For the study of Liberal, SDP and Liberal Democrat history

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Journal of Liberal HISTORY

2009: Liberals remember

Liberal Democrat History Group

ON LIBERTY

A celebration and exploration of aspects of the life, career and thought of John Stuart Mill – Saturday 14 November 2009, LSE, London

In 1859, the philosopher and leading liberal theorist of Victorian Britain, John Stuart Mill, published his most important and enduring work, *On Liberty*. In this essay Mill set out the principle, still acknowledged as universal and valid today, that only the threat of harm to others could justify interfering with anyone's liberty of action. *On Liberty* has become the most revered of liberal texts.

On 14 November 2009, the Liberal Democrat History Group, the London School of Economics and the British Liberal Political Studies Group are holding a one-day symposium to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On Liberty* and to publicise the archive of papers left by Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor – who, according to Mill, was as much responsible for *On Liberty* as he was himself.

The symposium will be held from 9.30am to 5pm on Saturday 14 November, at the London School of Economics in Room 1.04, New Academic Building, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2. Speakers include:

- **David Howarth**, Liberal Democrat MP for Cambridge: *The importance of J S Mill and* On Liberty *to British thought and politics today*
- **Dr Eugenio Biagini**, Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge: *J S Mill and the Victorian Liberal Party*
- **Dr Annabelle Lever**, Institute of Science Ethics & Innovation, Manchester Law School: *Mill and the secret ballot*
- **Dr Georgios Varouxakis**, Queen Mary, University of London: *Mill's vision of international relations*
- **Sue Donnelly**, Archivist at the LSE Library: *The Mill-Taylor archives at the LSE* (with optional visit to see papers in the archive over the lunch break)
- **Dr Michael Levin**, Emeritus Reader in Politics, Goldsmiths' College, University of London: *Mill and the threat to civilisation*
- **Dr Alan Butt Philip**, University of Bath and J S Mill Institute: *Mill as a politician*

The cost of the conference will be £10, to include refreshments at mid-morning and mid-afternoon
To register please contact:
Archives Division, London School of Economics
10 Portugal Street
London WC2A 2HD
Tel: 020 7955 7221
Email: document@lse.ac.uk

British Liberal Political Studies Group

The BLPSG, which is co-hosting the symposium, is organising extra events on Friday 13, Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 November, looking back at the general election of 1910 and forward to the election of 2010.

- Friday 13 November: a tour of the Greater London Assembly, hosted by the Liberal Democrat GLA group.
- Saturday 14 November: evening dinner at which Lord Wallace will be the speaker.
- Sunday 15 November: a series of panels examining, among other topics, electoral pacts, party leadership and the Liberal Democrats' role in Europe. Speakers include Dr Andrew Russell, Graham Watson MEP and Lord Chris Rennard.

For more details or to book a place on the BLPSG part of the conference, contact:
Dr Russell Deacon, rdeacon@uwic.ac.uk

Political Studies Association
60 years of political studies

Journal of Liberal History

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Cover illustration:
'Why do the Lords refuse to pass the Budget? They give plenty of excuses, but everybody knows that one of the real reasons is that the Budget taxes land values.' (Liberal leaflet, 1 December 1909)

Liberal Democrat History Group

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

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

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

THE 'PEOPLE'S BUD

RICH FARE.

GET' A CENTURY ON

Bruce Murray, author of *The People's Budget 1909/10: Lloyd George and Liberal Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), examines the genesis, content and impact of Lloyd George's famous Budget of one hundred years ago.

A century ago David Lloyd George's Budget for 1909/10, his celebrated 'People's Budget', dominated British politics, and has since left its mark on both the country's taxation and its constitution. It is a landmark in the making of British progressive, redistributive taxation, particularly the modern graduated income tax, as the main instrument of taxation.[1] But it is probably fair to say that the 'People's Budget' owes its lasting fame more to the fact that it was rejected in the first instance by the House of Lords, thereby precipitating the constitutional crisis that culminated in the Parliament Act of 1911, and with it the abolition of the absolute veto of the Lords. A century on, the issue of the place of the Lords in a democratic Britain is still very much part of the political agenda. Also alive, although not as intense as it once was, is the debate among historians as to whether the advent of the Labour Party, and with it the emergence of class-based politics, spelled the inevitable demise of the Liberal Party as a party of government in a democratic Britain.[2] The 'People's Budget' suggested otherwise.

