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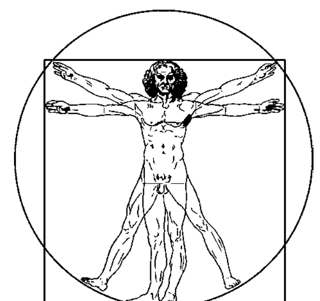

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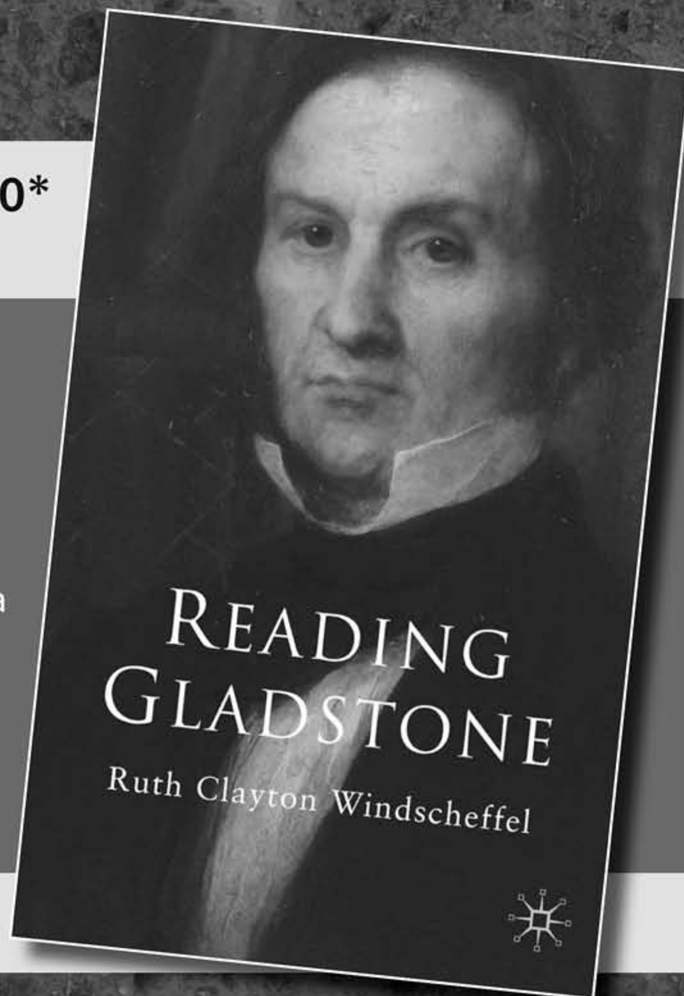

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ASQUITH AND TH

A hundred years ago, in April 1908, Herbert Henry Asquith became Prime Minister. In this lecture, given in the Convocation House, Oxford, on 15 May 2008 to mark the centenary of the formation of Asquith's administration, **Lawrence Goldman** assesses Asquith's record. If we admire Asquith's constitutional and reforming legacies from the Edwardian years, we must likewise recognise the role that he played in a third and less benign bequest to the future, which was to have an enduring impact on the politics of the century to come: the decline of the Liberal Party.

Asquith as Prime Minister, 1911

E LIBERAL LEGACY

One hundred years ago, on 8 April 1908, Herbert Henry Asquith kissed hands in the King's hotel room in Biarritz where Edward VII was then holidaying. Asquith had travelled across France alone and incognito to meet the King and receive his commission to form a government.[1] That the King required this of his next Prime Minister, and had not thought it necessary to return to London to assist in the creation of the new ministry, was to become the subject of adverse comment. On his return to London, on 29 April, the parliamentary Liberal Party endorsed Asquith's leadership. This was the first time in British political history that a political party had ratified the monarch's choice in this manner. He went on to hold the office of Prime Minister for nearly nine years, the longest continuous tenure since Lord Liverpool at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

On 7 May 1908, Asquith introduced the budget he had been preparing that spring as Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was in fact his third and most momentous budget, including provision for old-age pensions – non-contributory weekly payments, financed by general taxation, for those over seventy years of age. The idea was hardly new – a whole generation of social investigators and reformers, as well as some politicians, had already recognised the need to support the aged poor. But, in the spring of 1908, the introduction of a new type of 'outdoor relief', a national benefit paid without contribution, broke all precedent. No single measure better exemplifies the Edwardian Liberal legacy to us today; in the spring of 1908 we may, without exaggeration, note the origins of what came to be called the welfare state, and Asquith's role in that beginning. Asquith's promotion from 11 to 10 Downing Street likewise had political and personal consequences: it was left to the new Chancellor, David Lloyd George, to introduce and administer old-age pensions, and thus to reap the social and electoral kudos that naturally followed. The old-age pension rapidly became known as 'the Lloyd George', not 'the Asquith'. This was a foretaste of the later confusion and rivalry between the two men that was to compromise them both and came to imprison British Liberalism, at its moment of crisis, in a cage of their joint making.

Asquith has been well served by his major biographers who have all, in their ways, appreciated his political style and admired his achievements, while passing over his weaknesses and failings. In Roy Jenkins, Asquith had a biographer who shared his temperament and outlook, one who revelled in the world of Edwardian progressivism that he tried to perpetuate throughout his own political career. Jenkins' discretion was so complete that, at the end of his account, he could not bring himself to sum up and pass judgement on Asquith's life as whole. Jenkins gave Asquith the benefit of the doubt at every turn; and did not discuss, least of all question, the motives underlying Asquith's choices.[2]

Asquith has been well served by his major biographers who have all, in their ways, appreciated his political style and admired his achievements, while passing over his weaknesses and failings.

The entry on Asquith in the third of the twentieth-century supplements of the *Dictionary of National Biography* was written by another of his admirers, in this case his personal friend J. A. Spender, the notable Liberal journalist and editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, among other papers.[3] Prior to the publication of this entry, Spender had collaborated with Asquith's youngest son, Cyril, in a generous biographical tribute to Asquith.[4] The author, whose life also figures in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, is described as having been 'an ever dependable ministerial loyalist' when Asquith was in power, and had, like Asquith, been a Liberal Imperialist in the 1890s. [5] Later, Spender's position at the *Westminster Gazette* was undermined by an attempt, traceable to Lloyd George, to have him removed from the editor's chair. The plot failed, only reinforcing Spender's complete suspicion of Lloyd George. Fastidious and fair-minded though he was, the

effects of this are clearly read in Spender's memoir of Asquith, which praised his friend above all for the virtues of a Liberal attitude – for his 'dignity, fortitude and charity'; 'his sense of decorum in public affairs, his dislike of mob-oratory and self-advertisement, his high sense of honour'. Spender's praise for Asquith's personal qualities chime with Asquith's own assessment of political requirements: as he told his second wife, Margot, in 1914: 'In public politics as in private life, character is better than brains, and loyalty more valuable than either'.[6] Neither Spender nor Asquith had much stomach for what they perceived as Lloyd George's recurrent *dis*loyalties to his colleagues and party.

The same qualities of quiet dignity and character appealed to Colin Matthew whose memoir on Asquith in the *Oxford DNB* is surely one of the best and most judicious pieces among the many that he wrote in the last years of his life as the first editor of the dictionary.[7] According to Matthew, who particularly admired Asquith's stoicism in taking Britain into war in 1914, the leader remained a democratic statesman, determined that the normal rituals and processes of democratic government should go on and that a liberal nation should continue to think and act in the same measured and calculated manner of peacetime. Matthew recognised that the very attempt to continue with business as usual brought Asquith down; but with the rest of Europe falling victim to hysteria and jingoism, he paid tribute to Asquith's early control of the war effort. Matthew's portrait of Asquith is of an effective chairman and facilitator, a man who encouraged his subordinates and gave them their heads, rather than leading from the front. According to this biography, Asquith was closer in style to Attlee, the next Prime Minister to preside over the deliberate expansion of the social and welfare services of the nation, than to the other twentieth-century war leaders, Lloyd George and Churchill. Indeed, it was Churchill who in 1937 left us one of the best portraits of the Asquith *modus operandi*:

> In Cabinet he was markedly silent. Indeed he never spoke a word in Council if he could get his way without it. He sat, like the great judge he was, hearing with trained patience the case deployed on every side, now and then interjecting a question or brief comment, searching or pregnant, which gave matters a turn towards the goal he wished to reach.[8]

These were the techniques of peacetime – they did not, however, translate easily to world war. Vaughan Nash, the public servant and Asquith's wartime assistant, later recalled that 'Mr Asquith saw everything down to petty points of routine and detail'.[9] He meant it as a compliment. Lloyd George was less charitable about the same trait: in a letter of 1915 he complained that 'Asquith worries too much about small points. If you were buying a large mansion he would come to you and say, "Have you thought there is no accommodation for the cat?"'

More recently, Andrew Adonis (Lord Adonis, Minister of Schools, now Transport) has challenged the essentially respectful consensus among historians and biographers who have assessed Asquith's career and legacy.[10] Adonis blames Asquith for not reforming the composition of the House of Lords after having led the great constitutional struggle to limit its powers between 1909 and 1911. Where others have praised Asquith's commitment to ending the Lords' veto of bills sent up from the Commons, over which he was prepared to fight two general elections in 1910, Adonis convicts him of failing to find a solution to a problem that has not been answered by any government since that time, including the present government of which Adonis is a member.

The same qualities of quiet dignity and character appealed to Colin Matthew whose memoir on Asquith in the *Oxford DNB* is surely one of the best and most judicious pieces among the many that he wrote in the last years of his life as the first editor of the dictionary.

Asquith and his government were also at fault, according to Adonis, in their handling of the Irish question, although he does not clarify how a Liberal government in London could have prevented the mass resistance of Ulster to the Home Rule Bill of 1912. Adonis also fails to specify how the Asquith government might have dealt with home rule differently once the First World War had begun, and therefore how it could have prevented the incipient civil war that followed and which ended in the partition of Ireland in 1921–22. He recognises that it 'took nearly a century to overcome the bitter legacy' of events in Ireland, in tacit admission of the intractable nature of the situation, but does not acknowledge that the problem was bitten deep into the history of Ireland, rather than having been created by the Asquithian Liberals. Subsequent British administrations, including the Lloyd George coalitions between 1916 and 1922, found no easy solutions to Ireland's religious, economic and national divisions.

Adonis is even more critical of Asquith's failures of statesmanship in the days before the outbreak of the Great War, impugning him for neglecting the crisis in favour of trivial personal pleasures, for failing to understand its gravity, and for failing to deliver a clear and decisive warning to Germany concerning the consequences of its aggression. If it is generally agreed that the signals sent to the German government in the days before the conflict began lacked the severity required by the situation (a criticism which encompassed Asquith's meeting with the German ambassador, Prince Lichnowsky, on 1 August 1914 at which the issues of Belgian neutrality and German naval actions

in the Channel were discussed), it is also generally agreed that most governments across Europe were taken by surprise in July and August 1914 – Asquith and his cabinet were not alone.[11] It is also very widely understood that there was little the British could have done to prevent a continental war on two fronts, once mobilisation had begun on the Russian front, for this was the essence of Germany's strategy, planned long in advance of the 1914 conflict. Meanwhile, the old lament that Britain would have done better to stay out of the war, usually the card played by nostalgic imperialists and worse, neglects Britain's historic commitment to a balance of power on the continent, her longstanding guaranty of Belgian neutrality, her alliances with France and Russia and the ideological animus of some British liberals to an aggressive, authoritarian and expansionist German state. Among British progressives in 1914 were those who believed that the war had to be fought and that the fate of Liberalism depended on it: that in fighting they were defending liberal values rather than burying them, as Adonis implies.

With the benefit of hindsight, Adonis convicts Asquith's leadership of various sins of omission, just as the subsequent carnage of the Western Front has led us to underestimate the rational commitment of many Britons who went to war in 1914. But this was not how it appeared to contemporaries, nor did solutions come freely to hand in any of these situations, whether matters of parliamentary reform, self-determination in Ireland, or the fate of Europe. If Asquith's leadership is to be criticised, we must focus instead on the period after the First World War had begun, on his handling of the conflict itself and on his unwillingness to cede power in a dignified manner, in the interest of his party.

If Asquith's leadership is to be criticised, we must focus instead on the period after the First World War had begun, on his handling of the conflict itself and on his unwillingness to cede power in a dignified manner, in the interest of his party.

After Asquith had settled into his new position as Prime Minister, later in 1908, he came to Oxford, and to his old college, Balliol, to attend a dinner in his honour. It was here, in his after-dinner speech, that he pronounced that statement about Balliol men that has dogged them, and other Oxford men and women trailing in their wake, ever since: 'effortless superiority'. But Asquith's career had not been effortless, and though his maiden speech in the House of Commons in 1887 on the subject of an Irish crimes bill had impressed everyone who heard it, Mr Gladstone included, Asquith had experienced professional struggles and personal sadness in his formative years.[12]

Born into a relatively humble family in Yorkshire in 1852, his father, who was a minor employer in the local wool trade, died when he was eight, and his mother was an invalid. His stroke of luck arrived when he was sent to London to live with relatives and to attend the City of London School, where he won a classical scholarship to Balliol in 1870. A double first and a clutch of university prizes then followed; he was also President of the Union. But perhaps the greatest prize of all, and the most influential of Oxford's legacies on Asquith, was to have been at Balliol during the opening years of Jowett's Mastership of the college, when T. H. Green, the great liberal moral philosopher, was at the height of his powers. Asquith was never, by his own admission, a devotee of Green, but the ethos of social and political service that Green preached at Balliol, which was supported by Jowett, rubbed off. Other Oxford men were more directly affected by their teachings, and argued more vigorously and publicly for a rebalancing of the state's relationship to the citizen in the late-Victorian period – a phenomenon which would become known as the 'New Liberalism' of the Edwardian era. But it was under Asquith's leadership, between 1908 and 1911, that some of those new plans were transformed into practical policies and politics.

Despite all his brilliance and promise whilst at Oxford, on leaving the university Asquith struggled for a decade as a briefless barrister and occasional Liberal journalist, chafing at his relative poverty and obscurity, though gradually coming to the attention of the leaders in his profession and in his party. He was first elected to the Commons for East Fife in 1886, and continued to represent the constituency until the coupon election of 1918 at the end of the Great War. In 1891 the sudden death of his first wife, Helen, left him chiefly responsible for five young children. Though Asquith's talents brought him to the Home Office for the three years of Liberal government between 1892 and 1895, this was not an easy passage in the history of the Liberal Party, and the era as a whole is more notable for Liberal divisions and the absence of direction than for the purposeful preparation for future power.

When, on the occasion of the election of 1906, after a generation of Conservative dominance, the Liberals' opportunity came again, it was more the consequence of Tory mistakes and unpopularity than the positive endorsement of Liberal values. If the electorate was moved at all by a commitment to Liberalism, it was of an older variety, a recrudescence of the principles of Gladstonian free trade and religious equality, rather than an endorsement of New Liberalism.

Thus Asquith's first legacy as Prime Minister was one he had himself inherited from the past rather than one that he and his generation had fashioned for themselves and subsequently handed down: it was the finishing of constitutional business concerning the House of Lords and Ireland, begun earlier in the nineteenth century. It is doubtful

that Lloyd George's People's Budget of 1909 was deliberately aimed at the Lords – first and foremost it was a genuine and necessary measure of revenue-raising in order to pay for the unexpected costs of welfare and national defence. However, when the Lords rejected the budget, the Chancellor and Prime Minister were ready to use the opportunity to settle the outstanding question of the powers of the upper house. In the first two years of the Liberal administration under Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, from 1906 to 1908, the Lords had vetoed or heavily amended a clutch of lesser Liberal welfare measures. If the Liberals were to fulfil their historic responsibility to Ireland they would first have to deal with the Lords veto, for Gladstone's two previous home rule bills in 1886 and 1893 had been defeated in the upper house.

The epic struggles between 1909 and 1911, the matter of 'the peers versus the people', brought out the best in Asquith and should be regarded as his most notable achievement. In the public defence of historic Liberal principles he had no match. In complex parliamentary negotiations with the Liberal Party's allies, the new Labour Party and the Irish Nationalists, in consultations with the court over what two different kings, Edward VII and George V, would and would not support, and in calculations of electoral mood and advantage which these struggles required – there were, after all, two general elections in 1910 to be conducted and won – Asquith was in his element.

The Asquithian Liberals achieved what their Gladstonian fathers had not: an end to the conflict of powers between Commons and Lords under the Parliament Act of 1911, and the passage of home rule for Ireland in 1912. That the realisation of Irish independence took longer than planned owing to the First World War, that it also took very many lives, and that the outcome in 1922 was not what any of the parties in London, Dublin and Belfast had desired, was not the responsibility of the Liberal Party that framed and passed the legislation in 1912. In the long history of Liberal attempts to pacify Ireland and to bring justice to its people, Asquith's government deserves the highest credit for the lengths to which it went to fulfil an inherited commitment to Irish self-determination.

The Asquithian Liberals achieved what their Gladstonian fathers had not: an end to the conflict of powers between Commons and Lords under the Parliament Act of 1911, and the passage of home rule for Ireland in 1912.

Asquith's second great legacy was his government's commitment to the legislative foundations of the welfare state. Old-age pensions were only a part of this; there were also trade boards to regulate minimum wages and conditions in the so-called 'sweated' trades, labour exchanges to help the unemployed find jobs and contributory National Insurance to protect the unemployed when they fell sick or were laid off. Likewise, the People's Budget of 1909, when eventually agreed by both houses of Parliament, not only confirmed the pre-eminence of the Commons in all financial matters, but also established the principle that progressive taxation would be used thereafter to fund redistributive social programmes.

The ideas underpinning this historic series of changes in the role of the state and the responsibilities of the individual had, in fact, been developing and maturing since the 1870s and 1880s. Stimulated by the social investigation into poverty of the late-Victorian era, and debated and disseminated by the organs of Liberal opinion and by Liberal intellectuals outside of the government, they were fashioned into workable policies by New Liberals in parliament and the cabinet, such as Lloyd George and Churchill. Key civil servants inside government departments, like the Board of Trade and Board of Education, also played an important role in their dissemination. The filtration of ideas from T. H. Green's Balliol was slow and complex, without doubt, but nonetheless reached Asquith's cabinet. As Chancellor, Asquith had the energy and initiative to devise social policy and as Prime Minister he had the requisite sympathy and vision to encourage other ministers in social innovation.

But the price exacted on Asquith's personal life over these years – surely among the most intense and also the most exciting in modern British political history – was high indeed. His colleagues noted his growing fondness for alcohol from about 1910. According to Churchill in April 1911, Asquith was perfectly competent until dinner – 'serene, efficient, undisturbed' – but after that he was forced to entrust proceedings to his younger colleague. As Churchill wrote to his wife, 'only the persistent freemasonry of the House of Commons prevents a scandal'.[13] We can sense the pressure Asquith was under from the teasing letters he wrote to Venetia Stanley in the years leading up to the war, which have now been brought together and edited in a single volume by Michael and Eleanor Brock.[14] In their very playfulness and sometimes even in their triviality, these letters tell us how desperately Asquith needed a release from the concerns of office. The problems only intensified after August 1914, when Asquith's quest for such release not only conflicted with the pressing needs of government but also with the public's perception of how a leader during a world war should behave. As Bonar Law, the leader of the Conservative Party in the wartime coalition, had warned him in a letter of February 1916, 'In war it is necessary not only to be active but to seem active'.[15]

We know from Colin Matthew's memoir that Asquith enjoyed playing bridge in the evenings but that he never played cards after lunch or

before dinner. Matthew said nothing about cards in the *morning*, however. There is a fateful story of Asquith's premiership in June 1916 in which bridge *before* lunch features, though the story is disputed and the events may never have occurred in this manner. Following the death at sea of the War Minister, Lord Kitchener, Bonar Law apparently went in search of the Prime Minister to discuss the ministerial succession. Told that Asquith was still at his home in Sutton Courtenay on a Monday morning three weeks before the Somme offensive, he was forced to motor down to talk with him. 'He found the Prime Minister engaged in a rubber of bridge with three ladies. Asquith genially requested him to wait till the game was finished. Bonar Law, by now considerably annoyed, declined to wait.'

'Asquith immediately offered the War Office to Bonar Law', but the latter explained that he had already bowed to Lloyd George's determination to follow Kitchener. 'So Asquith agreed to offer the post to Lloyd George'. Little wonder that 'the episode left a lasting impression upon Bonar Law'.[16] Little wonder also that in the second half of 1916, as the shocking news from the Somme registered in the national mind and in its soul, the Conservative press should have begun a campaign against Asquith's handling of the war that assisted in his replacement as Prime Minister by Lloyd George in the first week of December. We must note here that Bonar Law's passenger as he motored to Oxfordshire on that Monday in June was none other than Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, the owner of the *Daily Express*, who was to play a large public and also a private role in Asquith's demise.

As early as the spring of 1915 even the loyal Spender had privately criticised Asquith's war leadership: the reason for much of the hostility of the press, he had written, 'is A's laziness & lack of ideas'.[17] By the autumn of 1916 Lloyd George and many others had come to believe that the organisation of the government and its consequent policy could not win the war, and that Asquith should stand aside. As Kenneth Morgan has suggested, the problem with Asquith by this stage was 'not so much political as psychological. Lloyd George simply looked like the vigorous, dynamic leader who could win the war, while the faltering Asquith, so dominant in peacetime, did not.'[18] Lloyd George's plan for a new War Cabinet, excluding Asquith, precipitated the crisis and Asquith's fall.

According to Enoch Powell, 'All political lives, unless they are cut off in midstream at a happy juncture, end in failure, because that is the nature of politics and human affairs'.[19] No one knew this better than Powell himself. That he should have written it in his biography of Joseph Chamberlain is, in the present context, not without interest. Though Chamberlain's career was cut short by a sudden stroke rather than a happy juncture, no one did more in 1903 to worst Chamberlain and his campaign for tariff reform than Asquith himself, whose speeches across the nation at that time in defence of free trade were among his most notable contributions to the re-emergence of his party and to the history of British Liberalism. But Powell's dictum points us towards one of the great problems of political life in any age or any type of political system: how to make a good ending. For it may be argued that by making a *bad ending*, Asquith's third legacy was his contribution to the division of the Liberal Party that destroyed it as the major party of the British left.

It may be argued that by making a *bad ending*, Asquith's third legacy was his contribution to the division of the Liberal Party that destroyed it as the major party of the British left.

