley were tidily relinquished. The Liberals had no one ready and waiting in the wings; no local candidates were forthcoming, meaning that the net had to be cast further afield to attract Sir Robert Vernon Harcourt (1878–1962), son of the late Sir William Harcourt, from London. One possible personal reason for Harcourt's candidature could have been his relative, Susan Harcourt, whose life had been commemorated by a brass plaque in the elaborate Hastings Gothic church of Holy Trinity, built between 1851 and 1859. Susan apparently entertained a great many people from Nuneham, the Harcourt family seat in Oxfordshire.¹⁰

Save for their shared privileged upbringing, these sons of

Local Liberals considered their chances good in what was, effectively, a marginal borough seat.

famous figures could not have been more different. Arthur Du Cros, an avid Tariff Reformer, was reported in the local Hastings press as expressing hopes that 'fiscal reform and preference in practical effect would be secured for the benefit of this country'. He optimistically viewed the suggested discord between Mr Chamberlain and Mr Balfour 'as only apparent – the men were [in reality] together'.¹¹ Du Cros pointedly asserted at meetings that the 'free import system had hopelessly broken down', a view he felt was evidenced by his business life, being the managing director of Dunlop Pneumatic Tyres, and a director of other rubber companies both in England and abroad. In his election meetings and literature, he proposed that increased expenditure on old age pensions could be funded by a change to tariffs, underlined by the appealing slogan, 'A vote for tariff reform is a vote for the Briton'.¹²

Arthur Philip Du Cros, a married man with two girls and a boy, held first-class Conservative electoral assets. He had won no less than thirteen amateur cycling championships, successfully competing in both France and Germany. He was an expert motorist and had reportedly driven over 100,000 miles throughout Europe, besides being a keen shot with a rifle. Most importantly, he owned a property at St Leonards-on-Sea, adjacent to Hastings, and was often seen on the local golf links. Local press articles referred to Du Cros as a man 'endowed with a unique experience, combined with youth and energy'. Moreover, he had seen service in the Army both before and during the South African War. He was commissioned into the Warwickshire Regiment, taking part in General Roberts' general advance and in several engagements. He particularly interested himself in musketry, having obtained the necessary certificates of proficiency,

including the title of ‘Instructor to the Battalion’.¹³ In brief, he was described in the region’s newspaper as ‘an ideal candidate of the type which the country particularly needs at this important juncture’.¹⁴

Sir Robert Harcourt, by comparison, did not have such a history of ‘derring-do’. In his boyhood, his family had spent time with the Roseberys, and correspondence from that time reveals ‘affectionate and playful allusions’¹⁵ between the two groups. As a sixteen-year-old, he had listened, in the House of Commons, with his half-brother Lewis (LouLou) Harcourt, to their father’s 1894 Budget speech, including its controversial Death Duty clauses.¹⁶ He was Cambridge-educated and had spent some time in the East End of London, observing social conditions. From 1900, he spent five years in the diplomatic section of the Foreign Office. He resigned to join the staff of the progressive newspaper, *The Tribune*, assuming the twin roles of parliamentary correspondent and drama critic. He was the author of several plays.¹⁷ During the Hastings campaign, he was seemingly silent over the question of Ireland. He was obliged to suffer jeers of ‘Liberal carpet-bagger’¹⁸ from fringe Unionist elements, who ignored his marked Liberal pedigree.

Harcourt’s policy, depicted on his election posters, was to emphasise the success of Free Trade (some Liberals believed Tariff Reform was a system that ground out millionaires at one end and paupers at the other), since 1908 was already starting to look as if it would be a year of strong economic performance. His radical preferences reflected a desire to get both the reintroduced Education Bill and the Licensing Bill through Parliament, although his priority argument, much to Unionist annoyance, was to give his support to the case for broadening the basis of taxation, the issue of

Death Duties being quickly condemned by Du Cros as taxation beyond the grave.

The electoral battle swiftly moved into what would be a short and sharp contest. Already, in the run-up to the writ for the by-elections and beyond, Liberal rallies and gatherings in East Sussex had tended to debate educational reform, army economies and old age pensions. The Unionists, especially in nearby Lewes, favoured discussions on the merits of Tariff Reform, with a supportive selection of letters in the countywide press such as the *Uckfield Weekly* and the *West Sussex County Times and Standard* pointing to the special local circumstances of the hop industry.

Lewes, an ever-popular political venue, was chosen by the Liberals for a Mid Sussex pre-election rally. The Under-Secretary for War, the Earl of Portsmouth, was present, as was Sussex-based Sydney Buxton, the Postmaster-General. The proceedings focused upon the merits of the Liberal Education Bill, the new licensing provisions (Harcourt’s father, Sir William, had been a formidable temperance reformer), support for the new Territorial Army scheme and claims of a strong Navy. The two latter issues were of special significance to those voters on or near the Channel coast, with their fears of invasion. The main attack on the Unionist Tariff Reform idea centred upon the Liberal ditty, ‘Stamp, stamp, stamp upon Protection’, by courtesy of the invited Liberal choir, conducted by a Mr Sole. The Unionist campaign concentrated on countering Liberal assertions that Tariff Reform meant taxes on food, a potentially more serious contribution!¹⁹

Unfortunately for the Liberals, some London suffragettes arrived in Hastings to sully the campaign by urging voters *not* to vote Liberal. Local opinion in the drink trade steadily hardened, following the national trend, with anti-Licensing Bill

meetings throughout the county quickly emerging to counter effectively any Nonconformist support for the measure. Overall, the real grievance felt by Hastings Liberals was the speed with which the Unionists adopted their candidate and started campaigning. The Liberal part-time agent described it as being ‘like a bolt out of the blue’, yet Liberal attempts to gain potential votes by suggesting an ungentlemanly ‘springing’ of the contest upon them appear, when the votes were counted, to have been less than fruitful.²⁰

Meanwhile, the Tariff Reform League, Hastings Branch, was making headway in the harbour quarter (the subject of some exquisite paintings by Turner) by showing local fishermen the contrast between French tax dues imposed upon English fish and Britain’s Free Trade policy. At one point, a crowd of boys made a nuisance of themselves by throwing stones from the beach on to the iron roof of the Fish Packing Shed, effecting considerable disruption at one meeting. Also, there were local newspaper reports of junior Conservatives in a bout of fisticuffs (apparently roused by the chant of ‘Harcourt, Harcourt’) with radical members of Hastings Baptist Chapel, with the ‘Progressives’ supposedly attempting to seize the Conservative Association’s election banner! In any event, the capture failed but one of the banner poles was broken in the mêlée. ‘Heads were punched, and a President of one of the district Conservative Associations was roughly mauled, having his shirt front torn out and his umbrella smashed.’²¹

As already intimated by Trevor Hopper, all was not well between the Hastings Liberal and Radical groups, local press reports indicating that the Liberal Party ‘had no more sympathy with the cause of Labour than the Tories had’. The ongoing issue of labour representation and the increasing socialist tendencies of some trade unionists

Harcourt’s policy, depicted on his election posters, was to emphasise the success of Free Trade (some Liberals believed Tariff Reform was a system that ground out millionaires at one end and paupers at the other).

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were to cause disagreements, if not actual lost Liberal votes. The *Hastings and St Leonards Weekly Mail and Times*, published each Saturday, endeavoured to redress the balance by portraying the Liberals as a caring party for working men, having a column in their weekly edition entitled 'Work and Wages' to report on such items as work for the unemployed, rates of pay, the Distress Committee and the provision of free school meals. This last issue entailed a petition by 'Hastings Townsmen [to] call upon the Town Council to make Application [under the School Meals Act] for the Provision of Meals'. The other local newspaper, the *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, ran separate articles under the heading of 'hungry children', and this publicity eventually led to a grant of £100 from Hastings Council. The Social Democratic Party (the name adopted by the Social Democratic Federation in 1907) managed to garner the accolades for this, describing their success as down to the efforts of their 'little band of socialists'. Once more, there was no specific credit for local Hastings Liberals. The Hastings Wesleyan Minister, the Rev. T. Jamieson, moreover, in the light of a weakened local Trades Council, expressed the standard radical sentiment that 'The great gulf between the rich men and the poor men was a disgrace and something which wanted setting right'.²² Superficially, elements of radicalism now appeared to be in place in a frenetic by-election with a host of meetings and well-known speakers in attendance.

Polling day itself was drab and grey; it rained in the evening. These were the weather conditions the Liberals feared most, since some supporters might prefer to stay at home after working all day. Amidst the anticipated bustle and excitement, the Liberals pointed to the extensive use of cars and wagons (supplied by Du Cros with his extensive motoring industry connections) to convey

Unionist voters, as against the considerably meagre Liberal transport fleet. As *The Times* put it,²³ there was 'an imposing procession of Unionist motor cars' and the 'Liberals were not so well equipped in this respect'. Nevertheless, one supportive Member of Parliament brought some Liberal voters all the way from Buckinghamshire in his motor car.

Even up to polling day, local Tariff Reformers paraded a donkey in the streets as an electoral ploy, with boards bearing an intended insult, 'My brothers and sisters vote for Free Trade'. County press reports emphasised the fact that there were 'too many Conservatives and Tariff Reformers in the town'. The Liberal equestrian response centred on a local carrier's cart whose horse bore 'on each flank a card saying – vote for Harcourt and no tax on my oats'.²⁴

The electorate was slightly lower than in 1906 – 8,707 as compared to 8,758, out of a total population of 61,145 as recorded in the 1911 census, as opposed to 65,545 recorded in the 1901 census. The result of the by-election of 3 March 1908 dashed Liberal hopes; their share of the vote declined to 43.6 per cent (from 47.5 per cent in 1906), the lowest proportion since before 1885. In terms of actual votes, the Liberal total fell by 458 and the Unionist tally rose by 147. According to press articles, everyone was relieved that the short, sharp, contest was over; in general it was accepted as a 'courteous and straightforward fight without rancour',²⁵ thus turning a blind eye to the underlying Lib-Lab local differences. Du Cros complimented Harcourt's fight, after the count, as 'strenuous and straightforward'.²⁶

Liberals, reluctantly accepting the cost of little or no preparation, sought reassuring reasons for failure. True, the outvoter or plural voter system²⁷ had worked against them, with duplicate votes, invariably considered Unionist, being garnered from residents in

other part of Sussex, Hampshire, Kent, and even Brussels in Belgium. One such vote was secured from a voter just about to board a ship. Suffragettes were believed to have added to Liberal misery. The unsuccessful Liberal candidate, Harcourt, contended that the defeat could be attributed to Liberal abstentions at the poll; unfavourable local conditions; an inadequate and unprepared local organisation; neglect of registration procedure, resulting in a loss of lodger votes, usually regarded as mostly Liberal; and the heavy odds of competing against an entrenched local man. In particular, he voiced his belief that 'the Licensing Bill of 1908 had a damaging effect upon Liberal prospects'.²⁸ Both the *Sussex Express*, a weekly Saturday countywide edition, and *The Times*²⁹ seemed to be in agreement that the Unionist victory was 'first and foremost [due] to Tariff Reform and particularly to the colonial preference side of the question.' Du Cros considered the election was won on these grounds before the Licensing Bill had any impact. Harcourt, as indicated, tended to suggest the importance of these issues in the reverse order. Either view represents an interesting cross-section of how opinion was moving, at least in the east of Sussex, between 1906 and the end of 1909.