RICH FARE
The Giant Lloyd-Gorgibuster:
'Fee, fi, fo, fat,
I smell the blood
of a plutocrat;
Be he alive or be
he dead;
I'll grind his
bones to make
my bread.'
(*Punch*, 28 April 1909)

The dilemma confronting the Edwardian Liberal Party was how to hold itself together as a party of both the middle and the working classes in an era when class issues were moving to the forefront of politics; the 'People's Budget' represented Liberal fiscal strategy to harness the two in a 'progressive' alliance to promote social reform.

The challenge

While the notion that Lloyd George deliberately devised the 'People's Budget' as a trap for the Lords carries little weight, what is nonetheless evident is that he had the Lords firmly in mind while drafting his Budget. In late 1908, when Lloyd George set about preparing his first Budget as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Liberal government of H. H. Asquith, the situation regarding the Lords was becoming dire. Despite the 'landslide' nature of the Liberal victory in the general election of January 1906, a month after Asquith's predecessor, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, had formed the first Liberal government in a decade, the Unionist-dominated House of Lords had employed their veto and revisionary powers to thwart important parts of the Liberal legislative programme, and apart from fulminate and threaten there was nothing the government had been able to do about it. The Lords used their powers selectively. Measures like the Trades Disputes Act of 1906, with a strong working-class identification, were allowed through, even though many peers thought that the non-contributory old age pensions enacted in 1908 were dangerously 'socialist', but measures like the 1906 Education Bill, which catered for more traditional Liberal minority 'sections', notably Nonconformist, were mangled by amendments or rejected outright. None was sufficiently popular to enable the government to appeal to the country against the Lords, with the result that the Liberals, still haunted by memories of how the Lords had humiliated the last Liberal government of 1892–95, were left feeling impotent. As Lloyd George warned his Cabinet colleagues when presenting his Budget proposals to them, the government were 'beginning to look silly'. They had menaced the peers often enough, but this had always been followed by 'inaction or rather by action on something else': 'Country sees

this – produces a sense of our ineptitude and impotence'.[3]

It was to regain the initiative against the Lords that Lloyd George looked to his Budget for 1909/10, not as a trap for their lordships but as a means around their veto. Theoretically, the Lords were not supposed to interfere with a finance bill and this, in the view of many Liberals, meant that the government could employ the next Budget to bypass the veto of the Lords on two issues of considerable concern to the party faithful: public house licensing and land valuation as a basis for site value rating. During 1908 the Lords rejected the government's Licensing Bill, designed to reduce the number of public house licences, and butchered the government's Land Valuation Bill for Scotland; the response of both the temperance reformers and the land value group in the Commons was to urge the government to resort to the next Budget as a way around the obstruction of the Lords. Heavy licence duties might be used to tax marginal public houses out of existence, and land value duties would require a land valuation, not only for Scotland but for the entire kingdom. The idea certainly appealed to Lloyd George – as he told his brother, he was developing some 'exquisite plans' for outwitting the peers[4] – and he proceeded to work into his projected Budget taxes that would help give effect to the objectives of the licensing and land valuation bills. 'Short of dissolution', he was to advise the Cabinet, 'we can only walk round the Lords by means of our financial power. Licensing – but this imperfect remedy – even if it be a remedy. Valuation we can completely circumnavigate them.'[5]

The need to respond to the Lords dictated the inclusion of the land value duties in the Budget. But Lloyd George also wanted them to assist with the wider purposes of the Budget, not so much for the money they would raise, as that would be minimal to begin with, but more to help give a democratic appeal to what was otherwise a potentially burdensome Budget.