Historians have long debated the reasons for the decline of the Liberal Party during this period. For some, the origins of the problem can be found in the 1880s and 1890s when the party's historic attempt to unite the workers and the bourgeoisie in a political coalition began to break down. The middle classes moved towards Conservatism; the workers felt ignored and unprotected and their trade unions provided the basis for the new Labour Party. Others have pointed to the decay of local Liberal organisations across the country, often as a result of the defection of richer local Liberals to the right, who took their money and flair for local politics with them.[20] Prior to the Second World War, the American historian George Dangerfield saw the 'death of Liberal England' prefigured in the industrial and social conflicts of the years immediately preceding the First World War: Liberal rationalism was unable to manage the violence and emotionalism of nationalists, feminists and syndicalists.[21]

Asquith, indeed, was a notable opponent of women's suffrage until 1918, speaking as well as voting against it on many occasions. Nor was his handling of industrial disputes sure or instinctive. His use of the Metropolitan Police to control disorder among locked-out miners at Featherstone in 1893, resulting in two deaths, haunted him for the rest of his career; just as Churchill was always reminded of the deaths at Tonypandy in 1911, the cry of 'Remember Featherstone!' was often heard at an Asquith rally. At the very end of his life he took a public stance against the General Strike, though Lloyd George, whose condemnation was reserved for Baldwin's government, contradicted him once more.[22] Concerning important issues of the present and future – the rights of workers and women in these cases – Asquith provides some evidence in support of the so-called 'Dangerfield thesis'.

For Colin Matthew and Ross McKibbin, meanwhile, the crucial development came later in the mass enfranchisement at

the end of the First World War. From this point of view, it was inevitable that the millions of working-class men and women now voting for the first time would automatically align with values of the Labour Party. It is undeniable that in the years following 1918, a crucial stage at which the electorate was changing and when many of its new members were forming political allegiances for the first time, the division of Liberalism between supporters of Asquith and of Lloyd George fatally compromised Liberal identity and encouraged the anti-Tory vote to drift towards Labour.[23]

That the major cause for this division was Lloyd George's decision to prolong the wartime coalition and to campaign against those Liberals who were not granted the 'coupon' (the joint letter of endorsement that he and Bonar Law had signed) is not in doubt. But it may be argued as well that Asquith could have chosen to try to conciliate. Beyond the enmity caused by the manner of his removal from office, there is no doubt that Asquith was also taking a principled stance against Lloyd George's ambition and vanity, and in favour of traditional Liberal principles and codes of political behaviour. But for the rest of his life he would remain locked in a fatal embrace with his former ally – a dance of political death, in fact – which undermined his party as it was being squeezed away from both the left and the right. This essentially resulted in both Asquith and Lloyd George being deprived of high office.

Asquith could have bowed out with dignity in the early months of the war at a stage when he had successfully overseen mobilisation and the transition to a war footing in government. He might have resigned when the coalition was formed in May 1915, even if it had been interpreted as accepting some of the blame for the 'shell shortage' of that spring. He could have followed the public mood more sensitively and made way for Lloyd George at almost any stage in 1916. In September of that year, his brilliant and charismatic son Raymond was killed on the Somme. A month later when he became seriously ill as a consequence of this news, coupled with the general strain of wartime leadership, Margot thought him 'absolutely done', and he might have bowed to the evidence of growing fatigue.[24] After his fall from power he could have retired with dignity to the backbenches and worked to minimise Liberal divisions. But Asquith's decision to move a motion of censure on the government in May 1918 over the question of troop numbers on the Western Front – which failed when Lloyd George mounted a bravura defence of his conduct in the subsequent Commons debate – irreparably divided the party.

True, he had performed wonders behind the scenes as a wartime Prime Minister holding together the cabinet and the wider administration (despite its often fissiparous tendencies). Asquith no doubt imagined that these skills were still required and at a premium. However, in light of the numerous opportunities which had presented themselves – and which Asquith had failed to take – that would have enabled him to finish on a more positive note and to reduce the divisions in his party, it is difficult to sympathise with his case. His incapacity to bow out gracefully at an appropriate time essentially contributed to the undermining of Liberal identity and the party's political authority which has endured to this day.

There is no better example of Asquith's lack of self-awareness at the end of his career than his request, put to Lloyd George in person, that he should be made a member of the British delegation at the Paris peace conference in 1919.[25] Would Gordon Brown take Tony Blair with him to the next summit? Could John Major have taken Margaret Thatcher with him to Maastricht in 1992? Merely to think of these alternative scenarios from our own age is to recognise the impossibility of Asquith's position. Instead of statesmanship on a global scale Lloyd George gave Asquith a little piece of local parish-pump politics as a sort of consolation: chairmanship of the Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge in 1919–22. He performed his duties well, though in a conservative fashion, sticking closely to the patterns that had been laid down by the preceding Victorian Royal Commissions on the two ancient universities. As the Oxford historian Sir Charles Firth wrote at the time, 'My impression is that Asquith's views on higher education are those prevalent at Balliol in 1870 and that he has learnt nothing about it since.'[26]

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As his committee collected evidence on the state of the two institutions, an exchange took place that illustrates the impression made by Asquith on the younger generation – those who had fought in the war and were hoping to set about social reconstruction in the following years. This was, in fact, an exchange between two Balliol men, with Asquith in the chair and the economic historian and socialist thinker, R. H. Tawney, twenty-eight years his junior, giving evidence on how to make Oxford more open and accessible to the children of the working class. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose,* we might say. But the tone of the exchange and Tawney's evident frustration with his interlocutors on the committee, Asquith included, suggests that more than university politics were at issue.[27] For Tawney had come within an inch of his life, quite literally, on the first day of the Somme, taking two bullets in his chest. When he had recovered, convalescing in Oxford in the Examination Schools, which had become one vast military hospital for the duration of the

conflict, he dedicated himself to a democratisation of the war, which, he argued, had been fought by a traditional class in a traditional manner and to the detriment of the nation.[28]

We might hypothesise that when Tawney confronted Asquith in 1921 he saw before him a prime specimen of 'the old gang' whom he held responsible for multiple national failings after 1914, and even perhaps before. Asquith, the Edwardian progressive, now seemed to personify the weakness of a played-out ruling elite to a new generation of more radical and impatient reformers. Tawney was perhaps the pre-eminent intellectual guide and inspiration of the inter-war left in Britain, arguing, in this case, for the accessibility and therefore the reduction in cost of a university education and the opening up of Oxford and Cambridge to the sons and daughters of the middle and working classes. For him, Asquith was a figuration of the politics and social values of the past. Later, in 1925, when Asquith was a candidate for the Chancellorship of Oxford, he was beaten soundly, by more than two to one, by the candidate of the right, Lord Cave, the then Conservative Lord Chancellor. The centre did not hold; at the end of his career Asquith was assailed from right and from left, as well as from sections of his own party who had remained loyal to Lloyd George.

At this stage Asquith was referred to as the 'last of the Romans'; this was meant as a compliment.[29] However, whereas the Romans knew when to fall on their swords, Asquith may simply have stayed too long. Given the nature and strength of the historical forces that were challenging Liberalism after 1911, the last year of the heroic phase of Asquith's career, it would be impossible to argue with any certainty or conviction that the outcome would have been different if he had shown more self-awareness and self-possession. But if we admire Asquith's constitutional and reforming legacies from the Edwardian years, we must likewise recognise the role that he played in a third and less benign bequest to the future , which was to have an enduring impact on the politics of the century to come: the decline of the Liberal Party.

If we admire Asquith's constitutional and reforming legacies from the Edwardian years, we must likewise recognise the role that he played in a third and less benign bequest to the future , which was to have an enduring impact on the politics of the century to come: the decline of the Liberal Party.

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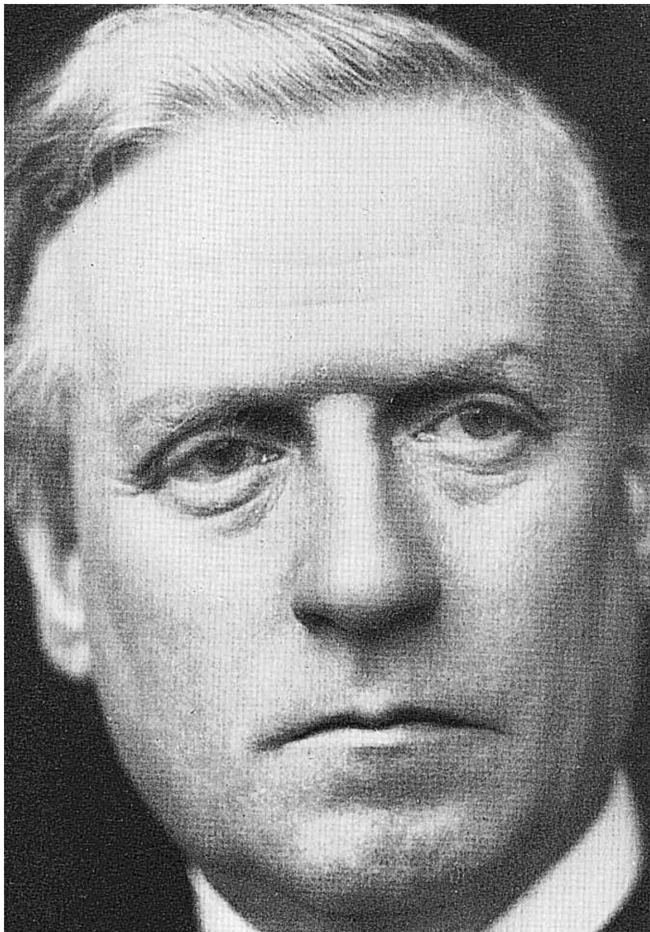
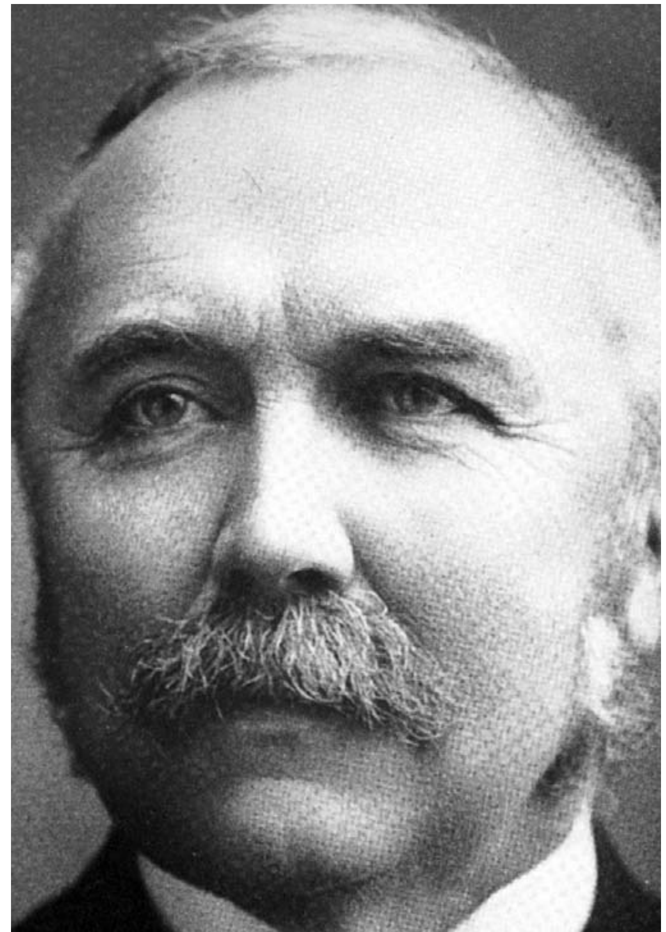
CAMPBELL-BANNER
AN UNEASY POLITI





This year marks the centenary of the death of Liberal Prime Minister Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and of the succession to the premiership of H. H. Asquith, the last head of a purely Liberal government of the United Kingdom. **Iain Sharpe** considers the relationship between the two Liberal leaders.

MAN AND ASQUITH:
CAL PARTNERSHIP

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Herbert Henry Asquith between them presided over the twentieth century's longest continuous period of non-Conservative rule, from 1905 to 1915.[1] They were instrumental in transforming the Liberal Party's political fortunes in opposition before 1905, leading to the landslide election victory of January 1906 and nine and a half years in government, before the inclusion of Conservatives in Asquith's wartime coalition government in May 1915. In government between 1905 and 1908, Asquith was the clear second-in-command to Campbell-Bannerman and deputised for the Prime Minister during his frequent illnesses. Yet for much of the period before the Liberals took office the two men were on opposite sides of the divisions that beset the Liberal Party and which at times threatened to divide it permanently. Their willingness to work together in spite of pressures from the rival wings of the party that threatened to pull them apart was crucial to rescuing the Liberals from the electoral wilderness.

The Liberal leadership

The final decade and a half of the nineteenth century was a period of electoral failure for the Liberals. The landslide defeat of 1886 followed the secession of the Liberal Unionists over Irish home rule. The party staged a modest electoral recovery in 1892, taking office under Gladstone, and then Rosebery, but the government was short-lived and accomplished little. The party suffered another catastrophic defeat in the 1895 general election. The resignation of Rosebery as Liberal leader in 1896 and that of his successor, Harcourt, in 1898, in both cases the result of disputes over imperial policy, created an impression of a party in perpetual crisis.

The Liberals' choice of leader now fell between Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, both survivors of the 1892–95 Cabinet. Of the two, Asquith seemed the more obvious choice. Aged forty-six, he was one of the few success stories of the recent Liberal government, in which he had served as Home Secretary. Originally from Yorkshire, he came from a relatively modest, middle-class and staunchly Liberal family. He had been a brilliant classics scholar at Balliol, before becoming a barrister and Liberal MP for East Fife. In the House of Commons he was associated with figures such as Richard Burdon Haldane and Sir Edward Grey, who were imperialist in outlook and wanted the party to project a moderate image, but who were also open to new ideas on social and welfare reform. Campbell-Bannerman, known universally as 'C-B', was more clearly a Liberal in the Gladstonian tradition. Sixteen years older than Asquith, he had served in all Liberal governments since 1868, most recently as Secretary of State for War. His father was a wealthy Glasgow merchant and his family Conservative. Although he had attended Cambridge University, his academic achievements were modest. As a cabinet minister he was capable and loyal, but by no means outstanding – neither a great orator nor a shining intellect. His lack of leadership ambition is shown by his unsuccessful pursuit in 1895 of the House of Commons Speakership.[2]

Liberal leaders: Asquith and Campbell-Bannerman

In the event, the party was spared a leadership battle. Asquith ruled himself out of contention because, being dependent on his earnings at the Bar to support a large family and a notoriously extravagant socialite wife, he could not devote himself to full-time politics. Indeed, despite his acute mind and academic achievements, Asquith was regarded by many of his contemporaries as a parvenu, in contrast to C-B who, although he took little part in 'society', was at least wealthy.[3] Asquith offered his backing to C-B, promising 'the most loyal & energetic support', while admitting that, with the party's ongoing difficulties, 'it has not at first sight a very friendly look to urge a man into such a position'.[4] C-B's election was confirmed at a meeting of Liberal MPs on 6 February 1899, at which he made clear that he was a reluctant party leader, and said: 'I hope I am well enough known to be a person of a pretty tolerant and easy-going disposition not likely to exercise pedantically any powers of party discipline.'[5]

Both men were to be severely tested on these respective pledges in the ensuing years.

The South African war

Although C-B enjoyed a quiet first few months as opposition leader, the war in South Africa, which broke out in October 1899, was guaranteed to reawaken divisions in the party. Liberals in the Gladstonian and Cobdenite traditions opposed aggressive imperial adventures and instinctively sided with small nations such as the Transvaal and Orange Free State, with which Britain was now at war. By contrast, the 'Liberal Imperialists', as they were to become known, felt the war was justified and did not want the party to seem unpatriotic.

On the surface Asquith and Campbell-Bannerman held similar views on the war. Both were critical of the Unionist government's diplomacy, but realised that a responsible opposition could not appear to side with their country's enemies in wartime. Yet C-B ultimately blamed the British government for the war and believed it an unnecessary blunder, while Asquith regarded Britain as more sinned against than sinning. In the early part of the war, they attempted to coordinate their public statements to avoid contradicting one another. But it was impossible to avoid differences of emphasis. Asquith, Haldane and Grey all supported the diplomacy of Sir Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner for Southern Africa and Governor of Cape Colony, with whom they had close personal ties. C-B, on the other hand, was privately critical of Milner's belligerent approach and struggled to resist expressing these views in public.

Key parliamentary votes in the early part of the war highlighted the divisions among Liberals between three groups: supporters of the war, its implacable opponents (dubbed 'pro-Boers'), and those who followed C-B's lead in trying to steer a middle course. Unlike Haldane, Grey and other imperial-minded Liberals, Asquith avoided voting against his leader on the parliamentary divisions. He cooperated with C-B and the Chief Whip, Herbert Gladstone, in agreeing an amendment to the Queen's Speech in February 1900 that briefly united all factions in regretting the government's 'want of knowledge, foresight and judgment' in its conduct of South African affairs and preparations for the war.[6]

Methods of barbarism

Despite C-B's attempts to preserve unity, Grey and Haldane, along with other Liberal Imperialists, believed that Campbell-Bannerman's leadership was resulting in an unsustainable fudge over the war and hoped for Rosebery to return to the leadership with Asquith leading the party in the House of Commons. Asquith, however, does not appear to have shared his friends' desire to oust C-B, and continued to support him.[7] However, C-B's notorious 'methods of barbarism' speech in June 1901, in which he denounced the conditions in which Boer prisoners were being held in concentration camps in South Africa, plunged Asquith into open confrontation with his leader.[8] Despite its celebrated position in the canon of Liberal speeches, the phrase 'methods of barbarism' was at the time widely regarded as a mistake, even by Liberals loyal to his leadership,[9] because it appeared to be a criticism of British troops fighting for their country. While C-B was sincere in his comments on the suffering in the concentration camps, Asquith joined with Liberal Imperialists in seeing it as a sign that the party leadership had been captured by the pro-Boers and that their own views were being anathematised. This was partly because the speech was given to a dinner sponsored by the anti-war National Reform Union, and the whole event was seen as having an air of pro-Boer triumphalism.

At first Asquith assumed that C-B had made an unintentional blunder. He offered to do what he could to discourage reprisals from Liberal Imperialists.[10] However, when it became clear that C-B stood by his remarks, Asquith spoke out in defence of Liberal supporters of the war. He addressed a dinner at Liverpool Street Hotel when, although he did not mention C-B by name, he attacked the National Reform Union meeting. He did not threaten a Liberal imperialist secession from the party, but defended the Liberal credentials of those who supported the war and their claim to be part of the orthodox Liberal movement.[11]

C-B ultimately blamed the British government for the war and believed it an unnecessary blunder, while Asquith regarded Britain as more sinned against than sinning.

Asquith's supporters arranged a further dinner in his honour, to be held on 19 July; it was regarded by many as a direct challenge to C-B's leadership. However, C-B outwitted his critics by calling a meeting of the Liberal parliamentary party, which endorsed his leadership while allowing scope for Liberals to express dissenting views. Asquith came under pressure from many Liberal MPs to abandon the dinner in a show of party unity.[12] What followed was an early example of the sort of compromise that became typical of Asquith's career. Pleading that the arrangements had gone too far for cancellation, he insisted that the dinner go ahead, but then used his speech to deliver a conciliatory message, in which he commented: 'I have never called myself a Liberal Imperialist. The name of Liberal is long enough, good enough, and distinctive enough, and always will be for me.'[13]

Relations between Asquith and C-B remained strained for some time afterwards, however. In his public speeches through the autumn of 1901 Asquith, while never directly repudiating C-B's leadership, took an increasingly independent line. At Ladybank on 28 September he raised the question of Irish home rule, advocating a 'step-by-step' approach, arguing that the Liberal Party should disavow any immediate intention to legislate for an Irish parliament and instead consider Irish reforms that were compatible with, but did not go as far as, a separate legislature.[14] This appeared a calculated attack on a long-held Liberal policy and therefore a direct challenge to C-B. In reality, Asquith's view was similar to the policy that C-B had acquiesced in before the 1900 election, at the instigation of Herbert Gladstone.[15] This made clear that home rule would not be an immediately priority of a Liberal government and gave Liberal candidates flexibility in their statements on the policy. But whereas C-B was happy to let home rule sit quietly on the back-burner, Asquith and the Liberal Imperialists wanted it to be publicly disavowed, signalling a clear change in Liberal priorities.

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On 15 December, Asquith was present at Rosebery's notorious Chesterfield speech, in which the former Prime Minister appeared to point the way to Liberal unity on the war, while at the same time stirring up tensions on domestic policy.[16] The speech was a political sensation, seeming to herald Rosebery's return to front-line politics. On this point both C-B and Asquith had mixed feelings. Rosebery's prestige in the country meant that all leading Liberals had to express the hope, in public at least, that he would rejoin the active ranks of the party. In C-B's case, this was tempered by the knowledge that Liberal Imperialists wanted Rosebery to resume the leadership. Asquith too was aware that Rosebery's return would threaten his own position as the foremost figure on the party's imperial wing. He was frustrated by Rosebery's semi-detached relationship with the Liberal Party, on one occasion describing him as 'afraid to plunge, yet not resolute enough to hold to his determination to keep aloof'.[17] At the same time, Asquith's allies, Grey and Haldane, were also strong supporters of Rosebery.

The Liberal League

If the Chesterfield speech seemed at first to offer hope of Liberal unity, its aftermath saw an increasingly bitter feud between C-B and Rosebery. The most divisive factor was Rosebery's espousal of the 'clean slate' – the view that the Liberal Party should abandon long-held policies that had proved unpopular with the electorate. In practice, C-B was flexible about what the Liberals ought to do in government, and willing to amend unpopular policies. For example, he agreed to drop the party's commitment to the prohibitionist 'local veto' policy on temperance, at the suggestion of Herbert Gladstone.[18] He was aware of the faults of the party's radical wing. But he saw Rosebery's 'clean slate' position as an abandonment of all that the Liberal Party stood for. Asquith's views were probably somewhere between the two extremes, but, in the wake of Chesterfield, he stood more clearly in the Rosebery camp.