Selecting a candidate from London rather than locally appears to have been a contributing factor to Liberal defeat. Harcourt's stress on the Licensing Bill was a definite drawback to the Edwardian working man, frustrated by the alcohol ban in Liberal clubs, however much it pleased Nonconformists. The Du Cros family were, additionally, well known for their largesse in the borough, funding secondary-school treats, giving blankets to the poor and providing jobs for local workmen. This undoubtedly provided electoral appeal for lower income voters. In the election campaign itself, Du Cros had his motor vehicle

Both the *Sussex Express* and *The Times* seemed to be in agreement that the Unionist victory was 'first and foremost [due] to Tariff Reform and particularly to the colonial preference side of the question.'

decked out in the chosen Unionist colours of blue and white, with his three children holding placards, marked 'Vote for our Daddy' – all practical yet emotive stuff. The Unionist strategy of using motor cars helped their cause tremendously. The incorrect printing of green on the Liberal election posters, by an out-of-town printer, may also have affected morale.³⁰

Quite possibly, the most immediate reasons for the Liberal failure were the suddenness of the contest and the effects of plural voting (highlighted by Jon Lawrence's studies, for example). Liberals believed, not without some justification, that the duplication of votes by 'outsiders' was hugely telling.

Just to rub salt in the wound, in the Manchester North West by-election of April 1908, caused by Winston Churchill's seeking re-election as a Cabinet member, the Unionists upset a 1906 Liberal majority of over 1,200 votes to capture the seat by a margin of 429 votes.³¹ The key question arose – did these by-election defeats reflect an inevitable, even irreversible, drift away from the Liberal Party by the electors after the peak of success in 1906? Were they thus rejecting the New Liberalism? Were the losses likely to increase and become serious enough to cast doubt over a continuation of Liberal government after the next general election? As Peter Rowland observes, the entire parliamentary session (including by-elections) of 1908 'had witnessed a growing sense of frustration, impatience and bewilderment'.³² In the event, the by-elections were significant, but not sufficient to deprive the Liberals of office in the general elections of 1910.

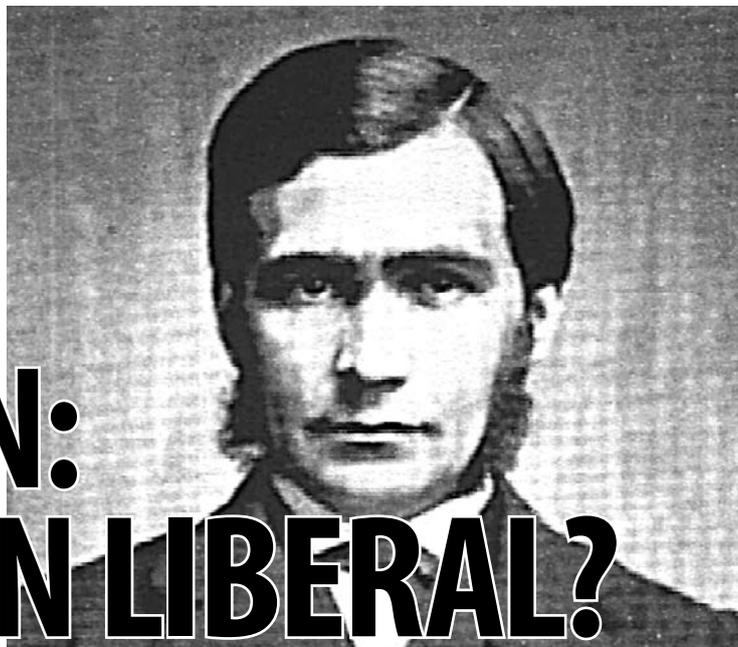
Ian Ivatt is now about to submit his doctoral thesis to the Open University, entitled 'The Fortunes of the Liberal Party in Sussex, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, 1900–1914'. He lives in Steyning, West Sussex, is a member of the Royal Historical

Quite possibly, the most immediate reasons for the Liberal failure were the suddenness of the contest and the effects of plural voting.

Society and the Historical Association, and is Chairman of the Steyning History Society.

- 1 C. Cook & J. Ramsden (eds.), *By-elections in British Politics* (London: Macmillan Press, 1973) – see the introduction by David Butler, pp.1–2.
- 2 Jaime Reynolds, 'Spectacular Victories', *Journal of Liberal History* 44 (Autumn 2004, pp. 5–9).
- 3 Hastings and adjacent Fairlight were the favoured retreats of some of the Pre-Raphaelite painters of the previous century; one of them, Rossetti, married Elizabeth Siddal at St Clements Church, Hastings in May 1860.
- 4 Henry Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885–1910* (London: Macmillan Press, 1967), p. 50.
- 5 Trevor Hopper, *Transformation of Political Consciousness of South East England 1880–1914*, PhD Thesis, University of Brighton, 1997, p. 37. Additionally, Hopper records 'an extremely bitter and muddled phase in the labour movement in Hastings [1900–10]' p. 39.
- 6 As Henry Pelling suggests in his *Social Geography* (p. 75), the Rye area was weaker in Conservatism essentially due to a higher level of Nonconformity in this Sussex East division. The Unionist candidate E. Boyle, conceivably lost votes due to his dogmatic stand over Church of England ritualism.
- 7 Neil Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People, the General Elections 1910* (London: Macmillan Press, 1972), p. 50.
- 8 Electoral results – see F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885–1918* (London: Macmillan Press, 1974), p. 255.
- 9 *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 8 February 1908.
- 10 Arthur Mee, *The Kings England – Sussex* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937 (original), reprint 1978), p. 101.
- 11 *Hastings & St. Leonards Observer*, 29 February 1908. Earlier, following the 'Valentine' letters exchange of February 1906, Chamberlain was effectively to demand that Balfour commit the Unionists more fully to Tariff Reform. Richard Rempel, *Unionists Divided*, (Newton Abbot, Devon: David & Charles, 1972), p. 166.
- 12 For the full election address, see the reproduced summary pamphlet contained in this article.
- 13 *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 29 February 1908.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 Patrick Jackson, *Harcourt and Son* (New Jersey (USA): Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), p. 93.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 227.
- 17 *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 29 February 1908.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Sussex Express*, 7 March 1908.
- 20 *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 29 February 1908.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 All extracts from Trevor Hopper's Thesis, pp. 39, 43 and 44 (as per *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 8 February 1908.
- 23 *The Times*, 4 March 1908.
- 24 *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 29 February 1908.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 7 March 1908.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 According to Jon Lawrence in *Speaking for the People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 'some towns [were] dominated by outsiders ... such as Croydon or fashionable resorts such as Hastings, Brighton, and Bath'. On p. 243, the footnote also adds that the local population in Hastings in around 1911 was 43 per cent, thus meaning they were in a minority of the whole, i.e. outsiders made up the balance of 57 per cent.
- 28 *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 29 February 1908, and 7 March 1908. As regards the 'suddenness' of the by-election claims, Unionists countered by indicating that the Liberals knew of Harvey Du Cros's pending retirement and that his son, Arthur, would be adopted in his place, in mid-1907.
- 29 *Sussex Express*, 15 February 1908, 22 February 1908 and 7 March 1908 editions; *The Times*, 4 March 1908.
- 30 *Hastings & St Leonards Observer*, 29 February 1908.
- 31 F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 151.
- 32 Peter Rowland, *The Last Liberal Governments, The Promised Land, 1905–1910* (London: Barrie & Rockliff, 1968), pp. 213ff.

The Liberal Democrat History Group's 'Great Liberals' contest of last year – won by John Stuart Mill – continues to arouse controversy. Dr Philip MacDougall argues the case for a Liberal who should have won.



T. H. GREEN: FORGOTTEN LIBERAL?

THOMAS HILL Green, in the 2007 search for the greatest British Liberal in history (see *Journal of Liberal History* issues 55, 56 and 57), received a mere one first preference vote and was subsequently eliminated in the third round. Being the person who, by adding his name to the ballot paper, cast that single first preference vote, I am perplexed by his having received such little recognition in that particular election. T. H. Green outshines them all. He is not only the man to whom the modern-day Liberal Democrats owes its continued existence, but also provides the *raison d'être* for that existence.

Thomas Hill Green, whose brief life ended in 1882, fully involved himself in the political issues of the day, was an active member of the Liberal Party, and an elected member of Oxford town council, the first don to serve the citizenry as well as the university. Among his particular policy concerns were land reform, regulation of labour, education and temperance. Specifically, he favoured security of land tenancy for the Irish smallholders and the extension of compulsory state education, together with a widening

of opportunities for those who wished to enter higher education. These, however, are not my reasons for the claim that he was the greatest British Liberal in history, merely confirmation of his having the additional and useful credential of active membership of the party.

It is the writings of T. H. Green that are important. Through his various publications and ability to explain his ideas to a live audience, he transformed the Liberal Party. At the core of his thinking was the need to ensure that all individuals would be guaranteed a right of freedom. He considered freedom to be part of a clearly accepted common good that was at the heart of all societies. In doing so, however, Green recognised that while freedom was an important part of liberalism, it could not be achieved without the state establishing the necessary parameters that would allow everyone the opportunity of enjoying the same level of freedom. This, in particular, is where Green differs from classical liberalism, with its emphasis on a minimal state and *laissez-faire* economics. For Green the state was an important leveller, essential for the creation of the equality that would allow true freedom to develop.

In simplified terms, how can someone achieve freedom if they are denied access to medical care when they are ill, or adequate housing when they are in poverty, and how can they use their full potential if they are denied equality of education? From this premise the Liberal Party of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries transformed itself through the doctrine of the New Liberalism.