The deficit Lloyd George had to provide for in the Budget, in the order of £16 million, was unprecedented in peacetime, and represented unparalleled spending by a Liberal government, more traditionally associated with a policy of retrenchment. The two major items of new expenditure were old age pensions at £8.75 million, considerably higher than Asquith's original estimate of £6 million, and nearly £3 million for new naval construction. In January/February 1909 Lloyd George was to wage a tenacious campaign against the Admiralty's demands for the laying down of eight new Dreadnoughts in 1909/10 to counter Germany's acceleration in shipbuilding; in the compromise finally reached, the Cabinet agreed to lay down four new Dreadnoughts in 1909, and another four no later than 1 April 1910 if the necessity for them was proven. The main costs for the latter would consequently be the liability of Lloyd George's second Budget, but the clear challenge before him was to provide the money for both guns and butter, for both the naval arms race and social reform.

On all sides it was recognised that the means by which Lloyd George raised his vast new sums would be crucial for determining the future of free trade finance.

On all sides it was recognised that the means by which Lloyd George raised his vast new sums would be crucial for determining the future of free trade finance. In the opinion of *The Economist,* the Unionist free trader, Lord Cromer, put the challenge before Lloyd George 'very fairly' when he said at Leeds on 18 January 1909 that: 'What Mr Lloyd George has to show is how he can meet the very heavy liabilities he has incurred and yet preserve intact the system of Free-trade.'[6]

For the Liberals, the issue of free trade was central. It was an article of faith, and the defence of it against Joseph Chamberlain's campaign for tariff reform, launched in 1903, had helped to unify an otherwise fractious party and to rally popular support to them in the 1906 general election. In so far as Chamberlain's programme for tariff reform was designed to establish a system of imperial preference, it required tariffs on foreign foodstuffs, and this was a weakness the Liberals thoroughly exploited by holding up the 'large loaf' of free trade as against the 'small loaf' offered by tariff reform. But since the onset of economic recession in 1907, and the consequent increase in unemployment, tariff reform gained in popularity, and the Liberals started losing a series of by-elections, sapping party morale. The protective aspect of tariffs promised to help save British jobs. Furthermore, the Unionists, initially badly divided by tariff reform, were beginning to unite behind it, with A. J. Balfour, the Unionist leader, announcing in November 1907 his 'conversion' to the idea of a general tariff. Key to his conversion was the argument that free trade finance was reaching the limits of its resources, and that any substantial increase in existing taxes, notably the already burdensome income tax, would prove politically unacceptable. Tariffs, by contrast, offered a 'broadening of the basis of taxation'. The increased revenue from tariffs would supposedly provide an equitable and efficient alternative to the 'predatory' new direct taxes advocated by the proponents of the New Liberalism of social reform and redistributive taxation. As Alan Sykes has demonstrated in his book, *Tariff Reform in British Politics 1903–1913*, as major increases in taxation became inevitable, so tariff reform was twisted away from its radical imperialist origins and into the defence of limited class interests.[7]

In Cromer's view Asquith's non-contributory scheme for old age pensions dealt a 'heavy blow' to 'the Free Trade cause', and according to the historian Bentley Gilbert, Lloyd George, who as Chancellor of the Exchequer had the responsibility for carrying the scheme through the Commons, came to agree with him: 'Well before pensions went into effect he came to feel that the tax-supported measure was a mistake: that it was carelessly drawn, that it would complicate Liberal financial problems to the point of imperilling free trade and that the pension provision was so narrow that its extension was inevitable.'[8] The word put out in mid-1908 was that Lloyd George was at his 'wits' end' over the finances for 1909/10.

At the same time as the Liberals were under pressure from the Tariff Reformers on the right, they sensed a challenge from the new Labour Party on the left. For the 1906 general election, a secret pact had ensured cooperation rather than competition between the two parties, with Labour given an 'open field' in thirty seats in England and Wales. In all, Labour won 29 seats, to 401 for the Liberals and 157 for the Unionists. In July 1907, the Liberals were startled by the loss of two seats to Labour in by-elections. On 4 July Labour won a four-cornered contest at Jarrow, and two weeks later Victor Grayson, an independent Socialist, won a sensational victory in a three-cornered contest for Colne Valley. These Labour advances at the Liberals' expense caused both resentment and alarm in Liberal circles, highlighting for many the need for positive action to safeguard the Liberal hold over the working-class vote against inroads from Labour as well as from the Tariff Reformers.