In February 1902, Rosebery launched a new organisation, the Liberal League, as a vehicle for his Chesterfield policy, and Asquith joined Grey in becoming one of its vice presidents. From the start the Liberal League's purpose was unclear – was it a putative breakaway organisation or a haven for imperialists within the Liberal Party? The fact that Rosebery, the League's president, pronounced himself 'outside [the official Liberal Party] tabernacle',[19] while its vice presidents remained active Liberals in the House of Commons, added to the confusion. It provoked a hostile reaction from C-B, to whose authority the League seemed a direct challenge. However, Asquith was keen to assert the League's position within the Liberal fold and disavow any intention to break away from the party or be driven out of it.[20]

Free trade

In May 1902 the South African war came to an end. The Unionist government's Education Act of the same year, with its perceived bias towards Church of England schools, enabled nearly all Liberals to rally to the traditional cause of religious equality. The following year Joseph Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign acted as a further catalyst for unity, as all sections of the party wanted to defend free

trade, one of the party's longest-held and most treasured causes. Relations between Asquith and Campbell-Bannerman thawed, and regular correspondence between them resumed from early 1903, although never quite on the same friendly terms as before the summer of 1901. C-B remained suspicious of the Liberal Imperialists, commenting privately that: 'That section, for their ends, which are mainly personal, exaggerate their zeal in the fiscal quarrel in order to cover their old back-slidings.'[21] However, he encouraged Asquith to follow Joseph Chamberlain round the country with a series of speeches countering tariff reform propaganda, a campaign that revived Asquith's reputation within the party as a whole. C-B valued Asquith's mastery of the facts and detailed arguments on free trade, referring to him as 'the sledgehammer' for his ability to rebut the tariff reformers' arguments.[22]

From 1902, the Liberals began to notch up a series of by-election victories and it became increasingly clear that the party was likely to win the next general election. This raised the question of who would be Prime Minister in an incoming Liberal administration. C-B was officially only the leader of the party in the House of Commons, and not an automatic choice to lead a Liberal government. Many Liberal Imperialists hoped that Rosebery would agree to form a government, but as the former Prime Minister still refused to make a political comeback, Asquith became their favoured choice. In 1903, Haldane told Asquith that neither he nor Grey would be willing to serve under C-B either as leader in the House of Commons or as Prime Minister. He claimed that Rosebery refused to consider forming a government and was going to 'work with all his strength for an A.[Asquith] ministry'.[23]

The Relugas compact is one of the most controversial episodes in Asquith's career, since he can be charged with duplicity on two counts – conspiring against his party leader and then reneging on the conspiracy as soon as he was offered high office.

In 1903, Herbert Gladstone reported to Asquith a conversation with C-B in which the latter said that 'in the event of Gov^{t} he did not think that he would be able to take any post which involved heavy & responsible work', adding that he would prefer a largely ceremonial post such as Lord President of the Council.[24] C-B's comments are surprising from a party leader who was presumably intending to lead the Liberal Party into the next election and who did in the end serve as Prime Minister. It is possible that, as C-B and his wife were constantly troubled by ill-health, the leader's remarks indicated his state of mind at that moment rather than his settled intention. Asquith relayed the information to Haldane and Grey and it may well have inspired the so-called Relugas compact of September 1905.

The Relugas compact

The Relugas compact is one of the most controversial episodes in Asquith's career, since he can be charged with duplicity on two counts – conspiring against his party leader and then reneging on the conspiracy as soon as he was offered high office. The compact, reached between Asquith, Haldane and Grey in September 1905, at the latter's fishing lodge at Relugas, Morayshire, involved the three men agreeing to refuse to take office under C-B, unless certain conditions were met. These were that C-B should take a peerage, allowing Asquith to lead the House of Commons, and that Haldane and Grey should become Lord Chancellor and Foreign Secretary respectively.

The Relugas conspirators have not had a good press from historians.[25] The clumsiness of their conduct bears the hallmarks of a conspiracy initiated by Haldane, of whom C-B once said: 'Haldane always prefers the back stairs to the front, but no matter, for the clatter can be heard all over the house'.[26] However, it would be wrong to see their agreement as simply the product of treachery and personal ambition. They feared being marginalised within a largely pro-Boer Liberal administration and wished to ensure they had real influence. They believed that a government which could not demonstrate its patriotic credentials would be short-lived, paving the way for the Unionists' return to office on a tariff reform programme.[27]

Asquith appears to have been a largely passive participant in the conspiracy. Always averse to direct personal confrontation and internal party conflict, he may well have acquiesced with Haldane's plan, hoping that C-B would prove amenable to their requests. Unlike Haldane and Grey, Asquith was not in a position financially to refuse office if it was offered. In addition, as he pointed out in a later letter to Haldane, his refusal to serve under C-B might well undermine the viability of a Liberal administration, something that was not true of Haldane or Grey.[28]

On 4 December 1905, Balfour resigned office, in the hope of regaining the political initiative by demonstrating that the Liberals were too divided to form a stable government.[29] When C-B was invited by the King to form a new government, Asquith accepted his offer of the Chancellorship of the Exchequer without insisting on the Relugas conditions. He argued that the compact was based on an assumption that a Liberal government would be formed after a general election victory; instead, C-B was being asked to form a minority government before the general election, and public disunity might prejudice the party's electoral prospects.

Asquith did urge C-B to take a peerage and to offer Haldane the Lord Chancellorship. However, C-B, having taken advice from his wife, and under

pressure from pro-Boer Liberals,[30] resolved to remain in the House of Commons. Haldane and Grey then refused office, with Grey being the more implacable, unless C-B met the Relugas terms. The formation of the Liberal government was therefore stalled by the strange situation in which Grey, although he had been offered his preferred position of Foreign Secretary, would not join the government unless Asquith was made leader in the House of Commons, even though Asquith had agreed to serve without such a precondition and was trying to persuade Grey to take office. Eventually, cajolery from various leading Liberals persuaded Grey that it was his duty to accept the Foreign Secretaryship; Haldane too joined the Cabinet as Secretary of State for War, C-B having denied him the Lord Chancellorship.[31]

It is tempting to conclude that the Relugas compact was a complete failure, with two of its three main objectives not achieved. In fact, the outcome was a compromise. C-B disliked both Grey and Haldane and had at first attempted to pass the former over for the Foreign Secretaryship and to offer the latter the non-Cabinet office of Attorney-General.[32] Instead, they had both secured high office; the Relugas triumvirate was in a strong position to influence or even control government policy. And as C-B survived for just two years as Prime Minister before ill-health led to his resignation and death, possibly he made the wrong choice in declining a peerage.

The Liberals in government

In government, relations between C-B and his Liberal Imperialist ministers were more harmonious than they had been in opposition. Asquith was the clear heir apparent and was treated as such by the Prime Minister. There remained, however, some disagreements. One of the challenges of the new government was to reverse the Taff Vale decision, which had made trade unions liable for damages sustained by employers due to strike action. While Asquith wanted to see trade unions given only limited immunity from legal action, C-B insisted on a Labour-inspired measure that gave them full immunity and which became the 1906 Trades Disputes Act.[33] Asquith and the Liberal Imperialists wanted to see disputes between the Lords and the Commons resolved by joint sittings of the two chambers, while Campbell-Bannerman preferred the more radical policy of a suspensory veto, in which the Lords would merely have power to delay measures passed by the elected chamber.[34] Asquith acquiesced without protest in C-B's decision and wound up the debate on the House of Commons resolution in support of the suspensory veto.[35] His own government, of course, was to legislate for the veto in 1911.

The correspondence between Asquith and C-B during the latter's premiership shows a friendly collaboration.[36] Indeed, in government the mutual suspicion between C-B and Haldane and Grey largely disappeared.[37] During C-B's final illness in 1908, Asquith deputised for him, presiding over Cabinet meetings and leading the House of Commons. According to Asquith's official biographers, C-B's parting words to his successor were to thank him for being 'a wonderful colleague, so loyal, so disinterested, so able', adding: 'You are the greatest gentleman I have ever met. This is not the last of me; we will meet again, Asquith.'[38] C-B resigned on 6 April 1908 and died on 22 April, with Asquith taking over as Prime Minister.

Conclusion

C-B's resignation and Asquith's accession to the premiership ended what had been a successful political partnership – one that was often tense and difficult but which yielded great dividends for the Liberal Party. Although they belonged to different social circles and differed in their political style and on some policy issues, there was far more that united than divided them. Both were practical politicians, more comfortable in government than with broad political theory or the posturing of opposition. Despite Asquith's imperialism, he was also a Liberal in the Gladstonian tradition, and like C-B had been strongly influenced by Gladstone himself.[39]

Both were highly partisan Liberals and believed in the benefit to the country of Liberal government. This contrasted with the radical pro-Boer left of the party, who often appeared to prefer opposition, and with Grey, Haldane and Rosebery, whose semi-detached attitude to the party gave the impression that they were willing to participate in Liberal politics on their own terms or not at all. Asquith and C-B alike believed strongly enough in the goal of Liberal electoral success to make personal and political compromises in order to achieve it.

Whereas Haldane, Grey and Rosebery viewed C-B with thinly veiled contempt for his intellectual and oratorical shortcomings, Asquith's correspondence suggests that he either did not share this view or kept such thoughts to himself. Likewise, C-B recognised the importance of Asquith to the success of the Liberal Party and did not regard him in the same light as the other Liberal Imperialists. Although C-B privately used disparaging nicknames for Haldane (Schopenhauer, to make fun of his pretensions as a philosopher) and Sir Edward Grey (Sir E. Hur), Asquith escaped his leader's mockery.[40]

One interesting question is whether, had C-B lived and continued as Prime Minister, he might have kept Britain out of

According to Asquith's official biographers, C-B's parting words to his successor were to thank him for being 'a wonderful colleague, so loyal, so disinterested, so able', adding: 'You are the greatest gentleman I have ever met. This is not the last of me; we will meet again, Asquith.'

the European war in 1914. One contemporary supporter of C-B, F. W. Hirst, was in no doubt, writing in his memoirs that C-B 'would have wished … to follow up the Entente with France by a similar Entente with Germany' and highlighting the reluctance with which C-B appointed Grey as Foreign Secretary.[41] Such counterfactual speculation can never produce definite answers, but there are strong reasons to doubt this conclusion. C-B was aware of the need for the Liberal Party not to appear unpatriotic. His election address in 1906, which was effectively the Liberal manifesto, committed the party to 'continuity' with the previous administration's foreign policy.[42] Of the two alternative candidates for the Foreign Secretaryship that C-B considered, Lord Cromer was a Unionist and Lord Elgin, although a Liberal, was an essentially non-partisan figure who had spent much of his career, like Cromer, in colonial administration. Any Liberal Foreign Secretary would have had to maintain a delicate balance between showing that a Liberal administration was committed to defending Britain's interests abroad and not alienating the anti-war left of the party by appearing excessively belligerent.

The course of the First World War led to the demise of the Liberal government that C-B and then Asquith had presided over for nine years, when Asquith formed a coalition government in May 1915. Although, as with any administration, it had its failures as well as successes, its achievements were considerable: it introduced old age pensions, laid the foundations of the welfare state, established the democratic principle of supremacy of the House of Commons, enacted both home rule for Ireland and Welsh disestablishment (although both of these were suspended for the duration of the war), established the principle of progressive taxation and succeeded in defending free trade. But for the intervention of the First World War it could have claimed to have completed much of the unfinished business that the Liberal Party had accumulated over the previous quarter of a century. Asquith and C-B's willingness to work together when other elements in the party sought to pull them apart was essential in ensuring that the Liberal Party was in a position to take office in 1905, win an election and enjoy its longest ever continuous period in government.

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3 Roy Jenkins, *Asquith* (London, 1964; third edn., 1986).
4 Asquith–Campbell-Bannerman, 19 December 1898, BL Add. Ms. 41,210 ff.155–56.
5 *The Times*, 7 February 1899.
6 Herbert Gladstone–Campbell-Bannerman, 16 January 1900 ff.205–06 and 18 January 1900 ff.209–10; Campbell-Bannerman–Gladstone 21 January 1900 ff.216–17 (copy).
7 H. C. G. Matthew *The Liberal Imperialists: The ideas and politics of a post-Gladstonian elite* (Oxford, 1973) pp. 52–53.
8 The speech is reprinted in full in Duncan Brack and Tony Little (eds.), *Great Liberal Speeches* (Politico's, 2001), pp. 211–14.
9 See Herbert Gladstone–Grey 28 December 1901 BL Add Ms 45,992 f.91.
10 Asquith–Campbell-Bannerman, 15 June 1901, BL Add Ms 41,210 f.206–07.
11 *The Times*, 21 June 1901.
12 See *Daily News*, 2 July 1901 for Asquith's reply to a letter from forty Liberal MPs urging him to abandon the dinner.
13 For the Asquith dinner, see *The Times*, 20 July 1901.
14 *The Times*, 30 September 1901.
15 See Herbert Gladstone Autobiography BL Add Ms 46,118 ff.79–80.
16 See Brack and Little, *Great Liberal Speeches*, pp. 217–27.
17 Asquith–Herbert Gladstone 7 October 1900, BL Add. Ms. 45,989 f.44.
18 Herbert Gladstone–Campbell-Bannerman, 16 and 18 December 1899, BL Add. Ms 41,215 ff.180–83 and report of Campbell-Bannerman speech at Aberdeen, *The Times*, 21 December 1899.
19 Rosebery letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 21 February 1902.
20 Wilson *C-B*, p. 388; Asquith speech at St Leonards, 14 March 1902, reported in *The Times*, 15 March 1902.
21 C-B–Vaughan Nash, 29 August 1903, quoted in Wilson *C-B*, p. 408.
22 A. G. Gardiner, *Priests, Prophets and Kings* (London, 1914).
23 Haldane–Asquith, 5 October 1903, National Library of Scotland, Haldane papers, 5906 ff.58–59.
24 Herbert Gladstone–Asquith, 29 October 1903, Asquith papers, Bodleian Library, Asquith 10 f.98.
25 See, for example, Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists*, pp. 112–120.
26 F. W. Hirst, *In the Golden Days* (London, 1947), p. 264.
27 Richard Burdon Haldane, *An Autobiography* (London, 1929), p. 174.
28 Asquith–Haldane, 7 December 1905, quoted in Spender and Asquith, *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith* vol. 1 (London, 1930), pp. 174–75.
29 It was a common tactic during this period of Prime Ministers in difficulty to resign rather than seek a dissolution, giving the opposition the dilemma of whether to form a potentially weak minority administration or to risk the accusation of being unable to form a government.
30 A. G. Gardiner papers, British Library of Political and Economic

Science, letter from Herbert Gladstone–A. G. Gardiner, 6 December 1905, and subsequent note by Gardiner of exchange of letters with Campbell-Bannerman.

31 See T. Boyle 'The Formation of Campbell-Bannerman's Government in December 1905: a Memorandum by J.A. Spender', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research,* 45 (1972), 283–302.

32 For C-B's view of Haldane and Grey, see Herbert Samuel's memorandum on a conversation with Asquith on the formation of the Campbell-Bannerman government, Herbert Samuel papers, Parliamentary Archives, A155 III ff.99–100. Also see Margot Asquith, *An Autobiography* (London, 1962; originally published 1920 and 1922), p. 236; Margot Asquith diary, 5 December 1905, Bodleian MS. Eng. d.3204 f.85; Haldane *Autobiography* pp. 170–71.

33 Ian Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905–1915* (Basingstoke, 2006) pp.157–58.

34 Ibid, pp.79–80.

35 See *The Times*, 27 June 1907.

36 See Asquith–Campbell-Bannerman correspondence, Campbell-Bannerman papers British Library, Add. Ms. 41,210 ff.256–314

37 See, for example, Haldane's tribute to C-B in his memoirs: Haldane, *Autobiography*, p.182.

38 Spender and Asquith, *Life of Lord Oxford and Asquith*, vol. 1, p. 196.

39 For Campbell-Bannerman's political outlook, see R. W. Strong, 'Campbell-Bannerman as opposition leader' (unpublished Ulster Polytechnic PhD thesis, London: Council for National Academic Awards, 1983). For Asquith, see Roland Quinault (1992) 'Asquith's Liberalism', *History* 77 (249), 33–49.

40 See Spender and Asquith, *Oxford and Asquith,* vol. 1, pp. 144–45.

41 Hirst, *In the Golden Days*, p. 252.

42 *British General Election Manifestos, 1900–1974*, compiled and edited by F.W.S. Craig (London: Macmillan, 1975) p. 13.

LIBERAL HISTORY QUIZ 2008

This year's Liberal history quiz attracted a fair amount of attention at the History Group's exhibition stand at the Liberal Democrat conference in Bournemouth in September. The winner was Robin Young, with an impressive 19½ marks out of 20. Below we reprint the questions – the answers, and some observations on what the entrants thought were the answers, are on page 27.

1. Which Liberal Democrat leader had been an Olympic athlete?
2. Which was the first by-election won by a Liberal Democrat (constituency and year)?
3. The Liberal Party was founded in 1859. Where?
4. Whose Dimbleby Lecture was instrumental to the foundation of the SDP?
5. Who did David Steel beat to become the leader of the Liberal Party?
6. Who was the Liberal Leader in the Lords at the end of the Second World War?
7. What was the year of the Orpington by-election?
8. In which twentieth-century elections did the Liberal Party achieve its:
   (a) highest share of the poll?
   (b) lowest share of the poll?
9. In 1929, Lloyd George published a pamphlet advocating a programme of public works which formed the basis of the Liberal manifesto in that year's general election. What was its title?

10 Which Liberal leader proclaimed, 'I intend to march my troops towards the sound of gunfire'?

11. Which Liberal Democrat leader described his party as 'confused, demoralised, starved of money and in the grip of a deep identity crisis'?
12. Which Whig Prime Minister had seventeen children?
13. In 1905, which three leading Liberal MPs plotted against Campbell-Bannerman in the agreement known as the Relugas Compact?
14. At the time of its formation in March 1981, how many MPs formed the SDP's Parliamentary Party?
15. In a piece of prose associated with the Liberal Party's presidency, which poet wrote 'Give me the liberty to know, to utter and argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties'?
16. In what year did William Beveridge become a Liberal MP?
17. For how long, in years and days, was David Lloyd George MP for Caernarfon Boroughs?
18. Which Liberal Prime Minister said of which other Liberal premier –
    (a) He is one of the ablest men I have ever known;
    (b) He is of the highest honour and probity;
    (c) I do not know whether he really has any common sense?

19 Who was the first president of the National Liberal Federation?

20. Who wrote: 'I am not aware that any community has a right to force another to be civilised'?

THE GLYNDŴR DENBIGHSHIRE RECO

The survival of local party records, as serious students of Liberal history will be well aware, is largely a matter of chance. In general, the Conservative and Labour parties are better resourced in this respect than are the Liberals. While the formal constituency papers of the East Denbighshire (Wrexham) constituency for the first half of the twentieth century seem to have disappeared, the Glyndwr collection at the Denbighshire Record Office contains a fascinating archive which offers an invaluable insight into the fortunes of the local Liberal Party at a critical stage in its history. **David Dutton** examines its contents.

The collection is essentially the private archive of Alderman Edward Hughes (1862–1938), maintained into a second generation by his youngest daughter, Edna (1894–1982). The name Glyndwr derives from the large redbrick dwelling in Bersham Road, Wrexham, into which Hughes and his family moved in 1895 and which housed the archive until its transfer to the Record Office in Ruthin. Hughes claimed that his family was descended from a daughter of Owain Glyndwr, the legendary Welsh patriot of

MANUSCRIPTS
ORD OFFICE, RUTHIN

the early fifteenth century, who led a major rebellion against English rule in Wales.

Born in Oswestry, the second child in a family of four sons and a daughter, Hughes moved to Wrexham in 1884 to work as a bookkeeper for a local firm of leather manufacturers. In 1902 he became Company Secretary to the Cambrian Leather Works and in 1910 he was appointed Joint Managing Director. Ousted from this position in 1922 following a coup led by his fellow Managing Director Charles Prescott, Hughes resigned from the company's board two years later. While his business career progressed, Hughes had also become prominent in local politics. Elected to the Wrexham Borough Council in 1898, he was Mayor for two successive terms, 1906–07 and 1907–08. He served as Chairman of the Borough Finance Committee from 1908 to 1919 and of the Electricity Committee from 1919 until his death nearly twenty years later. In the meantime, he became the essential power-broker of the local Liberal Party.

Hughes's training as an accountant no doubt contributed to the meticulous development of his private archive. But he was, in any case, by instinct a compulsive hoarder, and the collection houses some bizarre items. One neatly typed note pasted on a lightbulb sleeve reads, 'this lamp was fixed over my desk this date at 12 o'clock noon, 17 September 1936'.[1] Overall, the archive reflects Hughes's business and local government activity together with his passion for local history, topography and genealogy. But it also enables the researcher to follow the fortunes of the Wrexham Liberal Party over a period of more than three decades.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, coal mining was already the largest employer apart from agriculture in North Wales. The North Wales coalfield extended from Oswestry on the English border to the Point of Ayr on the coast. And, with coal miners forming a significant proportion of the electorate, East Denbighshire was one of many constituencies in which the traditional values and allegiances of the local Liberal Party were increasingly challenged by Labour's growing appeal to a working-class electorate. Before 1914, however, the local Liberal Party maintained strong links with the miners and it was normal for consultation to take place with the leaders of the North Wales Miners' Federation before the name of the Liberal parliamentary candidate was announced. In the period after the First World War, the Labour Party in the constituency made rapid gains while the social deprivations of the following decade enabled it to demonstrate the attractions of a socialist agenda. In the course of 1925 alone the area suffered three major industrial setbacks with the closure of the Llay Main and Vauxhall collieries and the disappearance of the Cambrian Ironworks. In total more than 3,000 workers lost their jobs. By the end of the 1920s Labour was setting up relief funds to raise money for the families of mine-workers living in abject poverty as a result of prolonged strikes and subsequent redundancies. These developments quickly impacted

Left: courtyard of Ruthin Gaol museum, Ruthin (photo: Arwel Parry). The Gaol now houses the Denbighshire Record Office.

Alderman Edward Hughes (1862–1938). (Photos reproduced by kind permission of the Denbighshire Record Office.)

upon the local political scene and the electoral history of the constituency in the 1920s suggested that Labour could not easily be beaten in a three-cornered contest.

Hughes's involvement in Liberal politics went back to an earlier period, when the Labour challenge was less potent. He formed a close association with Edward Hemmerde who was first elected as the constituency's MP in a by-election in August 1906, following the elevation of the sitting MP to the position of County Court Judge on the Chester and North Wales circuit. Hughes recognised the talents of the new member, an articulate and ambitious barrister, whose nomination had been strongly resisted by many other local Liberals, because he was English and did not speak the Welsh language. It was Hughes who masterminded the party's victory in East Denbighshire in the general election of January 1910 despite Hemmerde's absence until the last days of the campaign. But there was an erratic and unpredictable side to the MP's character. In 1909 he had been saved from financial ruin and political disaster only when the celebrated charlatan, Horatio Bottomley, organised a round-robin collection of £10,000 among his fellow MPs.[2] Now, when the country again went to the polls in December 1910, Hemmerde decided to contest Portsmouth rather than East Denbighshire. It was Hughes who seized the initiative and, after considering standing himself, secured the adoption and election of E.T. John as the constituency's MP. Strikingly, both Hemmerde and John would end up inside the Labour Party, the former as MP for Crewe in the 1920s. This, however, was not a course which Hughes himself was ever likely to follow.