Of particular importance in terms of Green's influence on Liberal Party thinking was a lecture given in 1881, subsequently published as *Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract*. Here, Green clearly laid down the importance of freedom:

We shall probably all agree that freedom, rightly understood, is the greatest of blessings; that its attainment is the true end of all our effort as citizens. But when we thus speak of freedom, we should consider carefully what we mean by it. We do not mean merely freedom from restraint of compulsion. We do not mean merely freedom to do as we like irrespectively of what it is that we like. We do not mean a freedom that can be enjoyed by one man or one set of men at the cost of a loss of freedom

to others. When we speak of freedom as something to be so highly prized, we mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others. We mean by it a power which each man exercises through the help or security given him by his fellow men, and which he in turn helps to secure for them.¹

It was a freedom that was available to all and would be used to liberate the powers of all:

Everyone has an interest in securing to everyone else the free use and enjoyment and disposal of his possessions, so long as that freedom on the part of one does not interfere with a like freedom on the part of others, because such freedom contributes to that equal development of the faculties of all which is the highest good of all.²

To achieve such an aim, state intervention was essential:

This is most plainly the case when a man bargains to work under conditions fatal to health, e.g. in an unventilated factory. Every injury to the health of the individual is, so far as it goes, a public injury. It is an impediment to the general freedom; so much deduction from our power, as members of society, to make the best of ourselves, society is, therefore, plainly within its right when it limits freedom of contract for the sale of labour, so far as is done by our laws for the sanitary regulations of factories, workshops, and mines.³

As regards education, a core area of interest for Green:

Without a command of certain elementary arts and knowledge, the individual in modern society is as effectually crippled as by the loss of a limb or a

broken constitution. He is not free to develop his faculties. With a view to securing such freedom among its members it is as certainly within the province of the state to prevent children from growing up in that kind of ignorance which practically excludes them from a free career in life, as it is within its province to require the sort of building and drainage necessary for public health.⁴

Having argued the need for state intervention, Green finally concluded,

Our modern legislation then with reference to labour, and education, and health, involving as it does manifold interference with freedom of contract, is justified on the ground that it is the business of the state, not indeed directly to promote moral goodness, for that, from the very nature of moral goodness, it cannot do, but to maintain the conditions without which a free exercise of the human faculties is impossible.⁵

Most certainly Green was the pioneering mind that moved the Liberal Party away from the classical liberalism that is often associated with John Stuart Mill to the radical reforming party that was soon to pioneer steeper graduation of income tax (1907), pensions for the elderly (1908) and a minimum wage for miners (1912). Nor should it be doubted that Green's ideas on positive freedom were the ones that generated these changes. It is widely recognised that many of the leading Liberals of the age – among them Hobhouse, Haldane, Samuel and Asquith – were influenced by Green.⁶ Between them, these were the individuals who drove the Liberal Party towards a policy agenda that was beginning to embrace New Liberalism in the period immediately before the landslide election victory of 1906.⁷

Consider, for a moment, the nature of the Liberal Party if Green had not developed and communicated his ideas on positive freedom. At the very least, the party would have lacked an intellectual foundation, or philosophy, to underpin the giant reforms that were to be pursued by the Asquith administration. Of even greater import would have been a failure in the coalescing of ideas that led to the party adopting the modern-day concept of liberalism. It is this concept – the careful balance between state and corporation while preserving the freedom of the individual – that has now come to define liberalism. Instead, if classical liberalism had continued to hold sway, or if a distinct and clear philosophy from that of state socialism had not emerged, then the party would not have survived. In the guise of the former, it would have been destroyed as an irrelevancy and in the case of the latter it would have been totally subsumed by the Labour Party.

However, Green is little credited by the modern-day Liberal Democrats, a fact amply demonstrated by the collection of policy writings by Liberal Democrats that appeared in the recent publication *Reinventing the State*.⁸ The title itself gives the game away. While proclaiming itself a book about social liberalism in the twenty-first century it demands a requirement for the state to be reinvented. Why? Those who contribute to the book, without giving credit to him, are merely reformulating a state that had already been invented by T. H. Green. It is a state that, in accordance with both modern-day Liberals and early twentieth-century New Liberals, reaches a careful balance that is neither state- nor corporate-autocratic. Instead, it is a state that clears away those obstacles that would otherwise block the less wealthy and most disadvantaged from enjoying the same level of freedom and opportunity that would otherwise be

It is widely recognised that many of the leading Liberals of the age – among them Hobhouse, Haldane, Samuel and Asquith – were influenced by Green.

monopolised by the most affluent and advantaged.

Many of the writers whose chapters appear in *Reinventing the State* ignore the debt they owe to Green. David Howarth, in the first of the essays, is a case in point. In setting out to explain the origins of social liberalism he traces its origins to the late nineteenth century but gives no explanation as to its genesis.⁹ Given the importance of Green to the entire substance of this particular book, a mention of his name might have been a useful touch. Similarly, Duncan Brack, in his essay 'Equality Matters' (a title that lies at the very heart of Greenian thinking), states:

The Liberal commitment to equality derives from the Liberal commitment to freedom; it is neither separate from it nor subordinate to it. *This belief can be traced right back through the long history of British Liberalism and can perhaps best be expressed as a commitment to equality of justice [my italics].*¹⁰

Yes, the belief can be traced right back through the long history of British Liberalism, a history that clearly leads to T. H. Green. Chris Huhne is the only one who makes a direct reference to Green, in his essay on localism. Here Huhne argues that the size of the British state is failing because of its massive size, and that decentralisation is crucial. That he refers to T.H. Green, albeit briefly, is a salient reminder as to Green's pertinence to modern-day liberal thought. To quote Huhne:

The Liberal Democrats are for liberalism, which is essentially a doctrine about the individual and power. Liberals want to create a society that puts people first and enables them to thrive. That means that the undue exercise of power over individuals must be curbed, whether it is private or state power. People must be allowed to make their own lives

His were the ideas that created the New Liberalism and underpinned it with an intellectual foundation that was to preserve the party in future years.

and choice so long as they do no harm to others. But liberalism is also a positive commitment to enable people to thrive, from whatever background they come from and from whatever unfortunate circumstance they find themselves.¹¹

To this Huhne adds:

That is the social liberal element that was introduced by the Edwardian New Liberals, such as L. T. Hobhouse and T. H. Green, but whose early stirrings are discernible in the work of classical liberals such as J. S. Mill.¹²

Huhne's solution, decentralising the state, is to be achieved through increased local decision-making. This is also in accordance with Green's thinking. Whenever possible, Green favoured actions being taken by local communities, believing that they tended to produce measures that were better suited to the reality of the situation.¹³ It is a point that Huhne could well have developed in his earlier short reference to Green.

Thus my contention, and my reason for adding the name T. H. Green to the Greatest British Liberal ballot paper. His were the ideas that created the New Liberalism and underpinned it with an intellectual foundation that was to preserve the party in future years. Furthermore, and of not inconsiderable importance, it gave birth to the social liberalism of the twenty-first century. His was a philosophy of positive over negative freedoms, achievable only through state intervention. While a continuing debate exists within the party as to the degree of state intervention, even those who are most influenced by Mill, and his emphasis on unrestrained freedom, are not so extreme as to ignore the need for a proactive state. To that extent, they are also guided by the writings of Green.

Dr Philip MacDougall is a research historian with a particular interest in localism. He is currently looking at political developments in West Sussex, especially the formation and development of the Liberal Party in Chichester from 1905 onwards.

- 1 Thomas Hill Green, 'Lecture on Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract', in R. L. Nettleship (ed.), *Works of Thomas Hill Green* (Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1906), pp. 370–71.
- 2 Ibid, p. 373.
- 3 Ibid, p. 381.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid, p. 383.
- 6 For a summary of Green's impact on a variety of leading figures see: David O. Brink, *Perfectionism and the Common Good* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003), pp. 107–10, 124–30; Matt Carter, *T.H. Green and the Development of Ethical Socialism* (Impact Academic, Exeter, 2003).
- 7 In his recent history of the Liberal Party, David Dutton notes of this period, 'An impressive group of academics and journalists, influenced by the Oxford philosopher, T.H. Green, had taken on the task of reinterpreting Liberalism for a new age'. David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party in the Twentieth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 11.
- 8 Duncan Brack, Richard S. Grayson and David Howarth (eds.), *Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21st Century* (Politico's Publishing, London, 2007).
- 9 Duncan Brack, 'Equality Matters', in Brack et al., *Reinventing the State*, pp. 17–35.
- 10 David Howarth, 'What is Social Liberalism?' in Brack et al., *Reinventing the State*, pp. 9–15.
- 11 Chris Huhne, 'The case for Localism: the Liberal Narrative' in Brack et al., *Reinventing the State*, pp. 241–54.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 P. P. Nicholson, 'T. H. Green and State Action: Liquor Legislation', *History of Political Thought* 6 (1985), pp. 517–50. Reprinted in A. Vincent (ed.), *The Philosophy of T. H. Green* (Gower, Aldershot, 1986), pp. 76–103.

REPORTS

Salad Days: Merger Twenty Years On

Fringe meeting, 7 March 2008, with Lord Goodhart, Lord Clement Jones and Dr David Dutton; Chair: Tony Little
Report by Neil Stockley

OF ALL the ups and downs in the Liberal Democrats' history, few have been more traumatic than the party's birth. The merger between the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) saw difficult arguments within both parties. The SDP leader, David Owen, resigned after he could not accept his party's decision to vote in favour. Once the two parties had voted to merge, negotiations over the new party constitution were difficult and protracted. The launch of a new policy document ended in disaster when the Liberal Party's MPs, who had not been consulted, rejected it. The abandoned paper became known as the 'dead parrot' document, after the Monty Python sketch. The new party, which could not agree on its name, suffered a financial crisis, sank into fourth place at the 1989 European Parliament elections and had derisory ratings in the opinion polls.

It was not until November 1990, when the new party won the Eastbourne by-election, that the curse was lifted. However, for some years it appeared that the merger might become a defining moment. When Chris Cook revised his history of the Liberal Party in 1993, he devoted an entire chapter, 'merger most foul', to the unhappy period.¹

Twenty years on, the Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting at the Liberal Democrats' spring conference in Liverpool provided the opportunity to reassess the merger.

Lord (Willie) Goodhart, a member of the SDP negotiating team and Lord (Tim) Clement-Jones, from the Liberal team, judged the merger by its results. They suggested that, given the party's growth and successes, the outcomes should be judged favourably.

Willie Goodhart argued that, for all their difficulties and frustrations, the merger talks provided the Liberal Democrats with a sound party constitution that has stood the test of time. He believed that the party's rules and structures owe rather more to their SDP ancestry than to their Liberal heritage. He cited as examples the roles of the Federal Executive and the party conference. He also referred to the election of conference representatives, where the SDP had argued for a formula to elect representatives.² Another example was the way policy is made. Lord Goodhart and his colleagues had insisted on a deliberative process, using policy working groups as opposed to the Liberals' standing 'committees', and had been vindicated.

Lord Goodhart went on to argue that the dominance of his old party's structural DNA has served the Liberal Democrats very well. For instance, the Liberal Party had no single membership database and its headquarters no reliable source of funds. The SDP, by contrast, was a more centralised operation. The Liberal Democrats has followed the SDP in having their membership, fundraising and campaigning run from

party headquarters and this, Lord Goodhart argued, has enabled the party to target its campaigning efforts on particular constituencies. Similarly, he believed that the party conference worked well and the policy-making process was well regarded and effective. Lord Goodhart also acknowledged, however, that the SDP team had won some victories they should not have. They insisted that the new party was named the 'Social and Liberal Democrats', a mouthful from which the unfortunate acronym 'the Salads' was soon derived and used to mock the party.