By the time of the next general election in December 1918, the First World War had helped to transform the political landscape and, nationally, it was a much weakened Liberal Party, divided between the followers of Herbert Asquith and David Lloyd George, which faced the electorate. Hughes was a friend of Lloyd George and the latter stayed on more than one occasion at Glyndwr. But the form of Lloyd Georgeite Liberalism of which Hughes approved was that manifested in the era of the

post-war coalition. Hughes's basic instincts were anti-socialist and they led him to view the Conservatives as potential allies in the quest to keep East Denbighshire out of Labour's hands. 'A strong Anti-Socialist policy is our best plan', he wrote in 1929. 'We lost 115 seats at the last [1924] election because the Liberals, under Asquith, put the Labour Party in office.'[3]

Formally re-titled Wrexham in time for the general election of 1918, the East Denbighshire electorate was considerably enlarged as a result of a rapidly-growing population and the government's extension of the right to vote. The pre-war electorate of under 12,000 now stood at around 39,000. Whether the extension of the franchise worked, of itself, to the advantage of the Labour Party remains a matter for historical debate.[4] At all events, in Wrexham the general election of 1922 was clearly the turning point, with Labour, in the person of Robert Richards, a lecturer at the University College of North Wales, capturing the seat for the first time. Thereafter, as the archive reveals, it was Hughes's primary goal to prevent the anti-Labour vote being split. In the general election of 1924, as Chairman of the local Liberal Party, he helped to secure the withdrawal of the Conservative candidate, E.F. Bushby, a move which enabled the Liberal Christmas Williams to recapture the seat. But as the general election of 1929 approached, and notwithstanding optimism about the Liberal Party's prospects nationally, Hughes doubted whether Wrexham could be held. With no help on offer from party headquarters, Hughes determined to pursue his preferred strategy. 'We should go on our own and try to get a Secret Agreement with the Conservatives.' Secrecy was central to Hughes's purpose. 'If [Bushby] does withdraw there must be nothing in writing. We may have notes in writing at first but these must all be destroyed and your [Williams's] word must be accepted. Prominent Conservative workers say that Richards will win on a three-cornered fight.'[5] Though logic might have suggested that, in the event of a candidate standing down, it was now the turn of the Tory candidate to have a free run against Labour, Hughes almost succeeded in once again persuading the Conservatives to give way. The argument he used – that Wrexham was the sort of constituency whose radical traditions meant that Conservatives would probably vote Liberal but that Liberals could not be relied upon to vote Conservative – would become the common currency of the Conservative–Liberal National dialogue of the next decade. In the event, however, an ill-judged article in the local press, which Hughes attributed to the malice of an 'Asquithian gang', left Bushby with little alternative but to insist that his candidature should go forward.[6] With the anti-socialist vote split, the result of the general election of 1929 in Wrexham was entirely predictable. Robert Richards recaptured the seat for Labour with a majority of more than 6,500 over Williams, the Liberal candidate.

But not all in the Wrexham Liberal Party approved of what Hughes had tried to do. As the local Treasurer explained:

> With regard to your Chairmanship of the party, I may be quite frank and say that there was considerable doubt as to where you stood. Many hold the view that you were a good old Tory, and that you had become a real Protectionist, and with these doubts, whether based on fact or not, it was felt that the Liberal Party could not exist with you as its Leader.[7]

By the end of 1929, Hughes had been eased out of his offices in the local party. 'Being thus freed from office', recalled Hughes, 'I felt that I could slide out of the party (locally) and thereby you would not have to use the "Bell, Book and Candle" and pronounce excommunication. I said nothing about it to anyone, but I considered that … I had ceased to be associated with the Wrexham Liberal Association.'[8]

The Glyndŵr papers allow the student to trace the way in which the mainstream Liberal Party, still a significant force in the constituency at the beginning of the 1930s, was comprehensively outmanoeuvred and relegated to the political sidelines over the course of the decade.

This, however, was far from being the end of Hughes's influence over the local political scene. The Glyndwr papers allow the student to trace the way in which the mainstream Liberal Party, still a significant force in the constituency at the beginning of the 1930s, was comprehensively outmanoeuvred and relegated to the political sidelines over the course of the decade. The documents make it possible to see the Liberal National schism less as the self-serving action of a group of beleaguered MPs desperate to cling on to their parliamentary seats and more as the expression of a reasoned and long-term strategy of a particular strand of Liberalism which believed that it was the Labour Party which posed the ultimate threat to Liberal values and ideals.

The general election of 1931 saw the return of the Liberal Aled Roberts in a straight fight against the sitting Labour MP, Robert Richards. On this occasion the Conservative candidate withdrew, not as part of a local bargain but as a result of nationally led negotiations between those parties which were participating in the newly formed National Government. It was, however, striking that, in the most unfavourable climate for Labour and in the context of its first national electoral setback since the party's formation, Roberts's margin of victory was a mere 1,800 votes. Hughes fully understood that this majority 'came from Tories' and was under no illusion about the difficulties that would have to be overcome if the Liberal victory were to be repeated at any future elections.[9] Possible success would depend not only

on maintaining the alliance with the Conservatives but on doing so without losing any Liberal votes in the process. Such thinking ruled out any possibility of an immediate transfer of allegiance to the newly formed Liberal National group, even though that body, headed by Sir John Simon, espoused precisely the same strategy of full electoral co-operation with the Conservatives as Hughes did. The problem was that any such step would almost certainly involve a serious breach in the ranks of Wrexham Liberalism. Hughes therefore moved cautiously and hoped that Roberts could be persuaded to take up a half-way position, supporting the National Government while still maintaining his ties with the local Liberal Party.

Hughes was not helped when Roberts joined the Liberal Leader, Herbert Samuel, in crossing the floor of the House of Commons and rejoining the ranks of opposition in 1933, estranged by the National Government's commitment to tariffs and the Ottawa agreements on Imperial Preference. Nonetheless, Hughes was again successful in persuading the Conservatives to give Roberts a free run against Labour at the general election of 1935. But the Chairman of the Wrexham Conservative Association registered his misgivings about the Liberal candidate by advising Tory voters to abstain. Denied full Conservative backing, Roberts faced almost inevitable defeat and Labour's Robert Richards regained the seat with a comfortable 5,000 majority. It was in this situation and in the knowledge that the mainstream Liberal Party had now been reduced to just twenty-one seats in the House of Commons that Hughes began to consider the Liberal National option more seriously. 'The old Liberal Party is dead', he declared, 'dead as Queen Anne, so what is the use of holding a wake over it?'[10] A Wrexham Liberal National Association was duly set up on 14 October 1936 with Hughes as Chairman.

Hughes knew, however, that he would have to take as much of the local Liberal Party as possible with him if his goal of recapturing the seat from Labour were to be fulfilled. His hopes continued to rest on Aled Roberts:

> If we could only prevail upon Mr Aled Roberts to become a member of the Liberal National Party it will secure the seat coming back from the Labour Party because in that case the Conservative vote will go in his support. Without that we have no chance of regaining the seat.[11]

Over the following months, as the Glyndwr archive reveals, Hughes displayed his skills as a consummate political operator. First, Roberts was persuaded to enter negotiations with the Liberal National Organisation in London. A joint consultative committee was set up with the Wrexham Conservatives at which the latter were once again induced to play second fiddle to a Liberal (or now, a Liberal National) candidate. As Hughes recorded, the Conservative Chairman 'stated quite clearly that there was a feeling in his party that the candidate should be a Conservative but upon the figures that had been produced [by Hughes] he could see that the prospect of a Conservative was not so good as a National Liberal'.[12] Before long, Hughes had persuaded the Conservatives that Roberts should be their man. 'Satisfactory to the Conservative

Edna Hughes (1894–1982) in 1916. (Photo reproduced by kind permission of the Denbighshire Record Office.)

Party and the Liberal Nationals, he will pull over a large body of the Liberals – he may drop a few of the old fashioned Liberal die-hards, but with the united support of both parties I think we can win.'[13] Finally, and perhaps most remarkably, the local Liberal Association also threw its weight behind Roberts as a 'Liberal candidate supporting the National Government'.

Though he felt a little 'uneasy about the "trimming" of the Liberal Association',[14] there was no doubt about what Hughes had achieved. In due course Roberts would

> … write to Lord Hutchison [Chairman of the Liberal National Organisation] requesting that on election he should receive the Liberal National whip. The designation of Liberal National Candidate will come in time and I am of [the] opinion that the suggestion will come from the Liberal Association. There will [be] three Associations. The Liberal Association, independent and not affiliated to either Liberal Party. The Liberal National Association affiliated to us and the Conservative Association. From these three Associations a small working committee will be formed to conduct the work of organising the constituency and [this] will become the election committee.[15]

Because of the outbreak of European war in September 1939, the general election which would have put Hughes's strategy to the test never took place. In any case, Hughes himself had succumbed to cancer, aged 76, on Christmas Eve, 1938. But it is hard to resist the conclusion that Liberalism as an independent political force in Wrexham had been the victim of his manoeuvres. While the majority of the Wrexham and East Denbighshire Liberal Association had declared its readiness to follow Roberts into what was, in all but name, a Liberal National stance, a minority of local Liberals soon reacted and formed a rival 'Radical Association'. With the newly-formed Liberal National Association backing Roberts, the former Liberal MP; the long-standing Liberal Association, which 'agreed to support Mr Aled Roberts and to co-operate with the Liberal National Association but could not see their way to join the Liberal National Movement'; [16] and now a 'Radical Association' trying to revive the cause of independent Liberalism, potential Liberal voters in Wrexham could have been forgiven if they were confused. At all events, when the war was over, Liberalism failed to recover anything like its pre-war strength in Wrexham. It was in fact finished as a significant political force. Liberal candidates came a distant third in the general elections of 1945 and 1950 and the party then failed even to contest the constituency again until 1966.

The travails of the post-war Liberal Party do not feature prominently in the Glyndwr archive, maintained now by Hughes's daughter, Edna. But there is much material relating to the Liberal Nationals, which is of particular value given the absence of any central archive relating to this party. The presence in the Glyndwr archive of an almost complete run of the party's pre-war house journal, the *Liberal National Magazine*, which is to be found in few other locations, should also be noted. What is described is the process by which the Liberal National party in Wrexham was swallowed up by the Conservatives. After 1945, the Liberal Nationals no longer had the institutional strength to maintain a partnership on equal terms with the Tories of the sort that Edward Hughes had envisaged. Despite an initial success in persuading the Conservatives to give their support to a Liberal National candidate in the general election of 1945, institutional union between the two associations was secured in 1949 very much on Conservative terms, with Conservatives dominating all aspects of the resulting joint association. Most National Liberals (the name was reversed in 1948) accepted *force majeure* and readily acquiesced in this situation, but a small group, including Edna Hughes, refused to be reconciled. The archive reveals a brave but ultimately futile attempt by surviving National Liberals in 1953–54 to reassert a degree of independence from their over-bearing Conservative partners. But, deprived of any backing from National Liberal headquarters in London – 'what an appalling exhibition of weakness!!' protested Edna Hughes, 'I am sorry that I have wasted twenty years in the support of such a party'[17] – the Wrexham rebellion was doomed to failure. In what had now become a safe Labour seat, the local Conservative Party maintained a joint 'Conservative and National Liberal' label in its constituency activities and parliamentary candidatures until after the Liberal National Organisation in London was itself wound up in 1968, but the designation increasingly lacked meaning. Symbolically, in what was now only a passing gesture to an all-but-defunct political tradition, Edna Hughes was persuaded to sign the nomination papers of the Conservative and National Liberal candidate for the general election of 1966, the last at which the joint label was used.

From the point of view of the political historian, the Glyndŵr archive stands as a remarkable monument to a right-leaning strand in British Liberalism which has as yet received insufficient scholarly attention.

By the time Edna Hughes died, aged 88, in 1982, the family archive filled most of Glyndwr apart from the restricted living area which she still occupied. The preservation of the archive had become the abiding concern of her final years. From the point of view of the political historian, the Glyndwr archive stands as a remarkable monument to a right-leaning strand in British Liberalism which has as yet received insufficient scholarly attention.

The Denbighshire Record Office is housed in the Old Gaol, 46 Clwyd Street, Ruthin and is open for research from 10 a.m. to 4.45 p.m., Mondays to Thursdays and 10 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. on Fridays. Users will need to be in possession of a County Archive Research Network (CARN) ticket.

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5 Denbighshire Record Office, Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/2511, Hughes to Williams, 26 April 1929.
6 Ibid., Hughes to D.T. Salathiel, 4 June 1929.
7 Ibid., R. Thomas to Hughes, 2 Nov. 1931.
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9 Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/188, Hughes to A. Roberts, 20 Nov. 1933
10 Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/2544, Hughes to Ffoulkes Roberts, 31 March 1937.
11 Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/184ii, Hughes to Henry Morris-Jones, 12 June 1936.
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13 Ibid., Hughes to G. Fitzhugh, 3 April 1937.
14 Ibid., Lewis Edwards to Hughes, 4 Oct. 1937.
15 Ibid., report of meeting of the Executive Committee of the Wrexham Liberal Association, 24 Sept. 1937.
16 Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/2547, minutes of meeting of the Wrexham Liberal National Association, 4 May 1939.
17 Glyndwr MSS, DD/G/2564, Edna Hughes to Ensor Walters, 26 Nov. 1953.

LETTERS

Ireland's Liberal MPs

I welcome Dr Waugh's letter (*Journal of Liberal History* 59, summer 2008) and interest in Irish Liberal MPs. James Wood fought the 1902 East Down by-election on the single issue of T. W. Russell's campaign for land reform. However, the illuminated address presented to Wood by his supporters in 1906 begins: 'After your contest at the late General Election to remain Liberal Representative of East Down in the Imperial Parliament …'

I suspect party labels, particularly in Ireland, were not as precise a century ago as they are now. I am content to leave the description to his East Down supporters, who seemed in little doubt that he was their Liberal MP.

Berkley Farr

News Chronicle

I am trying to get hold of some copies of the *News Chronicle*, which, alas, ceased publication before I was born. I wondered whether any readers might have a spare copy or two, or be able to put me in touch with someone who might be able to help.

Contact details: 16 Heatham Park, Twickenham, TW2 7SF; tel. 07946 421771; email york.membery@btopenworld.com

York Membery

Campbell as leader

I was moved by much of Ming Campbell's autobiography, and felt that your interview with him (both in *Journal of Liberal History* 60, autumn 2008) answered some of the questions the book prompted. However, there are two errors therein that have got themselves into the cuttings files and which, for the historical record, should be corrected.

First, the vote at the Llandudno Liberal Party Assembly in September 1981 was not 1,600 to 112. Gruff Evans, chairing the debate, counted the votes against the Alliance and then deducted that figure – 112 – from the total number of delegates! There were many abstentions, myself included, whose presence would have reduced the quoted vote in favour significantly.

Second, I left the negotiations on merger primarily over the nonsense of the proposed party name, and the diminution of the 'Liberal' presence, rather than on the inclusion of NATO in the new party's preamble.

Michael Meadowcroft

Liberal Foots

As a footnote to Professor Morgan's article on the dynastic Liberalism of the Foot family (*Journal of Liberal History* 60, autumn 2008), it is of interest that Paul Foot, too, had a brief Liberal phase when he was at university.

He was an active member of the Oxford University Liberal Club and became its President in the Hilary term of 1960. He remained on the Club committee for a year. At the same time he was pursuing a political career in the Oxford Union, of which he was President in Hilary term, 1961. My papers do not reveal when he left the Liberal Party, but my recollection is that it was in that summer. Some of us put it down to the influence of his uncle Michael, who he much admired at the time, while the more cynical said it was because he wanted a seat in Parliament, and thought that this would be harder to achieve as a Liberal!

In view of his subsequent membership of the Socialist Workers' Party, it seems that the cynics were wrong.

John R. Howe (President, Oxford University Liberal Club, Trinity term 1961).

LIBERAL HISTORY QUIZ 2008

See page 19 for the questions; here we print the answers, and a commentary on what our respondents thought the answers were …

1. Menzies Campbell

   Far too easy, this one: everyone got it right!

2. Eastbourne, David Bellotti 18 October 1990

   Almost as easy, though a few people put down by-elections in the 1980s, presumably thinking of the SDP.

3. Willis's Rooms, St James, London

   This one proved rather surprisingly difficult ('London' and 'UK' were not allowed); quite a few put the Reform Club.

4. Roy Jenkins

   Another easy one; several people added the date (1979), and even the title ('Home thoughts from abroad').

5. John Pardoe

   Almost everyone got this one right, but a couple thought it was Alan Beith (who Paddy Ashdown beat in 1988).

6. Viscount Samuel (Leader, 1944–1955)

   Most people got this one, but a couple thought it was Lloyd George; that would have been tricky, even for him, since he died in March 1945.

7. 1962 (won by Eric Lubbock on 14 March 1962)

   Most people got this right.

8. (a) 1906 (49.0 per cent); (b) 1951 (2.6 per cent)

   Surprisingly, the first date proved more difficult. Most people got 1906, but 1929 was also suggested, and some, presumably thinking we meant only post-war elections, suggested 1974 or 1983. Almost everyone got 1951, though other dates in the 1950s and '60s were also suggested.

9. *We Can Conquer Unemployment*

   Responses were evenly split between the correct answer and the 'Yellow Book' (*Britain's Industrial Future*), the much longer policy programme on which the manifesto was based.

10 Jo Grimond

   Another fairly easy one, particularly for the respondent who claimed to have been there at the time.

11. Paddy Ashdown (looking back, in an interview on 7 September 1991, in *The Independent*)

   Another easy one; almost everyone got it right.

12. Earl Grey (seven daughters and ten sons)

   Much more difficult: only a handful got it right. One respondent said he thought Grey had sixteen children; in fact both the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Wikipedia think it was fifteen, while the figure of seventeen we used comes from the *Dictionary of Liberal Biography*, and includes one known illegitimate child. Whatever the number, though, there was no chance of confusion with any other Whig PM!

13. Asquith, Grey and Haldane

   About half the respondents got this one right; most of the others correctly identified Asquith, but a fair few suspected Churchill and Lloyd George too.

14. 14

   Almost no one got this one; answers varied between 9 and 29. Fourteen was the number at the formal launch of the SDP on 26 March 1981; it then climbed steadily for the next two years, reaching 29 by the end of 1982.

15. John Milton, in *Areopagitica* (1644)

   Most people knew their Milton – or, possibly, knew the association with the Liberal presidency – and several correctly identified the work as well.

16. 1944

   Most got this right too, though a few said 1945 – when in fact Beveridge lost his seat.

17. 54 years 266 days

   In fact no one gave this answer, possibly because we might have got it wrong ourselves. Several respondents put 54 years (we gave them a half point), but there was a wide spread of answers for the number of days. On further investigation, it seems that our own answer may have been wrong (it wouldn't have made any difference to the winner, we hasten to add). Lloyd George fought his by-election in Caernarvon Boroughs (thank you to the respondent who pointed out the correct name in 1890) on 10 April 1890, though the result was not announced until 11 April; he took his seat on 17 April. His peerage was announced on 1 January 1945, but he was too ill ever to sit in the Lords, and he died on 26 March. These three possible start dates and two possible end dates gives answers of 54 years and 266, 265, 259, 350, 349 or 343 days. Anyone who knows the real answer should let us know!

18. W. E. Gladstone, of Lord Rosebery

   Almost no one got this right, though several suspected it was Gladstone who said it. In fact more thought Asquith was one of the two, with views split between Gladstone of Asquith, Asquith of Lloyd George, and Lloyd George of Asquith.

19 Joseph Chamberlain

   Another tricky one; more people said Gladstone than got the correct answer.

20. John Stuart Mill, in *On Liberty*

   And a slightly easier one to end on: possibly thanks to the profile we gave him in the 'Great Liberal' contest last year, most people got Mill, and one (the winner) identified *On Liberty* too. A fair number, however, thought it was probably Gladstone.

'ASKING TOO MUCH AND
THE CONSERVATIVE–LIBERAL COAL

Recently released Cabinet papers have provided new insights into the March 1974 talks between Edward Heath and Jeremy Thorpe over a possible Conservative–Liberal coalition government. **Peter Dorey** re-examines these talks, and notes that their failure went much deeper and wider than the disagreement over electoral reform. They were always hampered by a lack of support among MPs and grassroots members of both parties, convinced that the other was 'asking too much and offering too little' in return. Even if the talks had succeeded, the two leaders would have encountered a lack of support from their parliamentary colleagues.

Jeremy Thorpe arrives at 10 Downing Street, 2 March 1974

The general election held on 28 February 1974 yielded a highly ambiguous and constitutionally intriguing result. The Conservative Party won five fewer seats than the Labour Party – 296 to 301 – yet polled 240,000 votes more. Meanwhile, the Liberal Party won 14 seats (8 more than in 1970), although they had actually polled six million votes, thereby starkly illustrating the iniquity of Britain's voting system. With neither Labour nor the Conservatives having secured an overall parliamentary majority, Edward Heath was faced with the choice of either immediately conceding defeat, and thus tendering his resignation forthwith, or seeking a deal with one or more of the smaller parties. Heath pursued the latter option, observing that as neither of the two main parties had secured an overall majority 'My responsibility as Prime Minister at the time was to see whether I could form an administration with a majority'.[1] He thereby heralded what one minister subsequently described as 'two days [of] rather unseemly bargaining',[2] at the end of which the Conservatives 'were beginning to give the impression that we were bad losers.'[3]

I

At the end of Friday afternoon (1 March), by which time the parliamentary situation arising from the election result had become much more apparent (although the results in one or two remote Scottish constituencies, such as Argyll, were not announced until the Saturday[4]), 'a tired and downcast fag-end of a Cabinet'[5] met to hear Edward Heath delineate the three options available to them. These were: to concede defeat, and thereby advise the Queen to invite Harold Wilson (the Labour Party leader) to form a minority administration; to consider whether the Conservatives themselves could continue as a minority government, in the hope that the party could secure overall parliamentary support for a policy programme to tackle Britain's urgent economic situation; and, finally, to seek support from the smaller parties for a programme which would address these immediate problems.

The Conservatives were naturally reluctant to concede defeat immediately, partly because they had actually polled nearly a quarter of a million more votes than Labour, but also because ministers were anxious that if Labour formed a government and subsequently accrued the economic benefits of North Sea oil (which was just about to flow fully 'on stream'), then the ensuing economic upturn would rebound to Labour's political advantage in the next general election.[6] Yet ministers also appreciated that the second option – attempting to continue in office as a minority government and relying on general parliamentary support for its policies – would not only entail too much instability and uncertainty, but it would also 'not be honourable' and would create a clear and damaging impression beyond Westminster that the Conservatives were

) OFFERING TOO LITTLE'?
LITION TALKS OF 1–4 MARCH 1974

'hanging on to office at all costs despite defeat at the election', in which case the party risked being seriously 'discredited'.[7]

Having vowed not to relinquish political office immediately, however, Heath and his ministerial colleagues ruled out a political alliance with either the Ulster Unionists or the Scottish National Party (SNP).

Although the (Official) Ulster Unionists had returned 9 MPs (there were also two additional Unionist MPs not linked to the Ulster Unionist Party, and who were therefore discounted in this context), most of whom ordinarily took the Conservative whip in the House of Commons, many of them had, in this election, stood on an 'anti-Sunningdale' platform, explicitly opposing the power-sharing Executive and Assembly established in Northern Ireland by the Heath government the previous year. In so doing, they had made it clear that they would continue to oppose Heath's current policies concerning Northern Ireland, even though they would probably support him on most other issues. Consequently, Heath adjudged the UUP to be 'unreliable' potential allies, and thereby ruled out a deal with them.

At the same time, a deal with the SNP – which had achieved the election of 7 MPs – was ruled out after informal talks between Conservative MP Teddy Taylor's agent (who had been a member of the SNP prior to joining the Conservatives) and Bill Lindsay, Vice President of the SNP. Taylor informed Heath that the SNP seemed amenable to a deal whereby they would support the Heath government in any parliamentary confidence votes in return for the creation of a Scottish Assembly.[8] After all, the previous year had witnessed the publication of the Kilbrandon Report, which recommended devolution for Scotland (and Wales), albeit with divergent views over the actual form that this might take. Moreover, in a speech in Perth in 1968, Heath had expressed his support for a directly elected Scottish Assembly, although there was little enthusiasm for such an institution amongst his parliamentary colleagues – devolution 'had always sat lightly on the shoulders of Conservative MPs'.[9] Furthermore, when the Kilbrandon Report was published in 1973, Heath's own response was rather more circumspect than might have been expected given his Perth speech. In contrast, it had become apparent that the SNP wanted a Scottish Assembly established immediately, and imbued with greater powers than those proposed by the Kilbrandon Report, including a degree of 'fiscal autonomy'. Such a stance thus effectively ruled out a deal between the Heath Government and the SNP.

II

Having rejected the options of a political partnership with either the Ulster Unionists or the SNP, Heath – with the full endorsement of his Cabinet colleagues – turned to the Liberal Party in an increasingly desperate attempt to remain in office. It was reckoned that three options were available to the Cabinet. The first was to secure an undertaking by the Liberals to provide parliamentary support for 'any policies and measures introduced by a Conservative administration which seemed to them right and justifiable in the national interest', while remaining free to oppose other policies. Secondly, the Conservatives could seek a parliamentary pact whereby the Liberals would provide parliamentary support for a package of polices over which they had been consulted, and which would constitute the basis of the government's legislative programme for the next session. The third option would be to form a coalition government, with a Cabinet post for Jeremy Thorpe, and one or two ministerial posts offered to other senior Liberals.[10]

Having rejected the options of a political partnership with either the Ulster Unionists or the SNP, Heath – with the full endorsement of his Cabinet colleagues – turned to the Liberal Party in an increasingly desperate attempt to remain in office.

The Cabinet generally agreed that the third option, 'the formation of a right-centre coalition', was the most attractive and feasible of the three, not least because the combined 17,900,000 votes won by the Conservatives *and* the Liberals, compared to the 11,700,000 polled by the Labour Party, was interpreted as evidence of 'a large anti-Socialist majority' in Britain. Certainly, one or two senior figures were favourably disposed towards this option almost solely on the grounds that 'a coalition with the Liberals would keep the Labour Party out',[11] while other senior Conservatives acknowledged that the Liberal Party supported two of the key policies in the Conservative manifesto, namely the continuation of a statutory incomes policy (as a vital means of curbing inflation) which would eventually be replaced by a voluntary incomes policy, and British membership of the (then) European Economic Community (EEC).[12] A Conservative–Liberal coalition formed on this basis, ministers agreed, could thus serve 'to unite the moderates in the country.'[13] Moreover, Heath himself noted that the Conservative Party and the Liberals together had obtained 57 per cent of votes cast, which under a system of proportional representation would have secured a clear majority of parliamentary seats.[14] This observation proved rather ironic, given that Heath and his ministerial colleagues subsequently refused to accede to the Liberals' insistence on a clear commitment to electoral reform, thereby precipitating the breakdown of the inter-party talks, and thus the resignation of the Heath government.

III

Having discussed these options with his Cabinet colleagues, and obtained their approval

for approaching the Liberals, Edward Heath invited Jeremy Thorpe, the Liberal leader, to 10 Downing Street from his Barnstaple constituency in Devon, where the latter had been celebrating the Liberals' remarkable 19 per cent share of the national vote. Although hindsight suggests that it was entirely understandable that the Conservatives should seek a political deal with the Liberals, at the time the invitation by Heath was an initiative that the Liberal Party 'was totally unprepared for'.[15]

When Thorpe arrived at Downing Street on Saturday afternoon, an 80-minute meeting ensued (at which the only other person present was Heath's Private Secretary, Robert Armstrong), which Heath opened by delineating the three broad options available to them: 'a loose arrangement' whereby the Liberals 'could pick and choose which governmental measures they supported'; full consultation over the contents of the Queen's Speech, which the Liberals would then support; and a coalition government, in which Thorpe himself would be offered a Cabinet seat (although the precise post was not specified at this juncture). Heath then intimated to Thorpe that his (and the Cabinet's) preference was for the third of these options.[16]

It is worth noting here that the offer of a Cabinet seat to Thorpe subsequently gave rise to rather divergent accounts by the two party leaders. Heath claimed that Thorpe intimated 'a strong preference for the post of Home Secretary', although Heath himself maintained that 'I made no such offer to him', particularly as the Cabinet Secretary had warned Heath, prior to the meeting, that 'there were matters in Thorpe's private life, as yet undisclosed to the public, which might make this a highly unsuitable position for him to hold.'[17] Yet Thorpe maintained that he neither demanded nor indicated any expectation that he be appointed Home Secretary in a coalition Cabinet. Moreover, Thorpe claimed that he subsequently learned 'from a reliable source' that Heath envisaged offering him a ministerial post in the Foreign Office, with specific responsibility for Europe.[18]

In this first round of talks between Heath and Thorpe, the crucial (for the Liberals) issue of electoral reform did not prove to be a major stumbling block, for although the Liberal leader naturally raised it, and received an equally predictable non-committal response from his Conservative counterpart.

In response to Heath's delineation of the three options (and his expressed preference for the third, namely a coalition), Thorpe began by asking whether Heath had contemplated a 'Grand Alliance' of all three main parliamentary parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal), with a view to forming a National Unity government to tackle the grave economic situation facing the country. Heath swiftly rejected the idea, pointing out that, apart from any other considerations, such a move would split the Labour Party (as it had done in 1931), and whilst many Conservatives might relish such a prospect, Heath was sure that the Labour leader, Harold Wilson, would 'wish at all costs to avoid the role and fate of Ramsay Macdonald'. Moreover, the Labour Party had already issued a statement ruling out any deals with other parties, including the formation of a coalition government. Clearly, Heath explained, this meant that a Conservative–Liberal parliamentary pact or coalition government remained the most viable and attractive option.

For his part, Thorpe remained relatively guarded, emphasising the natural need to consult his senior colleagues before offering a response, but in lieu of such consultation, Thorpe sought Heath's views on various other issues prominent at that particular juncture, most notably the government's stance on a pay deal for the miners, which was expected to be recommended by the Pay Board in a few days' time, and the fate of the Industrial Relations Act. He also asked Heath what 'dramatic changes' he envisaged making to the Conservative Party's programme in order to accommodate a political agreement with the Liberals, to which Heath retorted that both sides would probably need 'to agree to postpone a number of policies and measures which they would have thought desirable in other circumstances', although these would probably be polices of lower priority compared to those necessary to tackle the short-term economic situation. To this end, Heath informed Thorpe, on a highly confidential Privy Councillor basis, of some of the economic measures under consideration, including an approach to the International Monetary Fund.

In this first round of talks between Heath and Thorpe, the crucial (for the Liberals) issue of electoral reform did not prove to be a major stumbling block, for although the Liberal leader naturally raised it, and received an equally predictable non-committal response from his Conservative counterpart, Thorpe acknowledged that 'electoral reform was of less immediate priority than the economic situation and dealing with inflation'.[19] This first meeting concluded with both leaders agreeing to report back to, and undertake consultations with, their senior colleagues pending another meeting the following day over Sunday lunch.

IV

It was during that Sunday, 3 March, however, that the difficulties materialised which were ultimately to contribute to the eventual collapse of the coalition talks between Heath and Thorpe. Thorpe consulted three of his most senior colleagues – his predecessor, Jo Grimond, David Steel (the Liberals' chief whip), and Lord Byers (the Liberals' leader in the House of Lords) – over Sunday lunch, although many other Liberals, both inside and outside Parliament, were considerably uneasy, fearing 'that some deal was being concocted'. In fact, the four senior Liberals

Edward Heath and Jeremy Thorpe

were agreeing at the time that the terms offered by Heath were inadequate as the basis for Liberal entry into a coalition government with the Conservatives, particularly as there was no firm commitment to introducing electoral reform.[20] Yet in jumping to the wrong conclusions over Thorpe's 'elite-level' discussions, it may be that Liberal MPs were henceforth inclined to view almost any subsequent proposals with unwarranted scepticism, thereby making it even harder for Thorpe to secure an agreement with either his own party or with Heath.

Beyond this potential problem, the first main difficulty affecting the putative coalition talks concerned the issue of electoral reform, which most Liberals deemed to be non-negotiable, and thus the prerequisite of any parliamentary pact or coalition with the Conservatives. Given that Heath had already alluded to the lower priority which this issue should enjoy in the (economic) circumstances – quite apart from the Conservatives' own lack of enthusiasm for it – the insistence of other Liberals on the primacy of this issue was bound to prove problematic.

However, it transpired that Thorpe had encountered an even more immediate and 'rather embarrassing' problem with his parliamentary colleagues, namely their unwillingness to serve under or support a Conservative administration led by Heath himself. This problem was initially reported to Heath indirectly, following a telephone call to Robert Armstrong (Heath's Private Secretary) from Conservative MP Nigel Fisher, who had himself been telephoned by Thorpe (the two of them were close friends, in spite of their political differences). Thorpe was at pains to emphasise that this was certainly not a view which he personally shared, for although he acknowledged that he was 'not very close to Ted', he considered him to be 'by far the most able man' to lead the country at that moment, and as such, Thorpe himself would have been perfectly happy to serve under him.[21] Nonetheless, many of his Liberal colleagues 'had many grave reservations about him [Heath] leading a coalition, partly because they had been highly critical of Heath's "handling of the miners" dispute before the election',[22] but also because while it was difficult to discern who had actually won the election, 'we did know who had lost it.'[23]

Incidentally, Heath might have taken some comfort from another telephone call, this time from former Labour MP, Woodrow Wyatt, who advised that if a deal with the Liberals did not materialise, he should seek a short-term coalition with the Labour Party, his reasoning being that if Labour refused, 'they will look very bad', whereas if they accepted, they would have to share responsibility for the necessary austerity measures. Either way, Wyatt advised Heath, 'you would look very good and come out of it very well'.[24]

When Thorpe subsequently phoned Heath himself early on Sunday evening, the Liberal leader made no allusion to having already spoken to Nigel Fisher earlier in the day, but did report to Heath – 'it is no good beating about the bush' – the concerns of other Liberal MPs about the Conservative leadership. Nonetheless, Thorpe expressed his confidence that this particular issue as not 'insuperable … I can handle my party on that issue'. What was likely to prove more problematic, Thorpe warned, was the issue of electoral reform, for this was the issue that his colleagues 'feel somewhat hard about', to the extent that there would need to be some concrete proposals 'before there could be talk about an agreed package of economic proposals'. If something could be agreed concerning electoral reform before the end of the year (1974), Thorpe suggested, then the Liberals might feel able and willing to move beyond offering 'general support from the Opposition bench to actual coalition', whereas entering a coalition under the existing voting system would be viewed by many Liberals as 'simply putting their heads under a chopper'.

The issue of electoral reform subsequently yielded somewhat divergent accounts of these talks, for according to Heath's account of their first meeting, Thorpe 'raised the subject of proportional representation', and when Heath had a subsequent meeting with his Cabinet colleagues, it was 'with particular reference

to proportional representation.'[25] Margaret Thatcher too refers explicitly to the Liberals' insistence on proportional representation, hence her claim (see below) that to accede to their demand would have meant that the Conservatives would never form a majority government again.[26] For his part, however, Thorpe insists that: 'The term proportional representation was never used' when he sought a commitment from Heath that a coalition Cabinet would introduce electoral reform.[27]

In fact, Thorpe *did* use the term 'proportional representation', but explicitly with regard to electoral reform for borough council elections, while recommending the alternative vote for rural (shire) elections. There was, however, no specific recommendation from Thorpe as to what type of electoral system should be adopted for general elections. The important point at this stage, Thorpe emphasised, was for Heath to pledge the establishment of a Speaker's Conference on electoral reform, to report before the end of the year, whereupon its recommendations (if acceptable to the Liberals, of course) would be enacted in the following parliamentary session. If this course of action could be undertaken, then the Liberals would subsequently be willing to countenance the transition from parliamentary support for the Conservative government to participation in it through joining a coalition. Without such a course of action, however, most Liberal MPs would almost certainly conclude that from their perspective, 'the difference between a minority Labour and a minority Conservative government are matters which are outside their control'.

Thus it was that this second round of talks was brought to an end, in order that Thorpe and Heath could conduct further consultations with their senior colleagues. Thorpe did apologise to Heath for the fact that his Liberal colleagues appeared to be proving somewhat intransigent on this issue (the implication being that Thorpe himself would much more readily have reached an agreement with Heath), acknowledging that 'this is obviously hell – a nightmare on stilts for you'.[28] Certainly Thorpe recalled that 'I don't think I left him [Heath] very sanguine about the chance of success' when leaving to consult the Parliamentary Liberal Party.[29]

Following these consultations during the Sunday evening, Heath and Thorpe held another meeting at 10.30pm to discuss the respective outcomes. That there was little progress on their earlier discussions was indicated by the fact that this meeting only lasted for thirty minutes. Heath explained that his senior colleagues had become even more convinced over the weekend that nothing less than a coalition with the Liberals would suffice in order to provide the country with the degree of political stability that the economic situation warranted. An agreement by the Liberals merely to support the government from the opposition bench in the House of Commons would not be sufficient. Furthermore, Heath insisted that if the Conservatives were to remain in office at this juncture, it would be under his continued leadership, which, he emphasised, was supported by his senior colleagues.

With regard to the Liberals' demand that a Speaker's Conference on electoral reform be established, with its recommendations being implemented in the following parliamentary session, Heath reported that while there was little objection to such a conference in principle, he could not guarantee that its findings would prove acceptable to the Parliamentary Conservative Party and as such, could not promise that whatever was recommended by a Speaker's Conference would be given legislative effect by his Cabinet colleagues. Moreover, he pointed out, electoral reform had always been a matter for the House of Commons itself, expressing its view by means of a free vote.

Thorpe was convinced that 'unless the Cabinet took a collective view in favour of reform and made it a vote of confidence in the government, no reform would have any chance of going through Parliament whilst the Conservative Party continued to favour the present first-past-the-post system'.

Needless to say, Heath's position was effectively matched by Thorpe's stance on behalf of the Liberal Party, namely that there could be no coalition or parliamentary agreement between the two parties without a firmer commitment from the Cabinet with regard to electoral reform. Thorpe reiterated that the Liberal Party would see little difference between a minority Conservative government and a Labour government, and would, therefore, not be inclined to do a deal with either of them.[30] Thorpe was convinced that 'unless the Cabinet took a collective view in favour of reform and made it a vote of confidence in the government, no reform would have any chance of going through Parliament whilst the Conservative Party continued to favour the present first-past-the-post system.'[31] This meeting therefore ended with no clear decision one way or another, beyond Heath and Thorpe agreeing to conduct further consultations with their respective senior colleagues the next (Monday) morning. It was evident, however, that a 'deal' was looking increasingly unlikely.

This was confirmed the following morning, when Heath and Thorpe reaffirmed that their – or, rather, their senior colleagues' – positions had not subsequently altered. Following a Cabinet meeting at 10.00am, Heath wrote to Thorpe to reiterate the Conservatives' view that nothing less than the participation of the Liberals in government (i.e., a coalition) could provide the requisite political stability, but at the same time, the Cabinet could only offer a Speaker's Conference on electoral reform, whose recommendations would then be subject to a free vote in Parliament.[32]

In reply, Thorpe insisted that this was an inadequate basis for cooperation between the Liberals and the Conservatives. He did suggest, however, that in view of the urgency of the economic problems facing the country at the time, 'a Government of national unity' should be formed, comprising members from all of the main parliamentary parties.[33] The latter option was firmly rejected by Heath (the Cabinet had, earlier that morning, acknowledged that the time might come when a national unity government would become necessary, but not just yet), who cited a statement by the Labour Party that it would not be willing to enter into any such coalition. The only option now, Heath explained, was to tender his resignation forthwith.[34]

V

That the coalition talks failed to yield a Conservative–Liberal administration was not solely due to disagreements over the issue of electoral reform, vitally important though this was, of course. What also undermined Heath's attempts at crafting a coalition with the Liberals was the antipathy towards such a venture which existed amongst senior figures in both parties, an opposition which was undoubtedly often closely linked to policy disagreements, but which also derived from unease at the clear impression of short-term opportunism which such a coalition would engender, and which might ultimately damage the credibility and popularity of both parties at the next general election, to the Labour Party's electoral advantage.

Within the Conservative Party, Norman Tebbit recalls that his surprise at Heath's refusal immediately to accept that he had lost, and resign accordingly, 'turned to real anger' when it became evident that 'he was seeking Liberal support for a coalition government.' Moreover, Tebbit was sure that the bulk of the Conservative Party was opposed to such a deal, especially if it might eventually lead to the adoption of proportional representation.[35] This had been confirmed at the Monday morning Cabinet meeting, when it had also been noted that many Conservatives were convinced that the Liberals were 'asking too much and offering too little'.[36]

Similarly, Margaret Thatcher's 'own instinctive feeling was that the party with the largest number of seats in the House of Commons was justified in expecting that they would be called to try to form a new government', and whilst she obviously deeply disliked the notion of the Labour Party benefiting from the Tories' travails, this was probably preferable to a Conservative–Liberal coalition from which the Liberals secured the prize of electoral reform – in which case the Conservative Party would never form a majority government again. [37]

Meanwhile, one of Heath's closest colleagues at the time, William Whitelaw, had appeared on television on the Friday morning immediately following polling day to comment on the election results, declaring that 'if Labour seemed to have won most seats, then they had … effectively won the election', which meant that 'any effort in 1974 by the Conservatives and Liberals to form a coalition together against Labour would have been very unpopular and thus doomed to early failure'. Whitelaw subsequently accounted for this somewhat injudicious assertion by claiming that he had felt unwell earlier that morning, and that whilst he had felt able to proceed with the television interview, the medicine he took to alleviate his feverish symptoms 'completely dulled my memory and my senses', to the extent that 'I had absolutely no subsequent recollection of my interview … nor of the somewhat controversial remark I made at the time.' Whitelaw subsequently maintained, however, that his televised comments were a genuine reflection of his views on the political situation at that time, and that the failure of the coalition talks 'was the correct outcome' constitutionally, even though it heralded 'a weak minority Labour government'.[38] Heath was evidently forgiving of Whitelaw's indiscretion, because he nonetheless invited him to join ministerial colleagues in London to discuss their options that weekend, but Whitelaw was not well enough to undertake the long journey from his Penrith & Border constituency.

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Also believing that it was 'just as well' that the coalition talks failed was Peter Carrington, who later acknowledged that the electorate would not 'have taken kindly to the two minority parties (in the immediate past being most abusive about each other) making common cause to form a Government and to exclude the majority party, however tenuous the majority was.'[39]

Such comments, particularly as they emanated from senior figures spanning the ideological strands in the Conservative Party at that time, suggest that even if Heath had managed to secure a commitment from Thorpe to enter a coalition, many Conservatives themselves would have been antipathetic. Certainly, the parliamentary majority that would have been attained by a Conservative–Liberal coalition would still have been extremely narrow, and thus highly susceptible to 'cross-voting' or abstentions by even a handful of disgruntled MPs in either party. The ensuing image of weakness and lack of authority would probably have done lasting damage to the Conservative Party's reputation for statecraft and strong government, an important consideration which doubtless led many Conservatives to conclude that in the short term, allowing a

minority Labour government to be formed was the lesser of two evils (although as noted above, there was also some concern that a Labour administration might subsequently benefit from North Sea oil revenues).

Furthermore, there was considerable antipathy in the Parliamentary Conservative Party to pursuing a political alliance with a Liberal Party which 'had been the main beneficiary, if not the cause, of the Government's loss of support', and as such, many Conservatives were strongly inclined to 'leave the Liberal Party alone', while anticipating that much of its increased support would dissipate in the next election, whereupon many of those who had voted Liberal in February 1974 would 'return' to the Conservatives, suitably chastened by their folly.[40]

VI

One might have expected rather more enthusiasm from the Liberals for a Conservative–Liberal coalition, for participation in such a government would ostensibly have raised the Liberal Party's profile and enhanced their credibility after decades of electoral decline and parliamentary marginalisation. However, the Liberals' antipathy went wider and deeper than the obvious disagreements with the Conservative leadership over electoral reform (or, rather, the absence of it), and disapproval of Heath's refusal to resign the Conservative leadership, having failed to win the election. Certainly, many, if not most, Liberal MPs were generally hostile to such a partnership in the political circumstances pertaining at the time, this hostility being underpinned by a concomitant calculation that a coalition would be unsustainable in practice – in which case, another general election would probably have to be called, whereupon the Liberal Party was likely to be 'punished' by voters for propping up the Heath government, and thereby destroying the significant progress achieved by the Liberals in February 1974. Indeed, this consideration was particularly pertinent given that much of the Liberal Party's electoral success in February 1974 had accrued from erstwhile Conservative voters defecting to the Liberals, to the extent that in many constituencies, the Conservatives, rather than Labour, were the Liberals' main rivals. In this context, more prescient Liberals adjudged that entering a coalition with the Conservatives would appear to many voters to be highly opportunistic, thereby undermining the Liberal Party's perennial claim to offer a new kind of politics which transcended the opportunism, partisan self-interest and 'short-termism' which the Liberals attributed to the Labour and Conservative Parties. It was also considered that the almost inevitable failure of a fragile Conservative–Liberal coalition would cause immense harm to the Liberal Party's own credibility and longer-term political prospects.

Certainly, with the Conservative and Labour parties' combined share of the vote in February 1974 having fallen to 75 per cent (this heralding a new era of partisan dealignment in British politics), and the Liberal Party having correspondingly increased its share to 19 per cent, many Liberals were of the view that their party's future electoral prospects would best be served by *not* aligning themselves with either of the main parties, but by maintaining their independence and 'equidistance', and thus their integrity. This, it was envisaged, would leave the Liberal Party well placed to attract further support from the growing numbers of disillusioned, dealigned voters in subsequent elections.