These outcomes, he contended, were a direct result of the way the two negotiating teams organised themselves. The SDP team was mostly agreed about the main issues at stake and was well-organised and cohesive. The Liberal team, by contrast, included the party leader, David Steel, and Tim Clement-Jones, who were enthusiasts for merger, along with erstwhile opponents, such as Tony Greaves and Michael Meadowcroft, who 'wanted their party to absorb the SDP'. Unlike David Steel, Robert Maclennan proved an effective leader of his party's team and a superb negotiator. Whereas the SDP team had 'carte blanche' from their party to hammer out a new constitution, the Liberals had to constantly refer back to their party council and this caused many delays in the talks.

Lord (Tim) Clement-Jones agreed that the merger talks had produced a generally sound constitutional framework and that we now had 'a more effective instrument of liberalism'. Like Lord Goodhart, he believed that this was especially true in respect of campaigning and fundraising. Interestingly, neither speaker fully explained the extent to which local campaigning, building on the community politics approach, was one of the Liberal Party's real strengths and important legacies.

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Lord Clement-Jones went on to present his version of where the merger talks had produced the right outcomes and to show that where they had not, mistakes were corrected, in nearly all cases quickly and with little long-term political damage. The Liberal Democrats had combined the sovereign role of the party conference with a 'workable democracy', he said. The policy-making process was 'originally too elaborate' but was now much improved. A real federal structure had been in place since 1993. In 1989, the party adopted 'Liberal Democrats' as its name, though this followed much internal angst.

One area of policy that had been a source of much argument between the Liberal and SDP negotiators was the inclusion in the preamble to the new party's constitution of a commitment that Britain should play a full and constructive part in NATO. Lord Clement-Jones still thought it 'crazy' to have included a reference to an international body in a party constitution (though, it might be added, the politics of defence in the 1980s were very different to those of today). The SDP team got their way but the reference to NATO was removed in 1990 and 'we got a sensible preamble eventually'.

Both men also agreed that the new party worked rather better than the merger process suggested it would. Tim Clement-Jones traced how the party eventually recovered from the experience of merger and what he called the 'financial meltdown' that followed. In an interesting aside, he also pointed out that, initially, the party had fewer members than the combined total of the Liberal Party and SDP and said that it has never achieved the number of members it was expecting. Lord Clement-Jones believed that 1990 was the turning point and suggested that the Eastbourne by-election result was itself the culmination of many factors:

the effective leadership of Paddy Ashdown; the resolution of arguments over the party's name; and the adoption of the 'bird of liberty' as the party's visual image.

Lord Goodhart recalled that in the early years there was considerable good will between erstwhile Liberals and Social Democrats. As the former chair of the SDP's Conference Arrangements Committee, he had a happy and productive period chairing the new party's Federal Conference Committee. He also served alongside many former Liberals on the Federal Policy Committee and many policy working groups. Lord Goodhart mused that the marriage had been rather happier than the courtship.

The views of both former negotiators appear to be vindicated by the success that the Liberal Democrats have enjoyed over the last twenty years. The party now has more than three times the number of MPs that it had in 1988 and a broader, deeper base in local government across the UK. There is an effective and influential Liberal Democrat team in the European Parliament. The party is represented in the Scottish Parliament and the National Assembly for Wales and Liberal Democrats have served as ministers in both. It has been many years since the point was reached when most of the party's members had joined after the merger, and had belonged neither to the Liberal Party or to the SDP.

Their remarks could be put in another context: a shared perception of the merger as a natural evolution from the alliance between the two parties. Tim Clement-Jones traced it back to the ways in which Liberal and SDP lawyers had worked together to develop common policy proposals. Such co-operation all but stopped, however, with the 'defence policy nightmare' of 1986. Willie Goodhart reminded the audience that from

Both men also agreed that the new party worked rather better than the merger process suggested it would.

the outset of the Alliance, some SDP members had seen full merger with the Liberals as the natural next step. Lord Goodhart also recalled his and his wife Celia's experience of how well the two parties could work together at constituency level.

David Dutton, Professor of Modern History at the University of Liverpool, did not quite share these views of the merger. He called it 'a shotgun marriage' and compared the passionate debates within and between the two parties in 1987–88 with those over Lloyd George's undermining of Asquith in 1916 and Labour's crisis in 1931.

Professor Dutton outlined three previous occasions in which two parties have worked closely together in an effort to produce a sum greater than the total of their political parts. The first was the formal electoral pact of 1903 between the Liberal Party and the Labour Representation Committee, which enabled the Liberals to win the 1906 general election with a bigger majority than they otherwise would have. Twenty of the thirty Labour MPs who were elected also owed their seats to the pact. The second was the way in which the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists co-operated to work against Gladstone, which had major political consequences, especially in Birmingham. The third was the decision of the Liberal Nationals to join the Conservative-dominated National Government in 1931 and subsequently to campaign with them at constituency level, to the electoral benefit of both. He compared these outcomes with the Alliance winning a higher share of the vote in 1983 and 1987 than the Liberals before or the Liberal Democrats subsequently.

Professor Dutton drew on these case studies to advance three circumstances that made fusion between two parties logical if not inevitable: where those

voting for them cannot easily distinguish between the two parties; where there is a junior partner that, over time, suffers a loss of political identity; and where, over time, the two parties become united on key policy issues. The first factor was not evident in the case of the 1903 Lib-Lab pact, he argued, and so there was no fusion. By contrast, the Liberal Unionists had lost their distinctive identity by 1912, when they united with the Conservatives to oppose the third home rule bill. Similarly, the Liberal Nationals had joined the Conservatives in opposing the Attlee government's 'socialism' when the two parties fused at constituency level in 1947.

Applying these principles, the merger between the Liberals and SDP was bound to be very difficult, Professor Dutton argued. He highlighted the contrasts with both the fusions between the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists and the Conservatives and the Liberal Nationals. The Liberal-SDP merger happened much more quickly. Neither party was in the ascendancy. Many more Liberal than SDP MPs were returned in 1987 but the SDP had in David Owen a substantial political figure. Further, that party's finances and membership were still quite healthy. Within both parties, he added, there were significant bodies of opinion opposed to merger, as shown by establishment of a splinter Liberal Party and Dr Owen's 'continuing' SDP.

Professor Dutton also contended that there was also a bigger range of political views between the two parties than in the other cases he discussed. The Liberals and SDP were not united over defence, a major political issue of the time. Before the 1987 general election, they were not able to reconcile their political outlooks or strategies because the SDP's own leadership had not reached a consensus about the party's central

purpose. Roy Jenkins was really a natural Liberal, a Keynesian in his approach to economic management; he saw the SDP essentially as a transit camp, a way of attracting people to encourage people to leave Labour and join a new, liberal political force.

In contrast, David Owen had a long history of antagonism to the Liberal Party and sought to remain as independent from it as possible. He perceived social democracy as a very different political tradition. Whether in his 'socialist' phase, in 1981, or in his later, 'social market' phase, Dr Owen held different political views to those of Jenkins and his followers.

Professor Dutton was correct in arguing that there were many important differences between the Liberal-SDP merger and previous attempts to blend two parties under one roof. The absence of a dominant partner and the fact that both parties still had a strong identity goes some of the way to explaining why the merger proved difficult. However, political reality intervened. As Alan Beith, a veteran of the Alliance and the merger process pointed out from the audience, the two parties would have been engaged in a process of mutually agreed destruction had they tried to live apart, whatever the arrangements.

Professor Dutton may have exaggerated the political differences between the Liberals and Social Democrats. Lord Goodhart reminded the meeting that the former were never a unilateralist party, whatever impressions may have sometimes been given to the outside world. The divergences that developed on defence in the 1980s between them and the SDP mattered much less once the new party was formed. He could recall very few policy debates in the Liberal Democrats that could easily be identified as a face-off between Liberals and Social Democrats. Of those, only one, over civil nuclear power, was contentious and there, as

in other areas, the Liberal view has prevailed. On most key political issues, such as Europe, civil liberties and human rights, there has been strong agreement between former members of the old parties.

Lord Goodhart saw any political differences as being about style and attitude, with the Liberals the 'idealists' and the Social Democrats the 'pragmatists'. Even this may have been too stark a contrast for some of those present. Lord Clement-Jones commented that in the years after merger it became almost impossible to tell who had been a Liberal and who had been a Social Democrat.

To this author, who became involved with the Liberal Democrats five years after merger, these observations came as no surprise. At a previous History Group meeting, Shirley Williams explained the philosophical underpinnings of the SDP and showed how much they had in common with those of the Liberal Party.³ The SDP was powerfully influenced by Tawney's writings on equality and education, as well as the philosophy of John Stuart Mill. The Liberal Party was strongly shaped by the New Liberalism, its main influences the writings of Hobhouse and Hobson, who made the case for an enlightened society in which the pursuit of social justice is an end in itself. The SDP's strategic confusion may have hastened the march to merger. Once the 'Owenites' departed, it became easier for the 'Jenkinsites' to reach agreement with the Liberals about the shape of the new party.

The two parties had a common cause in the pursuit of social justice and equal opportunities, combined with the defence of civil liberties to provide the greatest possible personal freedom. This far outweighed any differences over the shape of the Liberal Democrats' constitution, let alone individual policies. As a result, the merger has worked

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and the shambolic process by which it came about has seemed less important with the passage of time.

Neil Stockley is director of a public affairs company and a frequent contributor to the Journal of Liberal History.

- 1 Chris Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party 1900–1992* (Macmillan, 1993).
- 2 As was pointed out from the audience, although it was often

believed that any Liberal member could ‘walk in and vote’ at the Liberal Assembly, in fact this was never true; just like the SDP (and the Liberal Democrat) the Liberal Party possessed a representative formula, allocating delegate places per constituency relating to membership – although the entitlement was more generous than in the SDP.

- 3 Ian Hunter, ‘Old Liberals, New Liberals and Social Democrats: the Liberal Democrats’ political heritage,’ in *Journal of Liberal History* 37 (winter 2002–03), pp. 26–27.

As a radical Liberal, he was endorsed enthusiastically by the Dunfermline Press; his opponent, John Ramsay, a Whiggish Liberal, was endorsed equally enthusiastically by the Stirling Advertiser. Seven months later, at the November 1868 general election and on an extended franchise, Sir Henry defeated John Ramsay by over 500 votes and remained MP for Stirling Burghs for the rest of his life.

The talk was supported by an excellent handout including a biographical chronology, details of Sir Henry’s constituency election results, summarised Scottish and UK general election results from 1868 to 1906, a selection of quotations (on all of which Dr Cameron commented) and a bibliography ranging from T.P. O’Connor’s 1908 memoir to Dr Cameron’s own 2007 article. (Dr Cameron’s critical comments on the 2006 biography of Sir Henry by Roy Hattersley (*Campbell-Bannerman*, Haus Publishing) were much appreciated.)