Besides, as Jeremy Thorpe's predecessor as Liberal leader, Jo Grimond, observed, a Conservative–Liberal coalition would still have been in a minority unless support was offered by the SNP's 7 MPs, and as such, the putative coalition 'would have been strangled at birth.' For all of these reasons, therefore, Grimond observed that: 'The Liberal Party at that time were hostile to any arrangement with the Tories', one which, in any case, 'could not have got over the first hurdle of a vote of confidence' in Parliament 'unless extra support could have been drummed up from the minority parties.'[41] Similarly, according to a Conservative participant in the ministerial discussions that 'dreadful' weekend, two other prominent Liberal MPs, David Steel and Cyril Smith, were not interested in any coalition with the Tories. Indeed, it is suggested that had Jeremy Thorpe agreed to enter a coalition with the Conservatives, 'his Parliamentary Party would have split.'[42] Certainly, David Steel recalls that when Thorpe met his parliamentary colleagues on Monday 4 March, in lieu of making a final decision over Heath's invitation to form a coalition, 'it became clear that the almost universal view was that we should not go into a Heath government'.[43] Moreover, just as Conservative opponents of a deal felt that the Liberals were asking too much and offering too little, so did many Liberals feel that by asking them to entering a coalition while offering only a Speaker's Conference and a parliamentary free vote on electoral reform, it was the Conservatives who were asking too much and offering too little.

A further reason for Liberal reluctance to make a deal with the Conservatives, particularly in the form of a coalition, was the fear that 'they would, sooner or later, be swallowed up'.[44] There was undoubtedly a suspicion that this was one of the reasons why senior Conservatives were apparently so keen to persuade the Liberals to join a coalition. Such scepticism

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and antipathy towards doing a deal with the Conservatives was certainly not confined to Liberal MPs, for it was subsequently alleged that 'Liberal activists were … up in arms at the suggestion that the party … might lend itself to propping up a defeated Tory government.'[45] Indeed, it has been suggested that if Thorpe had agreed to form a coalition with Heath's Conservatives – 'For himself, he would have loved to have been able to accept'[46] – it would almost certainly have prompted 'a far-reaching split in the Liberal Party', for the 'radical anti-Tory mood in the Party was strong', as articulated in the communications submitted to Liberal headquarters in London throughout the weekend.[47]

It is evident, therefore, that while the Conservative Party's refusal to offer a firm commitment to introducing electoral reform is the most obvious and well-publicised reason for the eventual breakdown of the Conservative–Liberal coalition talks during the first four days of March 1974, these talks were always hampered by a lack of support among the MPs and grassroots members of both parties. Heath and Thorpe conducted their negotiations, increasingly cognizant of the fact that many of their Conservative and Liberal colleagues on the backbenches were unenthusiastic about, or even hostile to, any deal between them, and with MPs in both parties convinced that the other was 'asking too much and offering too little' in return. As such, even if Heath and Thorpe had succeeded in agreeing the basis of a coalition, they would almost certainly have encountered a distinct and damaging lack of support from their respective parliamentary colleagues.

Peter Dorey is Reader in British Politics at Cardiff University, and is the author of numerous books, articles and chapters on the three main British political parties.

Even if Heath and Thorpe had succeeded in agreeing the basis of a coalition, they would almost certainly have encountered a distinct and damaging lack of support from their respective parliamentary colleagues.

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3 James Prior, *A Balance of Power* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), p. 95.
4 Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of February 1974*, p. 258.
5 Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), p. 238.
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7 National Archives, PREM 16/231, Robert Armstrong [Heath's Private Secretary] 'Note for the Record: Events Leading to the Resignation of Mr. Heath's Administration on 4 March 1974', 16 March 1974.
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16 Heath, *The Course of My Life*, p. 518.
17 Ibid.
18 Thorpe, *In My Own Time*, p. 115.
19 National Archives, PREM 15/2069 'Note for the Record: Minutes of meeting between Edward Heath and Jeremy Thorpe, held on 2 March 1974', 3 March 1974.
20 Steel, *A House Divided*, pp. 14–15.
21 National Archives, PREM 15/2069, Robert Armstrong, 'Note of Telephone Conversation with Nigel Fisher', 3 March 1974.
22 Most Liberals were also critical of the militancy of the NUM in its pursuit of the strike, but there was nonetheless considerable sympathy in the party with the miners' case per se.
23 Thorpe, *In My Own Time*, p. 115.
24 National Archives, PREM 15/2069, 'Record of Telephone message from Woodrow Wyatt to Edward Heath', 3 March 1974.
25 Heath, *The Course of My Life*, p. 518.
26 Thatcher, *The Path to Power*, p. 239.
27 Thorpe, *In My Own Time*, p. 115.
28 National Archives, PREM 15/2069, 'Transcript of Telephone Conversation between Edward Heath and Jeremy Thorpe', 3 March 1974.
29 Thorpe, *In My Own Time*, p. 115.
30 Of course, three years later, the Liberal Party did do a deal with a minority Labour government, when it joined the Lib-Lab Pact.
31 Thorpe, *In My Own Time*, p. 116.
32 National Archives, PREM 15/2069, Heath to Thorpe, 4 March 1974 (morning).
33 National Archives, PREM 15/2069, Thorpe to Heath, 4 March 1974.
34 National Archives, PREM 15/2069, Heath to Thorpe, 4 March 1974 (afternoon). See also CAB 128/53, CM (74) 11th conclusions, 4 March 1974.
35 Norman Tebbit, *Upwardly Mobile* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), 1988, p. 134.
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39 Lord (Peter) Carrington, *Reflect on Things Past: The Memoirs of Lord Carrington* (London: Collins, 1988), p. 266.
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Record: Events Leading to the Resignation of Mr Heath's Administration on 4 March 1974', 16 March 1974.

41 Jo Grimond, *Memoirs* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 232–33.

42 Prior, *A Balance of Power*, p. 95.

43 Steel, *A House Divided*, p. 14.

44 National Archives, PREM 16/231, Robert Armstrong, 'Note for the Record: Events Leading to the Resignation of Mr. Heath's Administration on 4 March 1974', 16 March 1974.

45 John Campbell, *Edward Heath: A Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), pp. 616–17.

46 Ibid, p. 616.

47 Butler and Kavanagh, *The British General Election of February 1974*, p. 258.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

If you can help any of the individuals listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information — or if you know anyone who can — please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 3) for inclusion here.

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65). Knowledge of the whereabouts of any letters written by Cobden in private hands, autograph collections, and obscure locations in the UK and abroad for a complete edition of his letters. (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, please see www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/projects/cobden). *Dr Anthony Howe, School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ; a.c.howe@uea.ac.uk.*

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

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

The Liberal Party's political communication, 1945–2002. PhD thesis. *Cynthia Messeleka-Boyer, 12 bis chemin Vaysse, 81150 Terssac, France; +33 6 10 09 72 46; cynthiandrea@aol.com.*

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

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

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

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

Liberal politics in Sussex, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight 1900–14. The study of electoral progress and subsequent disappointment. Research includes comparisons of localised political trends, issues and preferred interests as aganst national trends. Any information, specifically on Liberal candidates in the area in the two general elections of 1910, would be most welcome. Family papers especially appreciated. *Ian Ivatt, 84 High Street, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3JT; ianjivatt@tinyonline.co.uk.*

The Liberal Party in the West Midlands from December 1916 to the 1923 general election. Focusing on the fortunes of the party in Birmingham, Coventry, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Looking to explore the effects of the party split at local level. Also looking to uncover the steps towards temporary reunification for the 1923 general election. *Neil Fisher, 42 Bowden Way, Binley, Coventry CV3 2HU ; neil.fisher81@ntlworld.com.*

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

Liberal Unionists. A study of the Liberal Unionist party as a discrete political entity. Help with identifying party records before 1903 particularly welcome. *Ian Cawood, Newman University Colllege, Birmingham; i.cawood@newman.ac.uk.*

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

The political career of Edward Strutt, 1st Baron Belper. Strutt was Whig/Liberal MP for Derby (1830-49), later Arundel and Nottingham; in 1856 he was created Lord Belper and built Kingston Hall (1842-46) in the village of Kingston-on-Soar, Notts. He was a friend of Jeremy Bentham and a supporter of free trade and reform, and held government office as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Commissioner of Railways. Any information, location of papers or references welcome. *Brian Smith; brian63@inbox.com*

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

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

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

REPORTS

Torrington '58 – Liberal survival and revival, 1945–79

Full-day seminar, 14 June 2008, at the LSE

Report by **Matt Cole**

The Liberal Democrat History Group, in association with the British Library of Political and Economic Science and the Richard Scurrah Wainwright Trust, supported a day of discussion and recollection at the London School of Economics on 14 June, to mark the half-centenary of the Torrington by-election, when Mark Bonham Carter captured a Conservative seat, securing the Liberals' first by-election gain for thirty years. Attendees included party leaders from local government, from the Commons and the Lords, as well as academic analysts and one or two former supporters.

Debate was focused around the causes of the party's remarkable recovery over the last fifty years, a period which has seen the number of Liberal Democrat MPs multiply tenfold and the party's role in government enhanced at all levels, to the point where even a voice as sceptical as Lord Greaves's could acknowledge that 'the Liberal Democrats are part of the political scene'. What the day emphasised most of all, ironically, was that a single event, such as the Torrington victory, was no more than a staging post in a journey which had begun years earlier.

Contributors repeatedly returned, each with a different perspective, to three salient factors responsible for the survival of the Liberal Party, some of which are more frequently recognised than others: the judgement and skill of its leaders; the tenacity, organisation and endeavour of its members; and the strategies and attitudes of other parties.

Lords Wallace and Dholakia, both of whom had joined in the Grimond enrolment of the late 1950s and early 1960s, addressed the role of party leadership. Dholakia described Grimond and Torrington victor Mark Bonham Carter as 'the most influential' figures in the party, whilst Wallace paid tribute to the 'astounding' impact made by Grimond in marshalling a range of intellectual figures into the Unservile State Group and other policy-making forums. According to Wallace, Grimond's impact was reflected in two waves: the 'reactivation' of existing membership between 1955 and 1958 and the addition of new members such as himself between 1961 and 1963. From this latter group, Tony Bunyan and Hilary Wainwright, who drifted away from the party in the 1970s, acknowledged that Grimond's leadership had inspired their hopes of building a radical movement rather than a conventional party.

Conversely, the leadership of Jeremy Thorpe was the subject of widespread criticism due to his failure to consult with the party or to lead policy innovation – for having been, as some put it, a very conventional politician. Clement Davies' defence of the party in its darkest hour was recognised, though even his biographer Alun Wyburn-Powell doubted his charisma. Speaker Michael Meadowcroft similarly reported that a flyer publicising a meeting to be addressed by Davies in Colne Valley promised that he would not speak for more than ten minutes! As for David Steel, Archy Kirkwood (who worked for Steel during the 1970s) gave a candid assessment of the leader's role in agreeing the Lib-Lab Pact, stressing Steel's distinction between 'principles' and 'demands'. Kirkwood recognised, though less fully than some present, that in retrospect we might argue that Steel could have won further commitments from the Callaghan administration, particularly in matters of PR, and some contributors quoted recollections of Labour ministers crowing that Steel had been 'robbed'.

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The focus on leadership as the monocausal driver of party success is, however, a fallacy of the age of television, as the day's discussions demonstrated. Alun Wyburn-Powell, for example, showed that the Liberals' strong second place at the 1954 Inverness by-election had demonstrated their potential to win votes even in the twilight of Clement Davies's leadership. Furthermore, as the present author pointed out, in a survey of dozens of Liberal Associations no reference appears in local branch minutes to Jo Grimond during his leadership. In parts of the country at least, Liberal organisation and activity persisted regardless of national profile. Michael Meadowcroft and Tony Greaves gave compelling evidence of the importance of local government campaigning and representation to the party's survival and prosperity. Meadowcroft noted that in Blackpool, for example, the Liberals won control of the local council in 1958, even though they had not fought either of the town's parliamentary seats

at the two previous elections. When a by-election occurred in 1962, Harry Hague, local activist of many years' standing, came within a thousand votes of winning the seat. That same week, Meadowcroft argued, the Orpington victory was the first parliamentary contest won on the basis of municipal election success. By 1962, Meadowcroft was the Local Government Officer at Liberal HQ (he was19 years old), where he began to build up a set of card files of Liberal local government activity. The growth in this representation, and the contact it created with popular political reaction, sustained the party in later years during problems with the leadership.

Martin Wainwright gave specific evidence of Liberal constituency work in his recollections of campaigning in Colne Valley, where his father, Richard, was MP from 1966 to 1970 and from 1974 to 1987. He emphasised the roles of local patrons and campaigners such as Harry Senior and Jessie Kirby, of both the organisation and the faith of Methodists in the party (he remembered being inspired by hymns such as 'Stay, Master, Stay', as well as the promise of a fish-and-chip supper) and of the local press and Liberal Clubs. Richard Wainwright, whose family trust supported the conference and whose widow and three children were present, reflected the importance of both organisation and leadership, as all those present who knew him recognised in turn. Martin compared his father to the enigmatic Hiram Yorke in Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* – an independent, successful and sometimes mischievous entrepreneur: 'revolt was in his blood. He could not bear control.' Tony Bunyan, Michael Meadowcroft and Lords Wallace, Kirkwood and Greaves all paid warm tribute to Wainwright's unique combination of shrewdness, common sense and capacity to inspire and invoke the confidence of the Liberal Party in its entirety, despite his attachment to the Commons. Lord Greaves remarked wistfully that Wainwright was 'looked up to. He had a healthy disdain for the London establishment. There's nobody like that there now', adding wryly that 'he could sometimes go over the top in his integrity'. Yet Wainwright would have been the last to claim that any one personality was at the root of Liberal success.

Tony Bunyan, Michael Meadowcroft and Lords Wallace, Kirkwood and Greaves all paid warm tribute to Wainwright's unique combination of shrewdness, common sense and capacity to inspire and invoke the confidence of the Liberal Party in its entirety, despite his attachment to the Commons.

Relations with other parties are both an unavoidable part of Liberal history and a neglected factor in Liberal fortunes. Sometimes inspirational in their sheer odiousness (the example of Lord Dholakia's motivation in becoming a Liberal councillor due to the racism he experienced at the hands of Brighton Tories springs to mind), the conference had nonetheless to acknowledge the short-term benefits of co-operation, from the launching of the parliamentary careers of Donald Wade and Arthur Holt in the 1950s and 1960s, to the Liberal Party's entrance into the sphere of government in the 1970s. The issue of the point at which these relationships became more damaging than useful was likewise addressed, and Russell Deacon's analysis of the Carmarthen by-election (where the Tories stood down but the Liberals still lost), Michael Meadowcroft's work on ending pacts in local government, and the contributors' overall reaction to the discussion of the Lib-Lab Pact all suggested that the Liberal Party had allowed itself to be drawn too deeply into these relationships. It is ironic that the Conservatives, who did the most to cultivate a relationship with the Liberals in the 1950s and who could most easily have destroyed them, were most vulnerable to them when the revival occurred.

The speakers never explicitly drew attention to a certain factor in Liberal survival, which historians also tend to overlook (though it cropped up in most discussions) – luck. Certain events and outcomes which favoured the party were a matter of chance, from Lord Dholakia's recruitment into the party to make up the quorum at a Young Liberal meeting in a pub, to the fact that certain candidates were unsuccessful (one wonders what would have happened to the Liberals had Violet Bonham Carter or Megan Lloyd George – or both of them – won their contests in 1951) or successful (for instance, the three MPs who between them had a majority of less than 1,600 votes in 1970). Torrington itself saw a narrow margin of victory of only 219 votes, and could easily have been a near miss. The survival of the Liberal Party in some form or other might have been guaranteed by its membership and organisation and its revival may have relied upon national leadership – but the difference between whether it survived or grew was in part a matter of chance.

Many thanks are due not only to the Wainwrights for their generous support of the conference, but also to Sue Donnelly and Becky Webster of the LSE archives for their work in making the conference possible, and for displaying examples of election material from the Liberal Party archives. The Liberal Democrat History Group looks forward to developing its work with the LSE archives in the future.

Matt Cole lectures at the London School of Economics on the Hansard Society's International Scholars programme. He is currently writing the biography of Richard Wainwright, former Liberal MP for the Colne Valley.

Founding the welfare state

Fringe meeting, 14 September 2008, with Ian Packer and Joe Harris; Chair: Lady Jane Bonham Carter

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

A hundred years ago, in 1908, the Liberal government of Herbert Henry Asquith introduced the Old Age Pensions Bill. This was just the beginning of a comprehensive Liberal programme of social reform including national insurance, minimum wages, labour exchanges and compulsory school meals, amongst much else. Was this programme evidence that nineteenth-century notions of the minimal state had finally been abandoned, or was it an attempt to counter the challenge of the emerging Labour movement?

Lady Jane Bonham Carter introduced the meeting with a plea for the role of Prime Minister H. H. Asquith (her great-grandfather) to be given its proper recognition by history. The Old Age Pensions Act of 1908 had become linked in the popular mind with the work and personality of David Lloyd George; it was enacted soon after Lloyd George became Chancellor of the Exchequer and has been widely seen as a prelude to the other social reforms heralded in and paid for by Lloyd George's People's Budget of 1909. Indeed, a colloquial term for being in receipt of the pension was 'being on the Lloyd George'. As Bonham Carter reminded the meeting, however, it was Asquith who, as Chancellor in 1906–08, had been the driving force behind the championing of pensions by the Liberal government and it was Asquith who, although by now Prime Minister, piloted the 1908 budget, in which pensions were introduced, through the House of Commons. Lloyd George handled the separate legislation on pensions later in 1908 and, as a result, began to accrue more credit for the policy than he was entitled to.

Dr Ian Packer of Lincoln University (author of *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905–15*) delivered a broad overview of the social welfare legislation enacted by Asquith's government between 1908 and 1914, and its significance in the administration's programme. Social reform as an agenda for central government was the outcome of the breakdown of the mid-Victorian idea of the minimal state, embodied in the concepts of low taxation and the least possible government interference in society and the economy. In the 1880s and 1890s the dominance of this idea was increasingly challenged as it became clear that the minimal state could not solve a wide range of problems, including an economy that was falling behind major international competitors, the spiralling cost of national defence and the persistence of poverty in what was, comparatively, a very wealthy society. Tories turned to imperialism and taxes on imports to promote economic growth. The Labour and socialist movements argued for measures like the eight-hour day as solutions to unemployment and poverty. The trend towards collectivism was reflected in many areas of thought, including sociology, philosophy and theology, so it was unsurprising that it also became a feature of Liberalism.

Many nineteenth-century Liberals had been hostile to the state because they saw it as controlled by a narrow clique who acted in their own and not the wider public interest. But as the extension of the franchise brought the state increasingly under popular control (or at least accountability) it became possible for Liberals to imagine it as a liberating influence. Liberal thinkers, most famously L. T. Hobhouse and J. A. Hobson, started to promote the 'New Liberalism', with social reform added to the list of traditional Liberal demands, like democracy, religious equality and Irish home rule. They painstakingly demonstrated that social reform was merely an extension of existing Liberal precepts, entirely compatible with Liberal ideas and language. Moreover Liberals were starting to think about ways in which rising government expenditure might be paid for. Their determination to preserve free trade ruled out the Tory solution of taxes on imports. This left the party with no option but to defend increases in direct taxation, especially on the very wealthy, as the fairest way to raise revenue – a policy first seen in Sir William Harcourt's budget of 1894, which consolidated and graduated death duties.

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However, while increased direct taxes might provide the means to pay for social reform, the abstract arguments of thinkers like Hobhouse and Hobson did not commit a Liberal government to any particular course of action and did not determine the form or timing of legislation in 1905–14. In fact there were three distinct waves of Cabinet initiatives on social reform in this period, the first of which was largely a response to the political agenda that had built up in the previous decade of Tory government. Its centrepiece was undoubtedly the Old Age Pensions Act of 1908. There had been discussion around the feasibility of a scheme of state pensions since the 1870s, but, ironically, pensions had become a front-rank political issue only when Joseph Chamberlain had taken them up during the 1895 general election on behalf of the Tories; and the Liberal government's pensions legislation was

at least partly a rebuff to the Tories for not introducing pensions during their term of office. Pensions, though, were probably not a response to Liberals' fears about the appearance of the Labour Party, which won 29 seats in 1906. Labour fought that election largely in alliance with the Liberals and the party was already in favour of pensions, an idea endorsed by 59 per cent of Liberal candidates in 1906. Asquith had promoted the idea of pensions well before Labour won two by-elections from the Liberals in 1907 at Jarrow and Colne Valley, so fear of Labour does not seem to have been a significant factor in the genesis of pensions. What was crucial about the Pensions Act was its introduction of important new principles in welfare legislation, principles the Liberals were to develop further – particularly the idea that welfare provision should be separated from the Poor Law and given to recipients as a right, rather than the humiliating and grudging relief given to paupers.

What was crucial about the Pensions Act was its introduction of important new principles in welfare legislation, principles the Liberals were to develop further – particularly the idea that welfare provision should be separated from the Poor Law and given to recipients as a right, rather than the humiliating and grudging relief given to paupers.

It was the perceived popularity of pensions and the advantage they gave in the battle with the Tories that allowed Liberals to regard themselves as a party particularly associated with social reform. This process was hastened once pensions became entwined with Lloyd George's 'People's Budget' of 1909 and the constitutional struggle between the Lords and Commons which followed when the Lords rejected the Budget. For many Liberals, social reform became inextricably linked with other items in the party's agenda, especially graduated direct taxation and the achievement of democracy. However, while pensions were not alone among the Liberals' achievements in the field of social reform in 1906–08, they were by far the most eminent and the only measure that captured the imagination of the party or sustained public attention. Other legislation was more limited: it was either non-controversial, like the provision of school meals, which had passed the Commons in 1905 in the last year of the Unionist government; or it was the result of pressure group activity such as the extended 1906 Workmen's Compensation Act, a concession to lobbying from the TUC, the maximum eight-hour day for miners in 1908, prized by the coal miners' unions, then still a powerful force within the Liberal Party, and the Trade Boards Act of 1909, which set minimum wages in four areas of, mainly female, home-working, which was the outcome of vigorous lobbying by the National Anti-Sweating League. This certainly did not amount to a coordinated programme, though it did establish some important, if limited, precedents – especially in the case of the Trade Boards Act, which created Britain's first modern regulation of wages.

At the elections of January and December 1910, pensions were the only social policy having a prominent role, being mentioned by 75 per cent of Liberal candidates in their election addresses. But even they were outstripped by other issues. In January 1910 the fate of the House of Lords, free trade and the 1909 Budget were all mentioned more often than pensions by Liberal candidates; in December 1910 these issues were joined by defence and Irish home rule. So, while social reform was an important component of Edwardian Liberalism, it was only one.