Other topics discussed included Sir Henry’s emergence from a Tory background (described as suspicious by the *Stirling Advertiser* in March 1868); his (perhaps deliberately cultivated) image of self-effacement; Irish and Scottish home rule and ‘home rule all round’ (or federalism); the disestablishment of the Church of Scotland; the South African War of 1899–1902; imperialism; free trade versus tariff reform; extension of the franchise (including votes for women); land reform; and restricting the powers of the House of Lords. Also discussed was what would or would not have happened if Sir Henry had lived longer with reference to the careers of Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill, the Irish dimension, the First World War, interaction with Bonar Law (Conservative Leader from 1911 and, like Sir Henry, a former pupil of the High School of Glasgow),

Rt. Hon. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman

Centenary Commemorations in Scotland

Report by Dr Alexander S. Waugh

SIR HENRY was born (as Henry Campbell) in Kelvinside, Glasgow on 7 September 1836. After education at the High School of Glasgow, the University of Glasgow and Trinity College, Cambridge, he married (Sarah) Charlotte Bruce on 13 September 1860. He was Liberal MP for Stirling Burghs (Stirling, Dunfermline, Culross, Inverkeithing and [South] Queensferry) from 20 November 1868 and, after junior ministerial office in 1871–74 and 1880–84, Chief Secretary for Ireland in 1884–85, Secretary of State for War in 1886 and 1892–95, Liberal Leader in the Commons from 6 February 1899 and Prime Minister from 5 December 1905. He resigned as Prime Minister on 3 April 1908 and died in 10 Downing Street on 22 April. After a Memorial Service in Westminster Abbey on 27 April, he was buried alongside Lady Campbell-Bannerman (died 30 August 1906) beside Meikle Parish Church (Perthshire) on 28 April.

Belmont Castle, half a mile from Meikle, was the Campbell-Bannermans’ Scottish home from 1887. The

church window above their grave is near the pew in the east gallery where they regularly worshipped when at Belmont. There is a plaque commemorating Sir Henry inside the church near the east gallery.

Campbell-Bannerman evening, 22 April

The Meikle and District History Society held a Campbell-Bannerman evening in the Kinloch Memorial Hall, Meikle on Tuesday, 22 April 2008. With some eighty people in attendance, the speaker was Dr Ewen A. Cameron, Senior Lecturer in Scottish History at Edinburgh University and a contributor to the *Journal of Liberal History*. His talk followed much the same approach as in his article about Sir Henry in the *Journal* (issue 54, spring 2007). However, Dr Cameron also referred to a number of other aspects of Sir Henry’s career during the talk and in discussion. There was, for example, reference to Sir Henry’s unsuccessful candidature at the Stirling Burghs by-election in April 1868.

Other topics discussed included Sir Henry’s emergence from a Tory background (described as suspicious by the *Stirling Advertiser* in March 1868).

Liberal-Labour relations and Liberal election prospects.

Centenary Commemoration, 27 April

A Campbell-Bannerman Centenary Commemoration, endorsed by the Liberal Democrat History Group, took place in Meigle on Sunday 27 April.

The day's programme started with morning worship in the Parish Church. The service was taken by the Rev. John (Ian) W. Knox, a retired minister, who managed to mention Sir Henry in his introductory remarks and welcomes, children's address, intercessory prayer and sermon. At one point Rev. Knox suggested that Sir Henry was a precursor of Sir William Beveridge's social initiatives.

We then visited Belmont Castle which, as a listed building, is still much as reconstructed and refurbished for the Campbell-Bannermans in 1885-86. They acquired the Castle after much of it had been destroyed by fire in 1884. It has been leased from the Dundee Corporation by the Church of Scotland as a home for senior citizens since 1931. We were welcomed by Dr Sue Marshall, Deputy Unit Manager, who pointed out various features and memorabilia associated with the Campbell-Bannermans, including portraits. We were then allowed to move freely between the main lounge and the other public rooms and into the large hall (originally a covered-in courtyard) and up its grand staircase.

By reason of fire safety precautions, there is no longer direct access between the main lounge and the hall. Thus we were unable to have an overall view of the space (lounge and hall) which accommodated over two hundred relatives and public representatives (and some four hundred wreaths) on the day of Sir Henry's funeral.

Lunch followed in the Kinloch Arms Hotel, in the centre

Top: at the Campbell-Bannerman grave – Cllr Willie Wilson, Provost Depute of Perth & Kinross, Dr Alexander S. Waugh, Sheila Waugh, Rev. Dr Malcolm Macrae

Bottom: Sheila Waugh handing the wreath to Cllr Wilson



of Meigle, starting with Grace by the Rev. Dr. Malcolm H. MacRae, Meigle's Interim Moderator (acting parish minister) and concluding, as did refreshments on the Tuesday evening, with buttered gingerbread, with which Sir Henry liked to end his meals.

We then proceeded to the Campbell-Bannerman grave beside the parish church. After an introduction by Dr MacRae, and a biographical eulogy by Dr Sandy Waugh, a former pupil of the High School of Glasgow and a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group, Dr MacRae read 'Let Us Now Praise Famous Men' from *Ecclesiasticus*. A wreath – featuring the old Scottish Liberal colours of red and yellow – was then laid by Liberal Democrat Councillor Willie Wilson, Provost Depute of Perth and Kinross.

The programme concluded with the singing of Scottish Metrical Psalm 23, 'The Lord's my Shepherd', to the tune Strathro (named for the house and estate in Forfarshire (Angus)

which Sir Henry's father, Sir James Campbell acquired in 1847), followed with prayer and benediction by Dr MacRae, and an expression of thanks to all concerned by the Provost Depute, who had also undertaken similar courtesies at Belmont Castle and at lunch.

Centenary Commemoration, 28 April

The Stirling Liberal Democrats organised a Centenary Commemoration at Sir Henry's statue in Stirling on the afternoon of Monday, 28 April. Wreaths were laid by Nicol Stephen MSP, Scottish Liberal Democrat Leader, and Councillor Fergus Wood (SNP), Provost of Stirling.

Among others present was Dr Elspeth King, Director of the Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum which has a seascape painting by the Scottish artist, T. Campbell Noble, purchased and donated by Sir Henry in 1897. Its other Campbell-Bannerman memorabilia are a posthumous banner proclaiming him as 'One

of Britain's Greatest Statesmen', a portrait sketch by Sir James Guthrie, RSA and – arrayed with a wreath of daffodils to mark the centenary – a marble bust by Paul Raphael Montford. Sir James (another Glasgow High School former pupil) also painted, in 1907, the portrait of Sir Henry in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Paul Montford was responsible for the bronze bust of Sir Henry in Westminster Abbey (1911) and the Stirling statue as unveiled by H. H. Asquith, then Prime Minister, on 1 November 1913.

Centenary Commemoration, High School of Glasgow

The High School of Glasgow – which has a bronze plaque of Sir Henry by Benno Schotz, RSA – will be having its own Centenary Commemoration in the autumn. Efforts are also continuing to have a new commemorative plaque erected at a more public location in Glasgow.

Dr Alexander (Sandy) S. Waugh is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group and, like Campbell-Bannerman, a former pupil of Glasgow High School.

both to be superficial and to omit explanations of key issues and individuals (for example, although the Corn Laws are referred to, there's no explanation of what they were or why their abolition was so controversial). The level of detail provided is too shallow for any reader who knows anything much about the background, but inadequate for those coming to it afresh. And the chapters actually say very little about the internal workings of the coalitions in question.

Even on its own terms this part of the book is pretty incoherent. Having rightly observed that most of the coalitions tended to be unstable because they were formed in the midst of crises (and therefore had a limited range of issues on which the coalition partners could agree), Oaten then criticises the Aberdeen coalition for *not* being formed in one, and therefore having nothing to bring it together. He does not attempt to consider what else could plausibly have happened in the hung parliament delivered by the 1852 election. He blames the coalition for the outbreak of the Crimean War (an accusation Disraeli also levelled), but never explains why. Having stated at one point that Asquith's large war cabinet was not a problem, he then argues that Lloyd George's much smaller one made a key difference. And so on.

Where Oaten provides a political viewpoint, it's essentially a right-wing one. Apparently the 1931 National Government should have made bigger cutbacks in the 'vast sums being wasted on social security benefits' – so much for Keynesianism, then. Throughout, ideological differences are sidelined; politics is almost entirely about personalities. Where the coalition leaders were weak, or where they were strong but disagreed with each other, the coalitions failed; where they worked well together, the coalitions

REVIEWS

Analysing coalitions

Mark Oaten: *Coalition: The Politics and Personalities of Coalition Government from 1850* (Harriman House, 2007)

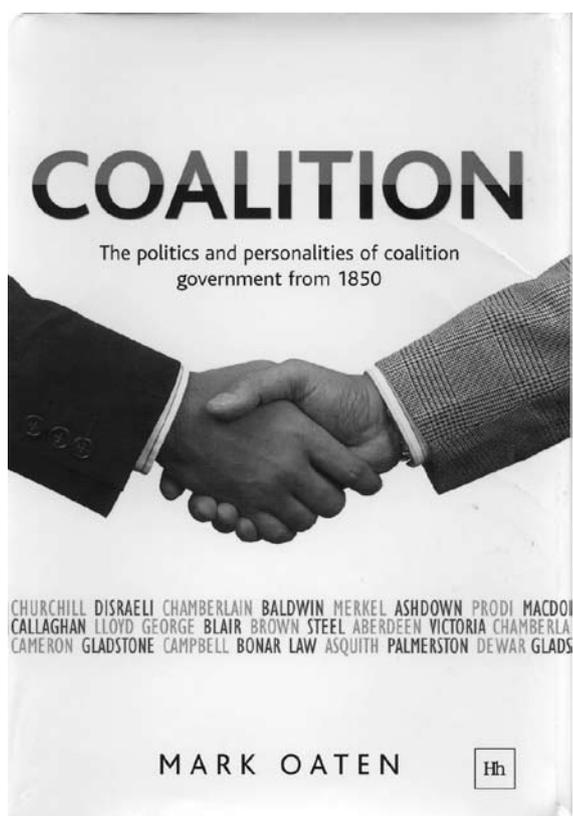
Reviewed by Duncan Brack

MARK OATEN'S book caused a small stir upon its publication, in September 2007, with its apparent call for the Liberal Democrats to consider a post-election coalition with the Conservatives. In fact, that conclusion is not put so starkly in the book itself – it stemmed more from the article Oaten wrote for *The Times* the week before publication ('A Lib-Con pact? You shouldn't rule it out', 6 September 2007). One conclusion, however, is clear from reading this analysis of coalition government in Britain and abroad: it's that if Mark Oaten wants to forge a writing career after his departure from the Commons, he'll have to manage a great deal better than this superficial, incoherent and poorly written effort.

Having said that, the book is not entirely without value. Oaten's aim was to derive lessons from the history of coalition government in Britain and from the rest of Europe, in the belief – entirely reasonable in 2007, not so clear now – that the next election is likely to lead to a hung parliament. He aimed to look both at the process of putting coalitions together and the personalities that made them work, or fail.

Five chapters thus examine Aberdeen's Whig/Peelite administration of 1852–55, Asquith's and Lloyd George's wartime coalitions of 1915–16 and 1916–18, Lloyd George's post-war coalition of 1918–22, the National Government of 1931–35 and Churchill's wartime coalition of 1940–45. Unfortunately they manage

Oaten's aim was to derive lessons from the history of coalition government in Britain and from the rest of Europe, in the belief – entirely reasonable in 2007, not so clear now – that the next election is likely to lead to a hung parliament.



succeeded. Needless to say, this analysis could also be applied to single-party governments. It's an essentially anti-ideological view of politics, an approach also seen in Oaten's praise for the non-party businessmen brought in to government by some of the coalitions, and his belief that party politics always gets in the way of good government – as though there is always a single solution to any given problem, and government is purely a matter of finding it.

Subsequent chapters are fortunately rather better. One chapter deals with the experience of coalitions in Europe, picking examples from Austria, Germany and Italy. The German example, though, is the 'Grand Coalition' formed between the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats in 2005 – not at all the typical German experience, which has tended to see coalitions of one big and one smaller party. This chapter is a good deal more interesting than the earlier ones, however, partly because of the interviews Oaten conducted

with politicians and political scientists in the countries in question, and the more detailed look he takes at the processes of forming and running the coalitions, and partly because, I guess, the material will be less familiar to a British audience. Once again, though, he criticises coalitions for doing things – like running out of ideas – that single-party governments are hardly immune from. His rather feeble conclusion is that 'in a strange way these coalitions all seem to work for their country' (p. 313). He does not consider why the UK should be different.

Three further chapters cover more recent British events: the Lib-Lab Pact of 1977–78, the Ashdown-Blair 'project' of 1994–97, and the Joint Cabinet Committee that followed, and the Scottish experience of 1999–2007. These are also a good deal better than the earlier chapters, again largely because of the interviews Oaten conducted with some of the key participants in the deals he describes, including David Steel, Paddy Ashdown, Jim Wallace and Tom McNally, as well as a number of political scientists. He makes some perceptive observations – I particularly liked the comment that 'Ashdown had a habit of making every decision the most important there has ever been' (p. 228). There are some interesting viewpoints from his interviewees, including Clare Short thinking that Blair could have pushed proportional representation through the Commons after 1997 (p. 245), and Neal Lawson arguing that 'there is nobody [now] left in the Cabinet that believes in the Jenkins dream of the reunification of progressives' (p. 283). Oaten's analysis of the Labour-Lib Dem Scottish coalition governments is interesting, as is their impact on politics (a less confrontational campaigning style, as parties appreciate that they might

have to work with each other after the election; a reluctance to stress key commitments too much, in case they may have to be dropped in negotiations) – though his conclusion that the coalitions were a failure because the Lib Dems did relatively badly in the 2007 election seems a bit narrow, to say the least. He raises the argument, without really developing it, that coalitions may be best negotiated by politicians who are in some sense party outsiders, such as Lloyd George, Churchill, Blair or Ashdown.

The penultimate chapter considers what may happen should the next election result in a hung parliament. Oaten reaches some sensible conclusions, including the need for some preparatory thought to the process for potential negotiations, and the need for a caretaker government to give them enough time. He points out the difficulty, for the Lib Dems, of putting Labour back into power once it has lost the election (a lesson also drawn from the Lib-Lab Pact), while minimising the party's policy differences with the Conservatives (though observing that most Lib Dem activists would hate a deal with the Tories). He stresses the importance of obtaining a guaranteed commitment to PR in any deal. He correctly identifies the flaw with Charles Kennedy's answer to how the Lib Dems should behave in a hung parliament (to judge each issue on its merits) which is that before the party gets that chance it has to decide how to vote on the government's Queen's Speech. 'Bluntly at this point you have to put up or shut up ... Whilst it sounds a good soundbite two years away from an election, the staying independent route is just not an option for a party that wants to be taken seriously' (p. 301).

In the concluding chapter Oaten mostly sides with Disraeli's famous aphorism,

'England does not love coalitions', while at the same time completely failing to explain how else the country is supposed to be governed under a PR electoral system (which he clearly does support). He argues that coalitions do not tend to provide strong government (while slightly undermining his own case by accepting that Lloyd George and Churchill in fact did) and mainly ends up with the conclusion that 'if a coalition government can have a strong leader it stands a greater chance of success' (p. 322). Well, yes; yet again, one could say the same about single-party government.

The book is littered with errors, over dates (the London bombings of July 2005 are given as 2004), election results (in 1931 the Liberal Party is simply omitted, though the Liberal Nationals (wrongly called 'Coalition Liberals') are there), events (the Liberal-Liberal National split happened before 1931, not after; Charles Kennedy became Lib Dem leader in August 1999, not spring), issues (the 1909 People's Budget and the 1911 Parliament Act are treated as though they're

the same thing) and places (Bute House, not Bude House, is the home of Scotland's First Minister). Words are misused ('attributed' where he means 'allocated', 'contingency' instead of 'contingent', 'denouncing' instead of 'renouncing', 'throws' instead of 'throes'). The grammar is erratic, and references are incomplete and sometimes wrong.

Coalition is a frustrating book. The topic is a good one, and there's enough of interest in the text to think that it could have turned out much better if it had gone through a couple of further drafts and been properly proof-read before publication. As it is, Geoffrey Searle's *Country Before Party* (Longman, 1995) is far better on the historical side; and we still await a thorough analysis of recent experiences in Scotland and Wales. But Oaten deserves credit at least for raising a series of good questions. Let's hope that the hung parliament that might provide the answers isn't too long coming.

Duncan Brack is the Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.

Oaten mostly sides with Disraeli's famous aphorism, 'England does not love coalitions', while at the same time completely failing to explain how else the country is supposed to be governed under a PR electoral system.

the eighteenth century were largely out of power. Moreover, Mitchell classifies the short periods when they were in government as 'ugly experiences' (p. 1) and argues that their taste for self-destruction was so marked that, from time to time, 'their political opponents were driven to beg them to pull themselves together' (p. 1) for the good of the nation. Yet this was the period in which the traumatic events of the American and French Revolutions laid the foundations of the divisions between the parties in succeeding generations and in which the nature of Whig opposition to the authoritarian Tory governments of the period was a contributory factor to the avoidance of a revolutionary outbreak in Britain. Eventually the Whigs did get their act together and the contribution of their administrative brawn to the Victorian Liberal governments was significant in the constitutional transformation of the nineteenth century. But, because he is not trammelled by the chronological dictates of the life of the various administrations, Mitchell is able to perform a more valuable service. He constructs a sociology of the Whigs, describing their character and their mode of life, building a picture of the archetypal Whig.

Gladstone, who joined the Liberals from the Peelite wing of the Conservative Party, was reported by a Whig of the later Victorian period as complaining that 'a man not born a Liberal may become a Liberal, but to be a Whig he must be born a Whig'.¹ Mitchell concurs, arguing that Whigs were 'made by nature and confirmed by nurture' (p. 6). Born to a rich aristocratic family comprising a mother and father of similar backgrounds and similar intellectual and political outlooks, indeed possibly cousins, the young Whig went through his formal education in the company of other Whigs and in a suitably

No one likes us, we don't care

Leslie Mitchell: *The Whig World 1760–1837* (Hambledon Continuum, 2005)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

AT THE beginning of his final chapter, Leslie Mitchell claims that 'Whiggery is no more' (p. 175). And like many extinct creatures, by their disappearance the Whigs have created something of a mystery, which continues to intrigue Liberal Democrats, who claim the Whigs as part of their ancestry but who mostly know little about them. For any such Liberal Democrats Leslie

Mitchell has written an enticing introduction to the world of the Whigs.

Despite the title, Mitchell's book is not a narration of political events during his chosen period, which covers the reigns of George III and his sons, up to the accession of Queen Victoria. Superficially, this choice would appear odd as at this time the Whigs, who had been so dominant in the early part of

qualified environment – Harrow rather than Eton, Cambridge rather than Oxford. If international conditions allowed, a Grand Tour of the continent followed, where he developed a taste for everything French and classical rather than gothic architecture. As a substitute, when continental warfare made such visits tricky, a visit to Enlightenment Scotland would help in fermenting the right, rational, outlook on life. Family and the acquaintance of childhood formed the circles in which he moved for the rest of his life.

Since Whigs were so rarely in government in this period, their cohesion required Whiggery to be a complete way of life, not just a set of political opinions. Although they visited the grand country estates that they owned and which were fundamental to their position in the pre-Reform political process, Whigs tended to be more comfortable in metropolitan surroundings and rather at a loss for things to occupy their time in the countryside – unless visited by other Whigs. As leaders

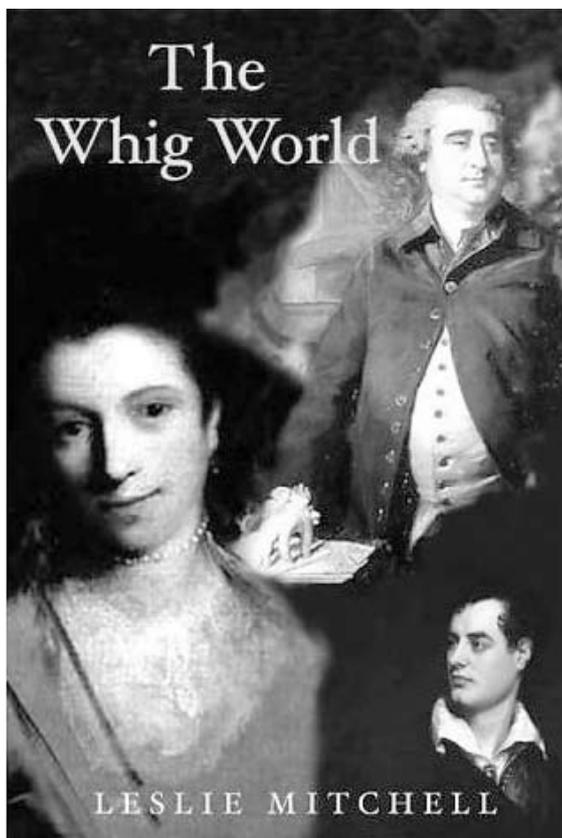
in fashion, their immersion in the pleasures of the West End and its Season set an example of profligacy that was easy to condemn and expensive to follow. Clothes styles were changed arbitrarily from season to season as a form of conspicuous consumption, though the costs were insignificant compared to the losses sustained by some Whigs in the pursuit of gaming. They were at best sceptical of organised religion, which was just as well given that they also tended towards indifference to conventional sexual morality. The flaunting of wealth, mistresses and illegitimate offspring tended to emphasise the differences between the Whigs and Tories, or even with the mass of the educated citizenry, and Mitchell's work is rich in the scorn of the Whigs' critics. But like Millwall football fans of a more recent generation, the Whig aristocracy was unconcerned – their motto could easily have been: no one likes us, we don't care.

for which Hampden bled on the field and Sydney perished on the scaffold' referred to the part played by Whig families in the taming of the monarchy between the Civil War of the 1640s, through the crisis over the succession of James II to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. As G. W. E. Russell wrote in 1918, 'I trace my paternal ancestry to a Russell who entered the House of Commons at the General Election of 1441, and since 1538 some of us have always sat in one or other of the two Houses of Parliament' (p. 153). As recently as 2004, the late fifth Earl Russell, a great-grandson of Lord John Russell, the Victorian Prime Minister, sat on the Liberal Democrat front bench in the Lords. It was the belief that past Whig relatives had been right in these great crises in Britain's history that reconciled the Whigs at the end of the eighteenth century to their exile from power; their analysis would be vindicated and in the end they would triumph.