In 1908, a second wave of initiatives began to take shape, carrying the administration much further. Whilst the earlier reforms stemmed from long-standing issues and were handled by a variety of ministers, the new departures of 1908 represented a fresh agenda and were largely the work of two ministers – Lloyd George and Churchill. The key to their ideas was National Insurance. Lloyd George's experience of piloting the pensions legislation through the Commons had convinced him that social reform made the party popular and stimulated his interest in schemes to provide sickness benefits for widows and orphans. Lloyd George was also convinced that future schemes could not be financed out of general taxation alone. National Insurance was devised by the Welshman and his eclectic group of advisers as a way of spreading the cost between the state, employers and employees. Under what became the National Insurance Act of 1911 everyone in work earning under £160 pa was compulsorily enrolled in a state scheme, in which they paid 4d a week, their employers 3d a week and the state 2d a week, in return for the right to sickness benefit. This ingenious scheme made use of the insurance principle that was already familiar to millions of people and of the expertise of existing friendly societies who would administer it. In some ways, Lloyd George was just extending and subsidising existing forms of insurance provision. But to be successful it had to be compulsory, making it a massive advance in the state's role in welfare provision; and, as with pensions, it rested on rights and entitlements to relief. People received benefits on the grounds that they were part of, and had contributed to, an insurance scheme.

The party accepted the legislation of 1911 willingly, hoping for another triumph on the lines of old age pensions. The only real opposition to the legislation came from interest groups like the BMA who feared that their position would be affected. However, while National Insurance was undoubtedly a parliamentary triumph for Lloyd George, and a milestone in welfare provision, it failed to repeat the political success of pensions, being

overshadowed by the crisis over the reform of the Lords. Once it came into operation in 1912–13 it became clear that many people resented paying a flat rate tax of 4d per week to belong to the National Insurance plan, and it was blamed for the party's poor performance in a series of by-elections. Nevertheless, the Liberals pressed ahead with the second part of the scheme which Churchill had presented to the Cabinet in 1909. This created a system of unemployment insurance for 2.5 million workers in trades like shipbuilding, where cyclical and seasonal unemployment were common. Together with the first labour exchanges, which had been introduced in 1909, unemployment insurance was a rather belated response to the unpopularity the government had suffered in 1908 when a trade depression had produced rising levels of unemployment.

While National Insurance proved a lasting achievement, its initial unpopularity meant that the political imperative that drove the role of social reform in the government's programme suddenly looked much less compelling. After 1911, it was entirely possible that the Liberal commitment to social reform would have died away, as Irish home rule and Welsh disestablishment came to dominate the parliamentary timetable. By 1911, too, Churchill was at the Admiralty, removed from domestic affairs. The third wave of Liberal proposals in the field of social reform was not, therefore, inevitable. It was sparked by a political crisis – the national miners' strike in favour of a minimum wage in March 1912. A compromise bill set up boards in each mining district to determine local minimum wages, representing an unforeseen extension of the principle of the 1909 Trade Boards Act to a major industry. Lloyd George leapt on this concept and took it in a new direction, suggesting the introduction of a minimum wage for agricultural labourers, arguing that low rural wages depressed earnings in the towns. This rather crude analysis was not a personal foible of Lloyd George's, but a reflection of a widely held view in the Liberal Party that many industrial difficulties could ultimately be traced back to the unreformed social structure of the countryside. Liberals were deeply suspicious of the role of landowners, holding them responsible for rural poverty by monopolising power for their own ends. This feeling had crystallised after the mass desertion of Liberal landowners in 1886 over Irish home rule and the hostile attitude of the House of Lords.

The achievements of the Edwardian Liberal governments in the field of social reform were truly outstanding and long-lasting. The concept of a centralised state welfare system first took form in 1905–14. The longer the Liberal government spent in power, the more committed it became to social reform.

Policies to challenge the role of landowners became increasingly popular amongst Liberals – hence their enthusiasm when Lloyd George put land taxation at the centre of his 1909 budget. In 1909 hostility to landowners and social reform had become entwined because the land taxes were one of the most high-profile elements of the budget that was raising the money for pensions and because the House of Lords had rejected the budget. This helped unite Liberals by fusing traditional radicalism with the new agenda of social reform, demonstrating that there was no contradiction between them. Lloyd George launched his own land enquiry, headed by the social investigator, Seebohm Rowntree, which provided the arguments to support his idea of a minimum wage for agricultural labourers and extended the land reform agenda by producing a programme of rent courts and security of tenure in the countryside and state encouragement for urban house-building. The new strategy was called the land campaign. Its rural side was launched in October 1913 and its urban elements were being discussed and approved by the Cabinet in the months before war broke out in 1914. The intention was that these ideas would form the centrepiece of the government's manifesto when the next general election occurred in 1915.

The achievements of the Edwardian Liberal governments in the field of social reform were truly outstanding and long-lasting. The concept of a centralised state welfare system first took form in 1905–14. The longer the Liberal government spent in power, the more committed it became to social reform. Moreover, its agenda on social reform underwent continuous internal renewal and by 1914 it was more bound up than ever before with other elements of Liberal ideology. But this position was also fragile, depending for its success on leadership from the top, particularly from the commanding and ingenious figure of Lloyd George. But Asquith played a vital role in this process too. More than anyone, it was he who was responsible for committing the Liberal government to old age pensions. And, as Prime Minister, he supported Lloyd George's great initiatives of the People's Budget, National Insurance and land reform, uniting the cabinet behind these policies. If it is the enmity between the two men that has been remembered for the period after 1916, it should not be forgotten that before 1914 they formed a remarkable team that led Liberalism in the direction of social reform.

If Ian Packer reviewed the Liberal position on old age pensions from the point of view of elite politics in the context of party competition with the Conservatives, Joe Harris, General Secretary of the National Pensioners Convention, and author of *Paupers' Progress: From Poor Relief to Old Age Pensions*, preferred to approach their introduction from the perspective of grassroots campaigning amongst working-class organisations, religious and charitable institutions, trade

unions, friendly societies and prominent and concerned individuals. At the root of the crusade was the desire to relieve the social conditions experienced by most older people in the nineteenth century who had to resort to Poor Law provision and the workhouse to survive. That this state of affairs should be necessary in economically developing, wealthy, industrial, Victorian Britain disturbed the conscience of the nation. This campaign of nationwide pressure was rewarded when the Old Age Pensions Bill, moved by Asquith and John Burns (the first working class man to hold government office) received Royal Assent on 1 August 1908. It established for first time the right of the poor to a minimum income as an alternative to the perceived charity of the Poor Law and the cruelty of the workhouse and was truly an historic measure.

There was little moral argument against such provision, with ideas about public funding to support the old and infirm going back several centuries. Numerous government committees had previously 'investigated how to improve the condition of the aged and deserving poor,' discussing possible systems and costs. As early as 1892, the reformer and sociologist Dr Charles Booth had proposed a practical old age pension plan, while on 20 November 1898 the Congregationalist Reverend Francis Stead, warden of the interdenominational Browning Settlement in Southwark, convened a meeting of councillors, MPs, and trade unionists to consider what could be done to pressurise the government to introduce old age pensions along the lines already operating in New Zealand. On 13 December 1898 the National Pensions Committee was formed with Stead and Frederick Rogers, a former bookbinder and trade unionist, as joint secretaries.

The Committee was backed by many well-known public figures, including philanthropist Edward Cadbury, labour and feminist organiser Margaret Bondfield, who would later become Britain's first female cabinet minister, future pensions minister George Barnes, Lib-Lab candidate and journalist Fredrick Maddison, and Will Crooks, the trade unionist and Fabian Society stalwart. Bernard Shaw, Cardinal Vaughan and the Archbishop of Canterbury also declared their support. Mass rallies took place in Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Glasgow, Bristol and Birmingham. Five hundred and sixty petitions containing 799,750 signatories were presented to Parliament by Fred Jowett, the Labour MP for Bradford West. For ten years, from 1898 to 1908, the Victorian and Edwardian conscience was stirred and the public campaign for old age pensions filled halls and assembly rooms across the country.

The first positive response came from Salisbury's administration, with the appointment of a Select Committee on 'Improving the Condition of the Aged Deserving Poor' in 1899 under the chairmanship of Henry Chaplin, a Unionist who was President of both the Board of Agriculture and the Local Government Board. The committee contained Unionists and Liberals, including Lloyd George. They accepted the moral case to provide for those 'whose conduct and whole career has been blameless, industrious and deserving but find themselves, from no fault of their own … with nothing but the workhouse or inadequate outdoor relief as the refuge for their declining years'. The Chaplin committee reported to Parliament on 26 July 1899 and recommended a non-contributory scheme for the deserving poor, hedged with many conditions. However the Conservative government took no action. Its resistance was on the grounds of cost, mainly because of the growing bill for the Boer War which had begun in 1899.

Although not acted upon, the work of the Chaplin committee was important in inspiring a number of proposals for pensions legislation over the next few years. The committee also met again in 1903 but all efforts to pass bills incorporating pensions provision into law between 1900 and 1908 failed. In December 1905 the Conservative administration of Arthur Balfour was replaced with the Liberal administration of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, whose government won a landslide victory in the general election of the following year. Campbell-Bannerman promised a pensions bill but died four months before it became law and his name is now rarely associated with the measure. Asquith, however, kept his predecessor's promise. In July 1908, 304 Liberals, 20 Lib-Labs, 23 Labour, 23 Irish Nationalists, 43 Unionists and 1 Socialist voted for the first old age pension bill; only 29 MPs opposed it. The act received Royal Assent on 1 August 1908. The battle for the provision of old age pensions had been won.

Lloyd George paid out the first pensions in January 1909 through local Post Offices; but the means-tested maximum of five shillings weekly for the over seventies, hedged with many conditions, was a long way from the 'endowment of old age' that Booth had envisioned and for which the trade unionists, philanthropists and Christian Socialists had fought. As a plaque erected at the Browning Hall Settlement to celebrate that first pension stated, it was a first step and the struggle for a universal pension above the official poverty level for all men and women. The struggle for that continues today.

As a plaque erected at the Browning Hall Settlement to celebrate that first pension stated, it was a first step and the struggle for a universal pension above the official poverty level for all men and women. The struggle for that continues today.

Graham Lippiatt is Secretary of the History Group.

REVIEWS

Liberal pragmatist

Donald Markwell: *John Maynard Keynes and International Relations: Economic Paths to War and Peace* (Oxford University Press, 2006)
Reviewed by **Ed Randall**

This is a book that will reward liberals (and many others) who are interested in Keynes's contribution to the understanding and the shaping of international relations in the twentieth century. However, Donald Markwell also has a grander and more demanding ambition, 'to facilitate the assessment, from time to time, of the contemporary relevance of Keynes's ideas to evolving circumstances' (p. 5). That grander aim is one to which I will briefly return at the end of this review.

Markwell is a political scientist with an abiding interest in economic thought and its impact on international relations. He was a Fellow at New and Merton Colleges, Oxford, before taking up a senior academic post at the University of Western Australia. He has written a study that is both accessible to the general reader and valuable to academic specialists who seek expert guidance. Markwell demonstrates an encyclopaedic knowledge of Keynes's writings and correspondence, which facilitates the reader's exploration of the relationship between Keynes's economics, his liberal internationalism and his myriad prescriptions for establishing and sustaining mutually beneficial economic and political interactions between states.

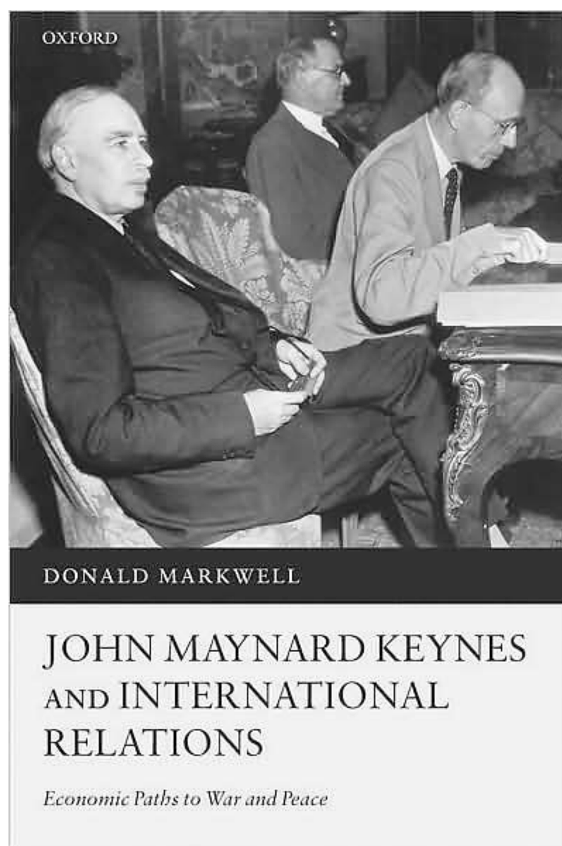
The range of Keynes's writings on international affairs is quite remarkable, but it is also deeply entwined with his economic theorising and his polemical writing about economic policy. Markwell's book, subtitled *Economic Paths to War and Peace*, takes the reader from Keynes's early and – in Markwell's view – largely uncritical acceptance of the classical liberal faith in free trade as the universal antidote to war, to his deeply disillusioning role as a British government adviser at the Paris Peace Conference at the end of the First World War. It was an experience that gave rise to his fierce and very public denunciation of international statesmen and the conference's main product, the Treaty of Versailles. Readers should be aware that while Markwell does not skimp on the evolution of Keynes's ideas about war and peace or his changing attitudes to international relations before 1920, he devotes most attention to later times, when Keynes's liberal internationalism – and what Markwell calls his 'liberal institutionalism' – became far more nuanced and pragmatic.

Readers of this book will find themselves on a political as well as an intellectual journey; it is a journey that finally delivers them – along with Keynes – to a time when Keynes himself played the leading British role in defending British interests, obtaining financial aid from the US for post-war reconstruction and shaping the international financial system.

The move from outsider to insider had happened in a little over twenty years. It also seemed to result directly from Keynes's criticisms of conventional economic theory, and of the foreign and economic policy nostrums supported by the British establishment, as well as his brilliant and sustained advocacy of alternatives.

Keynes's activities as Britain's principal international Treasury negotiator after 1940 took him to Washington (in 1943), Atlantic City and Bretton Woods (in 1944), Washington again (in 1945) and Savannah (in 1946). Keynes had been transformed from an outspoken critic of his own government (as well as the international economic and political system) – someone who felt impelled to leave the government service (in 1919) – to the chief negotiator of the British national interest and principal exponent of his own brand of internationalism at the international top table.

The move from outsider to insider had happened in a little over twenty years. It also seemed to result directly from Keynes's criticisms of conventional economic theory, and of the foreign and economic policy nostrums supported by the British establishment, as well as his brilliant and sustained advocacy of alternatives. The latter placed greater emphasis on institution-building, international cooperation and rehabilitating and restoring (rather than punishing) defeated military enemies than almost any of his peers and academic rivals. It is hard to envisage any similarly weighty academic critic of British public and foreign policy being entrusted with such sweeping authority to negotiate on behalf of their country. Felix Frankfurther (a Supreme Court justice who had been present with Keynes at the Paris Conference) wrote to him in 1945 about a transformation in attitudes that appeared to reflect and embody Keynes's ideas and arguments (made by him behind the scenes in Paris and later in public), ideas that favoured 'a more decent unfolding of world affairs'. This general change in beliefs had produced, Frankfurter told Keynes: 'a … permeating and informed realisation … of the extraordinary difficulties of peacefully evolving



a decent world order'. The change in attitudes toward relations between states had, they both believed, been matched by the readiness of the victors in a world war to be more generous and more realistic about what was needed to establish and then maintain the peace than national leaders had ever been before.

All this may well make it appear, as Markwell's objective seems to be, that Keynes was at his core an idealist-liberal internationalist, even if his method of pursuing international peace and political harmony between states had became increasingly sophisticated – i.e. via economic and political means, rather than undirected market means. However, I have to agree with another reviewer of Markwell's study of Keynes's approach to international relations, Jonathan Kirshner, who believes that Markwell overplays Keynes's liberal idealism. He points out that Keynes sought changes in public attitudes and government policies to improve the prospects of peace and international cooperation but that he also 'acknowledged the realities of power'. A key feature of Keynes's diatribe against the Versailles treaty (in *Economic Consequences of the Peace*), and the political manoeuvring that he believed made further conflict virtually inescapable, was his scathing criticism of Woodrow Wilson's idealism: Wilson was condemned, in *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, as the President who 'could preach a sermon' but lacked a plan to help rebuild Europe. The American President was, in Keynes's eyes, so extraordinarily detached from the requirements of effective international negotiations that he preferred to 'do nothing that was not just and right'. Kirshner finds in Markwell's scholarly exposition of Keynes's changing ideas about economics and international relations 'glimpses of a fascinating, if not idealistic or even coherent, Keynesian perspective on international relations'. I share Kirshner's assessment to some degree, even if I employ somewhat different language in doing so. Keynes had a strong sense of direction concerning both himself and liberal societies, but he was constantly alert to the difficulties of formulating a truly winning case and creating a feasible plan of action that valued liberty whilst recognising the vulnerabilities of markets and the dangers that brigand states represented to international peace, as well as to the conditions of their own population.

Keynes was far too concerned with weighing up different policy goals, and the relative likelihood of success in pursuing different strategies to achieve worthwhile ends, to be either a dogmatist or an idealist in the philosophical sense. Two hallmarks of Keynes's thought, well represented in Markwell's study, were his willingness to change his mind and his policy prescriptions when evidence could not be reconciled with theory, and his prioritising of British national interests even when that entailed some dilution of liberal ideals. For Keynes, the announcement of long-term goals – economic and political – was one thing, whilst the formulation and implementation of detailed policy was quite another. Keynes famously changed his views on free trade between the wars and proved hard to label when it came to reporting his attitudes to war. As his biographer Skidelsky recounts, Keynes believed that political judgements about war and peace should not confuse personal beliefs about the morality and horror of war (however strongly held) with the business of making policy for the whole of the nation.

It is probably best to describe Keynes as a proponent of optimistic but uncompromisingly pragmatic liberalism and internationalism. His militant optimism and grand vision for the future – of human societies – is most clearly articulated in an essay that was intended to be widely read: *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren* (initially published in 1928, then reworked and published in two parts in *Nation* and *Athenaeum* in October 1930). When times seemed at their hardest and economic and international developments at their most discouraging, Keynes was determined to explain why he believed most people would, in the future, be able to live better and more fulfilling lives.

He did not set out, in *Economic Possibilities*, to minimise what needed to be done to create a more prosperous world for our grandchildren, but argued that four factors within our control would shape the lives of our descendants: our individual ability to control population, the strength of our determination to avoid war, our capacity to make intelligent use of

scientific knowledge, and the extraordinary productive power that capitalism unleashed. A truly liberal society needed to invest, Keynes believed, much more heavily in the first three and to worry a good deal less about the final member of this quartet. We should not, Keynes wrote: 'overestimate the importance of the economic problem, or sacrifice to its supposed necessities other matters of greater and more permanent significance'. The liberal challenge of our own times is even more clearly established than it was for Keynes. Finding an appropriate place for economic growth, controlling our numbers, keeping the peace and making more intelligent use of the power we have in order to lead fulfilling lives, without at the same time destroying the planet or sinking into avoidable military conflict with each other, is the trial that we face today.

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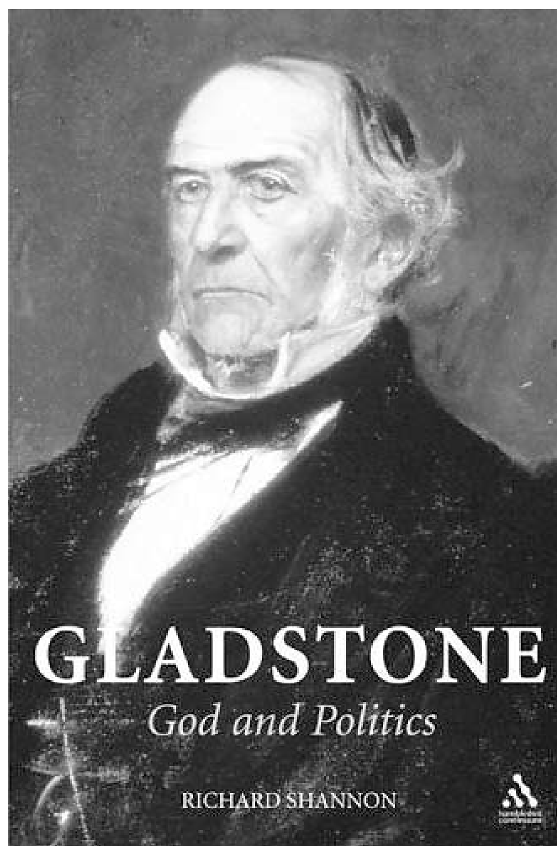
So many Gladstones

Richard Shannon: *Gladstone: God and Politics* (Hambledon Continuum, London 2007)

Reviewed by **Michael Ledger-Lomas**

Some years ago, Travis Crosby introduced readers to *The Two Mr Gladstones*. Historians of Victorian Liberalism might now be forgiven for wishing there were so few to contend with. The first generations of Gladstone's interpreters only had to map the stern young Tory churchman on to the crusader for disestablishment and home rule, who backed the masses against the classes. Since then, the publication of his diaries and the ongoing exploration of his papers has generated ever more Gladstones to be squeezed into the grand old man's silhouette: the lay theologian interested in Dante and Christian art who also scribbled anti-papal polemics; the icon of popular radicalism who was also a patriarchal Welsh squire and an 'out and out inequalitarian'; the erudite scholar of Homer; the dabbler in spiritualism and the self-scourging rescuer of prostitutes; even the progenitor of Blairite foreign policy. In years to come, historians of religion, culture and gender will turn up even more Gladstones as they continue to explore his vast hinterland, which survives in the physical form of his library at St Deiniol's, Hawarden. Yet Gladstone's eminence as a Liberal politician remains his major title to our attention: home rule mattered more than Homerology; the Liberal Party more than the ladies of the town. Both scholars and the general reader will then continue to need lives of Gladstone that reintegrate the burgeoning research into his inner life with his outer activity. It is this need that Richard Shannon's massively researched and pithily written *Gladstone: God and Politics* aims to satisfy.