The other fundamental Whig belief highlighted by Mitchell is that property was the key to liberty. 'The love of enjoying, the fear of losing an estate, is the main principle of action with all who have an estate to keep or lose' (p. 135). The rule of law was to safeguard property rather than the rights of man, and the ownership of property gave a stake in the country and the independence which justified political participation. Naturally, as some of the largest property owners, the Whigs should then have a prominent place in politics, but as the country grew wealthier it justified the extension of the franchise to incorporate the newly propertied, for example the protagonists of the Industrial Revolution. Property not only gave a stake in the country but also the means of securing an education which fitted a man for politics. Property owners had a vested interest in opposing

Change was to be managed rather than feared

Although the word 'Whig' is reputed to have originated as a term of political abuse, Mitchell leaves his chapter on politics until around two-thirds of the way through the book, and even then combines it with an analysis of Whig views of history. This is less odd than it may superficially appear. The defining Whig belief was in progress, a belief imbibed from the Scottish Enlightenment. As Palmerston claimed to have learnt from Dugald Stewart, 'change was to be managed rather than feared ... the correct Whig response to change was to accept it, welcome its possibilities and moderate its impact' (p. 101). But a belief in progress relies on a view of the past. That view was coloured by the part played by the Whigs of times past – the toast 'the cause



the tyranny of both kings and mobs, while the Whig belief in progress allowed for the expansion of the groups who could be embraced by the system, promoting reform rather than the counterproductive Tory tendency to resistance.

In his final chapter Mitchell argues that this process of incorporation took politics beyond the control of the Whigs. As the franchise widened, and as two world wars destroyed the Whig programme of gradual reform, they themselves became an irrelevance. But as he recognises, globalisation, democracy and industrialisation were managed affairs in Britain, not tainted by the revolutionary violence that has disrupted the development of continental Europe and so many developing countries.

From time to time the descendants of the Whig families have played a part in modern politics – some, unfortunately, on the side of the Conservatives – but as a significant prominent coherent group they have vanished. Nevertheless, the gradualist reforming philosophy of the Whigs is still the mindset

of the mainstream parties of the British left, whether Labour or Liberal Democrat, no matter how much they like to think of themselves as Radicals.

Leslie Mitchell has produced an important book which distils a lifetime of study of leading Whigs, including biographies of Melbourne and Fox. By giving us a portrait of the wider lives of the Whigs, rather than just their politics, he helps to reincarnate them as whole people rather than just as statesmen and party leaders. His apposite choice of quotations, his balancing of statements from within the Whig family and its acolytes with those of Tory and Radical opponents, is done so lightly that reading this book was a real pleasure and entertainment which I hope will not lead to an underestimation of its value as an introduction to a critical group in Liberal history.

Tony Little is the Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

1 G. W. E. Russell, *Social Silhouettes*, 1906, cited in Duncan Brack & Robert Ingham (eds) *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations* (Politico's, 1999).

By giving us a portrait of the wider lives of the Whigs, rather than just their politics, he helps to reincarnate them as whole people rather than just as statesmen and party leaders.

restates the problem at one remove. Why were these groups attracted to Liberalism, and why were Liberals able to create a persistent majority within the electorate and within the Commons, if not the Lords? Why did this majority evaporate so quickly in 1886?

Jonathan Parry has devoted much of his career to answering these questions, though perhaps he may not choose to express them in quite this form. *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830–1886* is 'the last of a trilogy of books which have attempted to shed light on the political strategies and ideological profile of the Victorian Liberal Party' (p. 2). However, it is a trilogy of very different books, and those unfamiliar with the period might be advised to read his *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain*¹ before tackling this latest contribution, as that book gives both an outline of the major events of the period and something of Dr Parry's perspective on the principal players. *The Politics of Patriotism* assumes a familiarity with the events which it seeks to illuminate.

The current volume has two objectives. The main focus in traditional narratives has been on domestic policy, free trade, the reform bills, the secret ballot, church reforms and introduction of state education. Foreign policy gets second billing, with much of the attention paid to Empire and Ireland, which was in reality more an aspect of domestic policy during a period when Ireland was governed by the Act of Union no matter how much it strained at its fetters. In an era of peace disturbed only by unequal colonial battles and the inconclusive Crimean debacle, where is the interest in foreign policy? Dr Parry wishes to argue not only that European events had a major impact on Liberal policy and politics but also to

Promoting progress everywhere

Jonathan Parry: *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830–1886* (Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Reviewed by Tony Little

THE DOMINANCE of the Liberal Party in the mid-Victorian period is often viewed in terms of class or perhaps interests. The Tory party had the support of the rural communities and the Anglican Church. It generally sought to avoid change while inevitably having to give way before the pressure of events and, if

embracing change, did so in order to minimise its impact. The Liberals had the support of the growing manufacturing classes and the Nonconforming religious groups who welcomed change and the reform of a system that held them back and repressed their rights. Such a summary is not only a gross simplification but merely

use the treatment of such events to explain the techniques that different politicians exploited to win support for Liberalism. The argument of his trilogy is that domestic, foreign, imperial and Irish issues all involved 'the responsibility of political leaders and the political nation to forge a strong and beneficent national community on healthy principles' (p. 2). Although not the intention of the book, this work cannot be read without provoking thoughts about the contemporary debate on Britishness, or the manner in which our current superpower, the United States, justifies to itself the operation of its foreign policy.

Parry uses the first two chapters to establish his central argument, which is then illustrated in the five succeeding sections, proceeding in a broadly chronological fashion through the major foreign policy threats and opportunities which challenged Liberalism up to its major crisis over home rule in 1886.

Liberal politicians projected an image of England as an exceptional European state,

which, because Europe was more civilised than other continents, was the leader of the progressive world. This exceptionalism was the consequence of a series of Whig/Liberal reforms dating back to the Glorious Revolution that gave Britain a Protestant tradition and a strong constitution, flexible enough to incorporate developing communities who were willing to accept civic responsibilities. England was marked out by providence as a light for the world. By developing the power to restrict monarchical and aristocratic tendencies, government was run in the interests of the whole community, and the avoidance of a standing army meant that taxes could be kept low to the benefit of all sections of society.

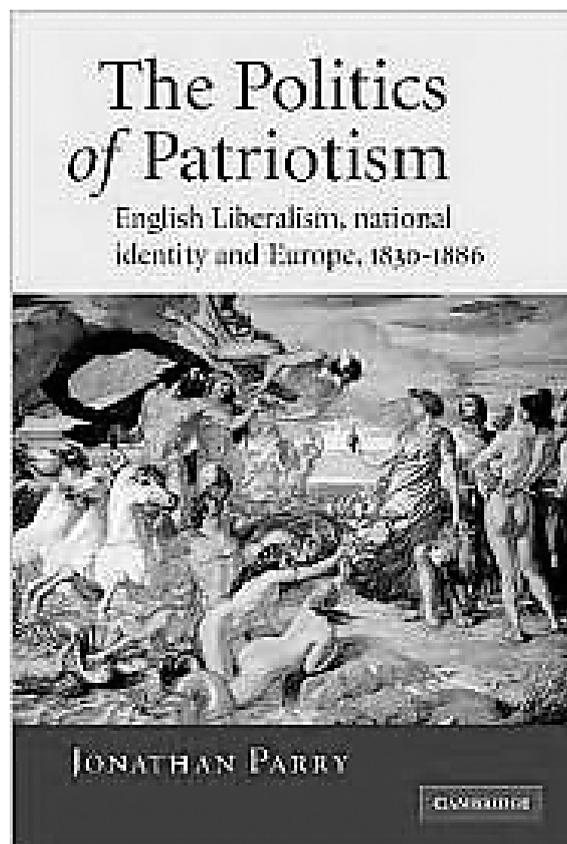
In contrast, the Continental powers tended to be autocratic, militaristic and priest-ridden. Their instability reflected the way in which government was run for sectional interests. Tories could be tarred with their support for these more autocratic regimes. At times when the Continent showed signs of moving towards what the British considered constitutional government, the Liberals could bask in reflected glory. When Europe experienced a bout of revolution, as in 1848, the Liberals could point out the superiority of the British system. Speeches of the Liberal leaders on Continental developments were intended in part to encourage reform in Europe and in part to consolidate support within the UK for Liberalism.

Their world-view gave Liberals a vested interest in European peace, if it could be secured while preserving British honour. A variety of techniques were employed. Free trade enjoyed the support of the whole party; for its Radical proponents such as Bright, peace was one of its natural consequences. Palmerston was

an enthusiast for threatening smaller powers and to playing the larger Continental powers off against each other to prevent any one dominating, reinforcing the image of the Liberals as the patriotic party. By and large, argues Parry, the Tories were less successful in using this strategy, although Disraeli recognised its importance and sought, not wholly successfully, to appropriate patriotism as a defining characteristic of Conservatism.

Parry proceeds to integrate Liberalism's attempt to propagate British moral progress to the world, its providential exceptionalism, with the aspects of Liberalism with which most people are already familiar, such as the search for improvement at home through the activities of civil society rather than government, demonstrating why this proved attractive to certain types of Anglican and Nonconformist groups. The politics of patriotic Liberalism offered these groups the best opportunity to achieve their agenda in both the domestic and international field, while making them grateful for reforms at home even when these failed to meet the expectations of the most fervent.

The episodes that Parry uses to illustrate his argument are not themselves an unusual part of the history of the mid-Victorian era; the novelty lies in the application of his argument and the integration of his perspective on foreign affairs with his analysis of domestic aspects of Liberalism. The period roughly up to the death of Palmerston proved particularly favourable to Liberalism because the Liberal narrative appeared to have a high correlation with events. Thereafter a number of difficulties occur. This is not because, as has sometimes been argued, Gladstone abandoned Palmerston's patriotic mantle for some loosely defined internationalism. Parry believes that



Gladstone was able to use the patriotic card to good effect in his Midlothian campaign against Disraeli's unmanly approach to the Bulgarian atrocities and the Congress of Berlin. Rather, Gladstone was working against a less favourable environment in which it was possible for Liberals to remain true to their philosophy yet arrive at opposing solutions to the most prominent problems.

Two key factors were at work. Firstly, Continental developments were less favourable. The threats from France and technological developments in naval warfare began to undermine Liberal economic and tax policy. Secondly, the Franco-Prussian War undermined the balance of power and was a significant factor in the Liberal defeat at the 1874 election. In addition, Bismarck's more assertive Germany not only sustained pressure on British defence expenditure but also helped to contrive greater Franco-British misunderstandings over Egypt, forcing Gladstone to maintain an occupation of parts of the Turkish empire in which he had intended a short-duration policing action. (It is hard to avoid thinking of Iraq when reading this section, though it is not part of Parry's case.) Secondly, Ireland failed to conform to the Liberal model. Its Catholicism and eagerness

for extra-parliamentary violence was closer to continental models than to the responsible lobbying of those British groups pressing for reform. Parry's book is especially valuable in his analysis of why Gladstone failed to 'pacify' Ireland in 1868, why education was so controversial in the 1870s and why Irish home rule was so divisive in 1886.

Since Parry is seeking to explain both the successes and failings of Liberal politicians over the whole mid-Victorian period, this is a complex work sustained by a mastery of the sources and a sensitivity to the intricacies of the various upholders of Liberalism, particularly of the religious groups which sustained the party. As an explanation of Liberal foreign policy it is valuable, as foreign policy has tended to be seen either from an 'official' or a Conservative perspective, with books on Liberal foreign policy much thinner on the ground. As an additional factor in the analysis of domestic policy it becomes an invaluable aid to the debate among professional historians.

Tony Little is the Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

¹ Yale University Press, 1993. The first of the trilogy is *Democracy & Religion, Gladstone and the Liberal Party 1867-1875* (Cambridge, 1986).

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among the Grand Old Man's admirers has been J. L. Hammond, whose *Gladstone and the Irish Nation* (1938) portrayed the great Liberal Prime Minister in a heroic light, trying to bring justice and peace to Ireland and being frustrated by the representatives of wealth and privilege. By contrast Cooke and Vincent in *The Governing Passion* (1973) saw the 1885-86 home rule crisis as a jockeying for position among the political elite in which short-term political tactics were more important than high principle.

Whatever view they have taken of Gladstone's motivation, recent historians of the Liberal Party have tended to see his adoption of home rule as a wrong turning. Some have argued that embracing home rule was a departure from the traditional Liberal approach of trying to integrate Ireland into the United Kingdom, while others have seen Irish entanglements as a distraction for the Liberal Party from addressing the concerns of the working-class electorate in Britain – in particular social and welfare questions.

One of the many virtues of Dr Biagini's book is that it addresses much more than just the high politics and electoral consequences of the relationship between Irish Nationalism and British Liberalism. This includes questions of party organisation and the wider political outlook both of parliamentarians and grassroots party workers. In doing so he questions the conclusion of many historians that the Liberal Party with its strong Nonconformist influences and the Roman-Catholic-dominated Irish parliamentary party were strange bedfellows. By locating Irish nationalism within the context of European, rather than simply British, liberalism, the author shows how Liberal Radicals and Irish nationalists shared a view of politics that emphasised democratic and constitutional

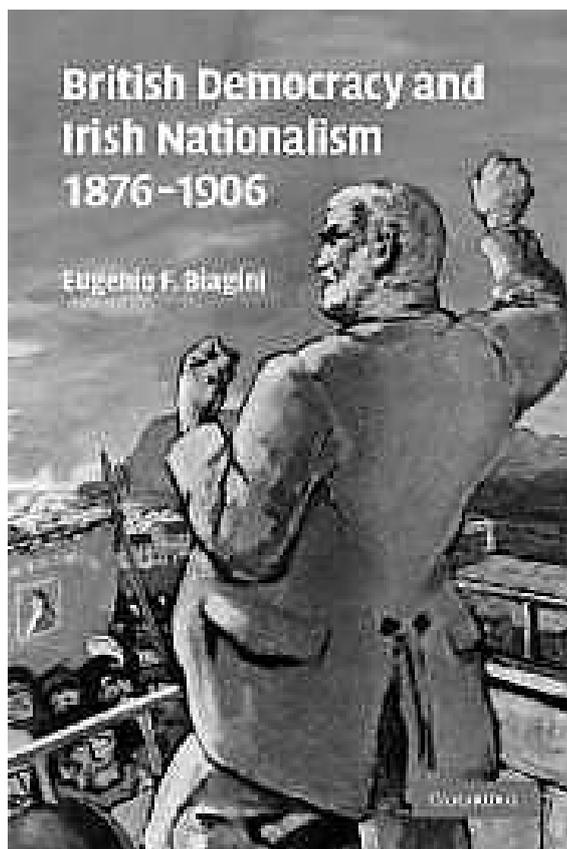
British Liberalism and Irish Nationalism

Eugenio F. Biagini: *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876-1906* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Reviewed by **Iain Sharpe**

THE RELATIONSHIP between Irish Nationalism and British Liberalism in general, and the Liberal Party's attitude towards Irish home rule in particular during the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have been as much a source of controversy among historians as they were among contemporaries of Gladstone, Chamberlain et al. Foremost



freedoms, as well as humanitarian sympathies, rather than economic collectivism.

Indeed, the book highlights a number of often forgotten episodes in the history of the period. For example, it shows that Irish nationalists as well as Gladstonian Liberals shared a sense of outrage at the Unionist government's failure to act decisively over the Turkish government's Armenian atrocities in 1895–96. And, in the course of a fascinating chapter on Joseph Chamberlain and Radical Unionism, Dr Biagini describes the unlikely career of T. W. Russell, the Ulster Liberal Unionist MP, who refused to accept that the campaign for land reform should be subservient to the greater imperative of preserving the Union, who combined virulent anti-Catholicism with a willingness to co-operate with Irish nationalists on land issues, and who eventually ended up back in the Liberal Party.

The book offers an account of the Liberal–Irish Nationalist relationship that is multi-dimensional and rich in

complexity, while offering at its core a very clear thesis. This is that Gladstone's adoption of home rule helped to delay the advent of class-based politics in Britain by fostering a radical political outlook that was Chartist rather than Marxist in nature – championing democratic reforms, ethics in foreign policy and support for free trade rather than socialist economic determinism. Paradoxically, however, the Liberal government of 1905–15 (and to a lesser extent that of 1892–95) had more success in addressing social questions, such as old age pensions or employers' liability for workplace accidents, than constitutional questions such as home rule for Ireland (let alone for Wales and Scotland). Even after the eclipse of the Liberal Party and its replacement by Labour after the First World War, Labour leaders such as Ramsay Macdonald appeared more comfortable defining their politics in essentially Gladstonian humanitarian terms rather than as distinctively socialist, ensuring the continuation of this aspect of Liberal politics.

This is very much history for a post-class-war era. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s, much of the historical debate on Liberalism, labour and democracy focused on the inevitable development of a socialist versus capitalist division in British politics, Dr Biagini argues that in the last decades of the nineteenth century, even in an electorate with a working-class majority, social and welfare reforms had limited appeal at the ballot box when compared with constitutional questions. He suggests that this phenomenon undermined the Radical Unionism of Joseph Chamberlain, which was strongly based on outcomes rather than democratic processes, as well as hindering the growth of socialist organisations.

Much of this is convincing, yet there are still problems with

the thesis which the author does not properly confront. Not least of these is that Gladstone's adoption of home rule initiated a period of unprecedented electoral failure for the Liberal Party. However complementary the dynamics of Irish nationalism and British radicalism may have been, neither appears to have gone down particularly well with English floating voters. The four general elections after the 1886 home rule crisis saw the Liberals suffer three landslide general election defeats and one unconvincing victory that left the Gladstone/Rosebery administration largely impotent.

In order to achieve its landslide victory of 1906, the Liberal leaders explicitly disavowed any intention of legislating for home rule in the next parliament. This was largely at the insistence of Liberal Imperialists, such as Grey, Haldane and Asquith (although the latter disavowed such a label), whose importance the author somewhat underestimates. In the end Liberalism prospered electorally when it presented a moderate image to the electorate and where the leadership rather than the party grassroots was clearly in charge of the direction of policy. Strong currents of radicalism have not generally led to electoral success for the left, whether in the 1880s, 1950s or 1980s.

These are matters that will of course continue to exercise historians of the Liberal Party and of British politics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dr Biagini is greatly to be congratulated on having produced a highly readable volume that offers new and original perspectives on the relationship between Liberalism and Irish nationalism. This book will surely be essential reading for all students of the period.

Ian Sharpe is researching a PhD at London University on the Edwardian Liberal Party.

WORKING WITH OTHERS: THE LIB-LAB PACT

From March 1977 to October 1978, the Liberal Party kept Jim Callaghan's Labour government in power through the Lib-Lab Pact. Labour ministers consulted systematically with Liberal spokespeople across a wide range of policy areas. Arguably, the Pact restored a degree of political and economic stability to the country, but its achievements from a Liberal point of view were highly limited and it did not appear to be popular with the country at large.

Yet, in the longer term, the Pact can be seen to have paved the way for the concept of different political parties working together – which led in the following decade to the Liberal–SDP Alliance and may – ultimately – lead to coalition government at Westminster.

Twenty years on from the Pact, key participants from both sides discuss its history and impact.

Speakers: **David Steel** (Leader of the Liberal Party 1976–88); **Tom McNally** (Head of the Prime Minister's Political Office 1976–79); **Michal Steed** (President of the Liberal Party 1978–79, and academic psephologist). Chair: **Geoff Tordoff** (Chairman of the Liberal Party 1976–79).

7.00pm, Monday 14 July

National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

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which was quite apparent by the time of Lloyd George's visit to Germany in 1936, which was followed by his notorious praise of Hitler. Even Lloyd George's much vaunted pro-Zionism can be seen to have nothing to do with the Nazi persecution of the Jews – he never offered that as a reason for supporting the establishment of a Jewish national home. Rather, his support had a decidedly anti-Semitic base. Even though his belief in Zionism was partly based on sincerely felt Christian Zionism, he also believed in the old canard of the

international influence and power of the Jews to determine world events. 'The Jewish race', Lloyd George wrote in his memoirs, 'had world-wide influence and capability, and the Jews had every intention of determining the outcome of World War I – acting in accordance with their financial instincts'. In other words his support for Zionism was a bribe to enlist the support and 'world influence of international Jewry' – a myth that Hitler was soon to shatter.

Lloyd George was also an admirer of the fascist

Oswald Mosley, and Lloyd George's recorded criticism of fascism was mild indeed. The similarity of Lloyd George to Marshal Pétain is striking. Both were war leaders, vain men who admired strong autocratic rulers, and both were easily seduced by Hitler. George Orwell alluded to Lloyd George as a potential Pétain, writing in his diary that: 'There are rumours that Lloyd George is the potential Pétain of England. It is easy to see him playing this part.' Churchill in 1941, in reply to a speech by Lloyd George in the House

of Commons, said: 'It was the sort of speech with which, I imagine, the illustrious and venerable Marshal Pétain might well have enlivened the closing days of M. Reynaud's Cabinet.'

Whilst it is right that we should acknowledge the tremendous achievements of Lloyd George, we should not ignore these major non-liberal flaws in his character.

Harry Davies