Shannon argues that the reluctance of previous biographers to 'do God' has prevented them from offering a rounded or fully accurate picture of Gladstone the politician. H.C.G. Matthew's two-volume life of Gladstone (1986, 1995) did much to reverse the neglect of Gladstone's Christian faith that had prevailed ever since his first biographer, John Morley, turned a positivist's blind eye to it. Yet in Matthew's interpretation, Gladstone's migration from the Conservative to the Liberal Party was synonymous with the diminishing salience of his Anglican agenda. Scorned by Sir Robert Peel, ridiculed in print by Macaulay, and unable to accommodate the grievances of Ireland or political dissent, the young Gladstone's Coleridgean doctrine that the state should work exclusively for the Church of England quickly became a political liability. He had therefore moved quickly towards considering the state's priority as the promotion of fiscal justice between classes – Peel's lesson – and justice between nations. Gladstone's crusading governments worked on the assumption that the people had a fiscal contract with the state and duties towards Ireland and the wider world,



not an exclusive covenant with God. Without disputing the intensity of his religion or denying the tensions between him the Liberal Party, this account established Gladstone as the progressive heavyweight in opposition to Benjamin Disraeli's court jester, and was widely popularised in Roy Jenkins's biography (1995).

Shannon mounts a comprehensive assault on this interpretation. While claiming that historians can identify consistent themes in Gladstone's career, he denies that his understanding of politics underwent even mild secularisation. Gladstone's mind ran on a noxious cocktail of evangelical conscientiousness, Aristotelian logic-chopping and high-church ecclesiology until the end; he even privately wished that his death might occur in the middle of a church service. Shannon identifies some startlingly direct connections between Gladstone's beliefs and his political conduct, invoking, for instance, the Tractarian doctrine of 'reserve' to explain why Gladstone stubbornly withheld his intentions on home rule from his party and stressing that he privately credited successful speeches to the direct intervention of the Almighty.

Without disputing the formative influence of Gladstone's membership of Peel's second administration, Shannon denies that it was a school of moderation. If anything, it strengthened his authoritarianism, as he absorbed Peel's conviction that it was legitimate to defy party feeling in wielding the power of the state. Gladstone was no more interested in listening to the people than Peel had been. Unlike Peel, his rhetoric dwelt lovingly on the moral purity of working men and came to welcome their enfranchisement, but it denied them intelligent agency. It was generally reserved for Gladstone, with his providential gift for scenting the right 'juncture', to determine public opinion. Where the people did have a role it was as a picturesque backdrop to his prophetic oratory, or as an abstraction that could be used to shake Disraeli's government and menace Salisbury's House of Lords.

Shannon is fond of Palmerston's prediction that Gladstone would destroy the Liberal Party and die in a madhouse: his trust in a 'great and high election of God' made him a commanding but ultimately disastrous Liberal leader.

Shannon is fond of Palmerston's prediction that Gladstone would destroy the Liberal Party and die in a madhouse: his trust in a 'great and high election of God' made him a commanding but ultimately disastrous Liberal leader. This was particularly true when it came to Ireland. Gladstone's obsession with providential mission led him to ignore the promising reforms proposed by other liberals and in due course to introduce a home rule measure that was eccentric in its reading of Irish history, vague in its details and absurdly sanguine in gauging the feelings of Ulster. In strong-arming the party into persisting with this hopeless measure, the elderly Gladstone condemned the late nineteenth century Liberal Party to impotence. At one point, Shannon suggests that General Gordon's mulish fanaticism made him the only man able to mirror and outface Gladstone's wilfulness. If the parallel is admitted, then home rule was the murderer of Gordon's Khartoum, a disaster resulting from a holy scorn for sound advice.

The book's dense narrative of Westminster politicking etches the negative lines of the portrait even deeper, as it necessarily shifts attention away from Gladstone's God to the intricate scheming required to implement His will. Hostile in its framework, Shannon's biography is also disapproving in detail. Briskly dismissive of Gladstone's scholarly productions, Shannon also has a sharp eye for his foibles: his weakness for foreign holidays paid for by wealthy businessmen and his inability to understand or respect minds, notably Disraeli's and the Queen's, which worked differently than his own.

The suggestion that Gladstone's peculiar faith made 'Gladstonian liberalism' an unstable, even an oxymoronic concoction is hardly novel. Shannon made it himself in a two-volume biography of Gladstone (1982, 1999), of which *God and Politics* represents a sort of executive summary. Jonathan Parry has compellingly argued a similar case, but differs from Shannon in his empathy for the Protestant latitudinarianism that actuated many of Gladstone's rivals for the control of the Liberal Party. God also 'spoke' to Lord John Russell and even to Lord Palmerston, although admittedly in a different accent. Moreover, Shannon's cursory and overly psychologised treatment of Gladstone's theology makes it an overly reductive key to his politics: little more at times than the belief that the ace that was invariably up his sleeve had been put there by the Almighty. David Bebbington has shown that it is possible to give a more nuanced account of the religious 'mind of Gladstone'. This emphasises change rather than consistency in his religious views and specifically his embrace from mid-century of a mellower, incarnational Christianity and of the humanism inculcated by his studies of Homer, which were not as off the wall as Shannon implies. Many Liberal electors shared these values, if not always the faith itself: the freedom of individuals and nations from unjust restraint and iniquitous taxation, tempered by reverence for social and intellectual superiors, and a love of common humanity. They were not just browbeaten into stage-managed acquiescence by their 'Caesarist plebiscitarian' leaders. Indeed, if we follow Eugenio Biagini and Peter Ghosh's recent arguments, Gladstone was less of the imperious Peelite and much more of the sincere party man, anxious

both to naturalise himself in Whig liberal tradition and to meet the desire of popular liberals for peace, economy and Cobdenite free trade.

The problem, then, with this kind of narrative biography is that the very sharpness of its focus on a Victorian statesman's quirks causes the environments that sustained him to fade from view, making it harder to explain the political achievement that drew our attention in the first place. The shortcomings of that approach are particularly evident when it comes to Ireland. Even if Gladstone's embrace of home rule represented a last fling of religiose selfishness, popular British Liberalism, as Eugenio Biagini has powerfully argued, was set to become increasingly preoccupied with the Irish problem anyway. If Gladstone's proposed solution split the party, this reflected not just his devious tactics, but the profoundly conflicted attitudes of British and particularly English Liberals towards Ireland: itching on the one hand to meet religious grievances and extend constitutional liberties, they worried on the other about maintaining the rule of law, the integrity of the Empire and the influence of Protestantism.

Richard Shannon has, then, not so much put a stop to the proliferation of Gladstones as added yet another to the list, with which historians of Liberalism will want to take issue. It is only a pity that the book's hefty price tag is likely to deter the general reader.

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Burke reflected

Peter J. Stanlis (ed.): *Edmund Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches* (Transaction Publishers, 2007).
Reviewed by **Sylvana Tomaselli**

It is a testimony to Edmund Burke's enduring popularity as a political writer that *Edmund Burke: Selected Writings and Speeches* is the fourth edition of this collection of speeches and letters, first published in 1963. Furthermore, Peter J. Stanlis's is the only available volume of its kind. 1984 saw the publication of Harvey C. Mansfield Jr.'s *Selected Letters of Edmund Burke*, followed in 1993 by Ian Harris's edition of Burke's *Pre-Revolutionary Writings*, while Yale University Press published David Bromwich's *Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters, Edmund Burke* in 2000, which is closest in aim and content to Stanlis's volume. All are indebted to Thomas Copeland's *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, 10 vols. (Chicago, 1958–78) and Paul Langford's *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford, 1981–).

Both Stanlis's and Bromwich's selections seek to make more easily accessible Burke's writings and utterances other than the work with which he is most readily, and, regrettably, often almost solely, identified, namely his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Bromwich's choice of texts was partly determined by a desire not to abridge, and all but one, the four-day 'Speech in Opening the Impeachment of Warren Hastings' (15–18 February 1788), are presented in their entirety. This compilation does not, therefore, include early works, such as *A Vindication of Natural Society* (1756), *Tract on the Popery Laws* (1765), and *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770). Instead, it begins with his first speech for the contested seat of Bristol in 1774, and is the shorter (by nearly 200 pages) and the more compact of the two selections, though it is nonetheless representative of much of Burke's political thought. Both editions provide a general introduction as well as more specific preambles to each of Burke's pieces. Both editors appear to greatly admire their subject, not least for his moral fortitude.

The Burke that emerges from Bromwich's collection is the gifted parliamentarian, principled, tenacious, and an unembarrassed apologist of high politics in a lost world, one that was suspicious of the ambitious power of a commercial elite, and which perceived a marked distinction between political and mercantile interest. As Bromwich sees it, the real subject of Burke's writings on France is the ruination of deliberative representation by plebiscitary politics and slavish reliance on the popular will, while the real subject of his writings on India is the ruination of constitutional government by the usurping power of a commercial empire.

The Burke that emerges from Stanlis's collection is the impressively erudite man of letters, the talented stylist steeped in the classics, deeply knowledgeable about the natural law tradition and continental legal philosophy, as well as English legal history. His legal training, whilst abandoned, shaped his understanding of the nature

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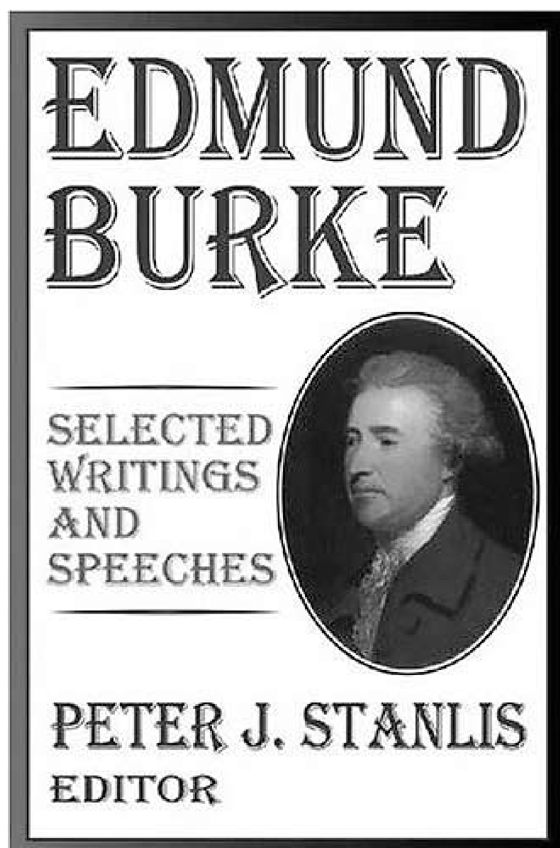


of society and government. Stanlis's Burke is the author of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) (although regrettably no part of that work is reproduced in this selection; it is in Harris's), the anonymous general editor of the very successful *Annual Register* to which he contributed historical articles as well as book reviews, and the experienced and long-serving politician. Above all, this is a Burke who consistently applied and developed ideas and principles he acquired at the beginning of his intellectual life, and remained true to himself.

Stanlis's anthology affirms that the common perception of Burke has changed dramatically since 1948. 'Far from being an empiricist, utilitarian, and pragmatist, and therefore an enemy of Natural Law', he argues, '[Burke] was in principle and practice one of the most eloquent and profound defenders of Natural Law morality and politics in Western Civilisation'. Writing in 1963, Stanlis thought this the accepted interpretation of the political philosopher. It may well have been, but it is no longer. This is not because Stanlis's view is now rejected out of hand, nor because commentators have returned unreflectively to the pre-war understandings of Burke, but because however much one recognises the continuity in his thought, there is no denying that events in France made him particularly aware of what could be done, or one might say, undone, in the name of nature, natural law, and natural rights. Burke was too artful an orator not to be profoundly aware of the power of moral and political languages and the terrifyingly destructive uses to which the language of nature was being put in France. This was particularly disquieting for England, a country that had slowly but surely perfected a constitution and a system of law that were equal to none.

Burke's world was complicated and difficult to rationalise, even for Burke himself. The language of natural law was insufficient for the task. Persuading as well as understanding, which was what Burke spent his entire life trying to do, required more than one idiom. Following J. G. A. Pocock's lead in 'Burke and the Ancient Constitution: A Problem in the History of Ideas' in his *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (1971), the received view of Burke now is that he brought together a number of political discourses and that amongst those common law was one of the more significant ones. The political labelling that was once *de rigueur* in studies of Burke is now also a defunct endeavour. Today's Burke is a sophisticated and subtle thinker who tackled highly complex issues of continued relevance. He can be seen as such, for instance, in Richard Bourke's 'Edmund Burke and the Politics of Conquest' (*Modern Intellectual History* 4, 3 (2007)), which examines how Burke's intervention in the debate on the Quebec Bill in 1774 led him to develop his thought on conquest, and in particular, how he dealt with the difficulties raised by the desire to respect the native culture and religion of a conquered people, while giving them the benefits of what Burke thought a superior legal system.

The scholarly world has changed since the 1960s, and in this case for the better, but if Stanlis's introduction is of its time, Burke's works remain timeless for anyone interested in the nature of politics.

Sylvana Tomaselli is a Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, who works principally on eighteenth-century British and French political thought.

Email mailing list

We have recently changed the mailing system through which we send out email notices of History Group meetings, latest publications, special book offers for *Journal* members, etc.

If you have already signed up to the mailing list, you should be automatically transferred to the new system. However, we have been experiencing problems recently, and it is possible that you may not be.

If you received an email from us in late October, advertising our meeting on the People's Budget in January (see back page), then you are on the list, and no further action is needed.

If you did not, then you are not on the list. To join the list, send a blank email to **liberalhistory-subscribe@lists.libdems.org.uk**. You will be asked to confirm your email address, to avoid spam. Our apologies for any inconvenience.

Politics as self-sacrifice

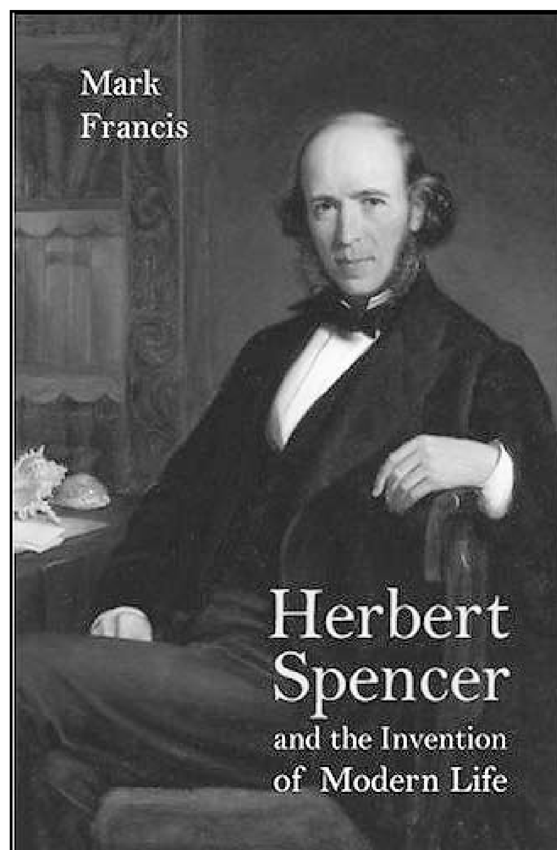
Mark Francis: *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (Acumen, 2007)

Reviewed by **Melissa Lane**

This is a monumental, painstakingly scrupulous, and innovative study, based on a complete grasp of Spencer's corpus and a thorough use of archives relating to his circle and period. Francis succeeds in recovering the precise lineaments of Spencer's complex project, and in rebutting the unconscionable oversimplifications which have dogged, and to a large extent substituted for, his scholarly reception: in particular, in Spencer's relation to 'social Darwinism', his classification as a sort of Comtean positivist, and his purported status as an arch-individualist of a laissez-faire type in politics. He is also alert to Spencer's contributions to his own mis-reception and instructive on aspects of his personal life, including his relationship with George Eliot. The book's larger purposes – portraying Spencer as the inventor of modern life and tracing the possible contributions that a proper understanding of Spencer's politics could offer to political life today – are more sketchily realised, though thought-provoking.

At the heart of the book's argument is a novel reading of Spencer's *Autobiography* as the key to his mature ethical and emotional outlook. Spencer came to see the emotional tumult and lashings of duty imposed on him by his particular breed of moderate dissenter family as psychologically devastating (Francis is particularly good at distinguishing the old dissenters from those, like Spencer's partly Methodist family, who bordered on and sometimes married into Anglican circles and who could, without conscientious scruple, choose to attend Oxford or Cambridge, though Spencer proudly did not). Although he believed that love and play were the keys to human happiness, he nonetheless was incapable of returning George Eliot's love in an emotionally or physically satisfying way for either of them, and his ponderous attempts at play and exercising his 'philoprogenitive' instincts on friends' children were self-conscious efforts to construct a balanced life around his emotionally crippled core. More positively, he drew from his unhappy upbringing the moral that anger was a barbaric emotion to be expelled from civilised life. Francis argues that Spencer's ethics and politics were a form of self-sacrifice, in which Spencer advocated the sort of emotionally harmonious, calm and playful future which he had not been able to achieve for himself, and criticised militarism and aggression as forces that, while previously necessary to progress, had no place in that future state. To mark how far this is from the conventional image of Spencer, Francis recounts that his single public address on his 1882 tour of the United States, far from endorsing the law of the market jungle, admonished his audience of businessmen and public figures to spend more time at play (pp.103–05).

By 'Spencer's ethics and politics' in the preceding paragraph I am implying his *Principles of Psychology* and *Principles of Sociology*, the latter including among its parts *Political Institutions*, which Spencer regarded as his most important book and which inter alia expressed his vehement anti-militarism. Francis views the works up to and including *Social Statics* (1851) as radical juvenilia in which Spencer flirted with popular suffrage and democracy before coming to view democracy as an atavistic expression of will-theory, in which the popular will replaced monarchical despotism, and which was unsuited to the complex conditions of modern life. A fear that such democracy was on the verge of triumphing in the early 1880s led to *The Man 'versus' the State* (1884), the crudeness and extremism of which Francis views as separated by a 'rift' (p.323) from his other, and mature, political writings. (Francis notes without really explaining the fact that 'paradoxically … he was an advocate of democracy in his psychology' (p.339), in which as, the book shows, Spencer rejected the crude domination of reason or will in favour of a sort of consensus model acknowledging the reality of the various passions and emotions.) In focusing on Spencer's ethics and politics, I cannot do justice to Francis' supple and revisionist treatment



A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

FIGHTING LABOUR:
THE STRUGGLE FOR RADICAL SUPREMACY IN SCOTLAND 1885–1929

The Liberal Democrat History Group is holding its first meeting in Scotland, part of the fringe at the Scottish Liberal Democrats' spring conference. The meeting will look back at the Liberal Party's contribution to radical, progressive politics in Scotland and its struggle with Labour in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, culminating in the years following Asquith's by-election win in Paisley in 1920.

Speakers: **Professor Richard Finlay** (Strathclyde University); **Dr Catriona MacDonald** (Glasgow Caledonian University, author of *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland; Paisley politics, 1885–1924*); **Jim Wallace** (Baron Wallace of Tankerness, former Deputy First Minister of Scotland). Chair: **Robert Brown MSP**.

6.45pm, Friday 13 March 2009
Royal George Hotel, Tay Street, Perth

of Spencer's biology, in which, while acknowledging that Spencer coined the term 'survival of the fittest', he stresses Spencer's interest in the adult organism and its adaptive rapport with its environment rather than in natural selection, and his view of human intelligence as enabling a break-out of previous conditions of evolution.

Does Francis justify his portrayal of Spencer as the inventor of modern life, even while placing him firmly in the now neglected debates and concerns of the mid-, rather than late, Victorian period? This claim rests variously on his rejection of Christianity (although his advocacy of the 'Unknown' played, as Francis deftly shows, a key role in easing mid-Victorian angst), his resolutely scientific and anti-classical outlook (which attempted to free philosophy and social science from the inherited prejudices of past metaphysicians, whilst basing them on a zealous and indefatigable assemblage of empirical knowledge – Spencer's rebuttal of Paley's natural theological paean to the oyster by dryly ranking its sensations below those of the cuttlefish (p. 290), is priceless) and his valuing of peace and altruism rather than militarism and competition as part of the evolution of civilisation. These contentions mix ways in which Spencer was ahead of his time but far from influential (anti-militarism) with ways in which he is portrayed as an inaugurator of new currents of thought, though even then his repudiation by the Edwardians make it difficult to see him as a causal fashioner of modernity rather than, in some respects, as a prophet of an idealised vision of the latter. In ethics and politics, Francis contends that Spencer's twin legacies should be the value he attributed to human emotions and his desire to see suffering diminished (although, as Francis demonstrates throughout the book, this did not prevent him from a lifelong hostility to what he viewed as a hyper-individualist and unscientific Benthamite utilitarianism), coupled with his advocacy of a liberalism unencompassed by democratic politics that acknowledges 'the primacy of communal decision-making' (p.311) and protects the notion of 'private' life which has a non-political value of its own as a more highly evolved site of ethics. Yet just what form 'the primacy of communal decision-making' would take – and how Spencer's rejection of force and state power could be reconciled with his demand for governmental powers to administer social complexity and institute justice – remains unclear in both this biography and in his thought. The book is also rather better at summing up the results of Spencer's thinking (sometimes taking the reader's knowledge of its basic content too much for granted in the quest for interpretation) than at illustrating his thought process – more could be said about what Spencer read and how he wrote, for example. This is nonetheless a landmark work of intellectual biography

Melissa Lane teaches the history of political thought and political philosophy in the History Faculty at Cambridge University, where she is a Fellow of King's College.

A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

'TAXES THAT WILL BRING FORTH FRUIT' THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET OF 1909

2009 sees the centenary of the 'People's Budget', introduced by Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George. The Budget featured increases in income tax and excise duties, a new supertax for those with incomes above £5,000 a year, new taxes on cars and petrol and crucially on land. It was a truly radical budget: for the first time the attempt was made to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor.

The principal repercussion of the budget was the constitutional stand-off between the government and the House of Lords. Finally, after the two general elections of 1910, the Lords agreed to the Parliament Act of 1911, confirming the primacy of the elected over the hereditary chamber.

A hundred years on, this meeting will examine the political context in which the budget was introduced and evaluate its importance both to Liberalism a century ago and its resonance today.

Speakers: **Lord Kenneth O. Morgan** (biographer of Lloyd George); **Dr Vince Cable MP** (Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats and Shadow Chancellor). Chair: **Lord William Wallace** (President of the Liberal Democrat History Group).

7.00pm, Monday 12 January 2009 (following the History Group AGM at 6.30pm)
Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS IN EUROPE 21 YEARS OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

The Liberal Party and the SDP were the most pro-European of the British political parties. So how has their successor party fared in European politics since merger in 1988? How has the party adapted to the wide range of liberal thought represented by its sister parties in ELDR and ALDE?

Speakers: **Graham Watson MEP** (Leader of ALDE) will look at the record of the Lib Dem group in the European Parliament; **Florus Wijsenbeek** (former Dutch Liberal MEP and the first secretary-general of ELDR) will examine where the party fits on the European liberal spectrum, and whether there have been changes in ideological or political position by the Lib Dems over the past twenty years.

8.00pm, Friday 6 March 2009
Queen's Suite 2, Harrogate International Centre, Harrogate