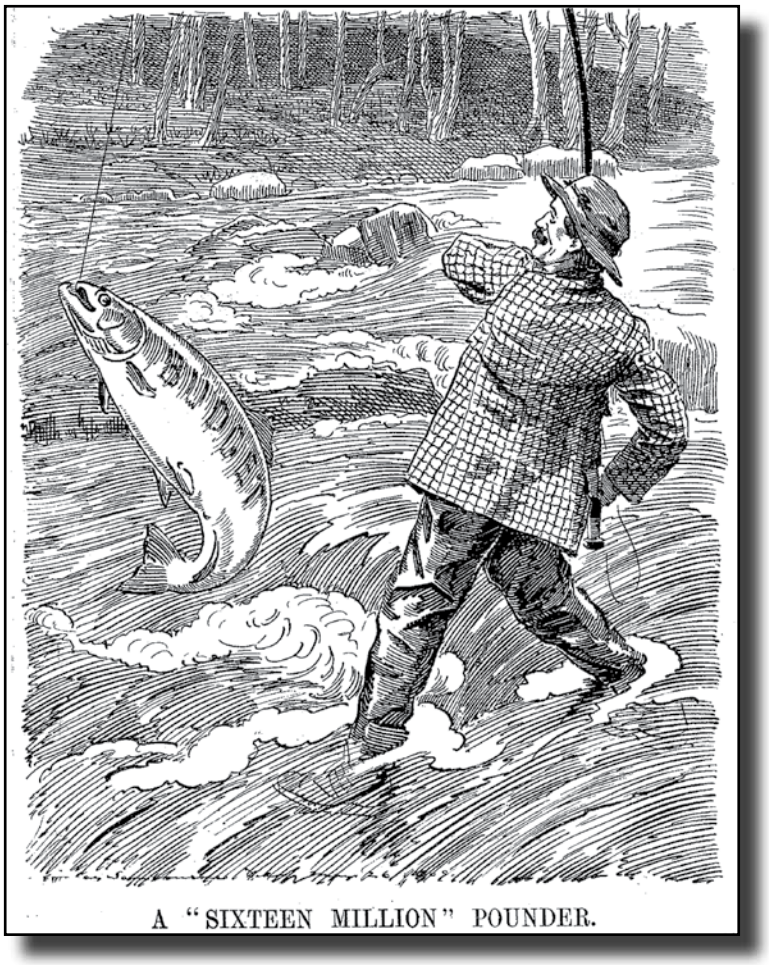
The challenges confronting Lloyd George, both political and financial, in his first Budget were certainly daunting, but for him challenge represented opportunity. Once he gathered his wits, he determined that his Budget, far from being a makeshift response to an immediate deficit, would prove once and for all the resources of free trade finance and give free trade a new popularity as against tariff reform. It would provide the fiscal underpinnings for the ongoing programme of social reform that he and Winston Churchill were preparing, and it would offer a way around the veto of the Lords on land valuation and, following the rejection of the Licensing Bill, on licensing as well. When the Lords threw out the Licensing Bill on 27 November, Lloyd George organised a 'thanksgiving service' in the Treasury and said he was 'looking forward to taxing the trade'.[9] As Charles Hobhouse, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, detected, Lloyd George became determined in the autumn of 1908 that his Budget should include a wide range of new taxes, even if not all of them were absolutely essential to meet his immediate deficit, so that he might cater for all foreseeable future liabilities on a free trade basis. 'Ll.G', Hobhouse remarked in his diary on 17 November, 'is now on a new tack, he encourages ministers to spend, so that he may have justification for the extra millions he proposes to ask for next year'.[10]

The Budget that Lloyd George had in mind by November would, in brief, be a 'People's Budget' in that it would provide the money for old age pensions and other social reforms, yet it would do so not by taxing the people's food, which he would leave to the Tariff Reformers, but rather by taxing the land of parasitic landlords and the incomes and inheritances of the super-rich. His Budget would be an effective rejoinder both to the Tariff Reformers, with their claims that free trade finance had exhausted its resources, and to the obstructionism of the Lords on the issues of land valuation and licensing. The returns he anticipated from his projected Budget were as much political as financial. Of one thing he was convinced: that 'the fate of the government depends on the Budget entirely'.[11]

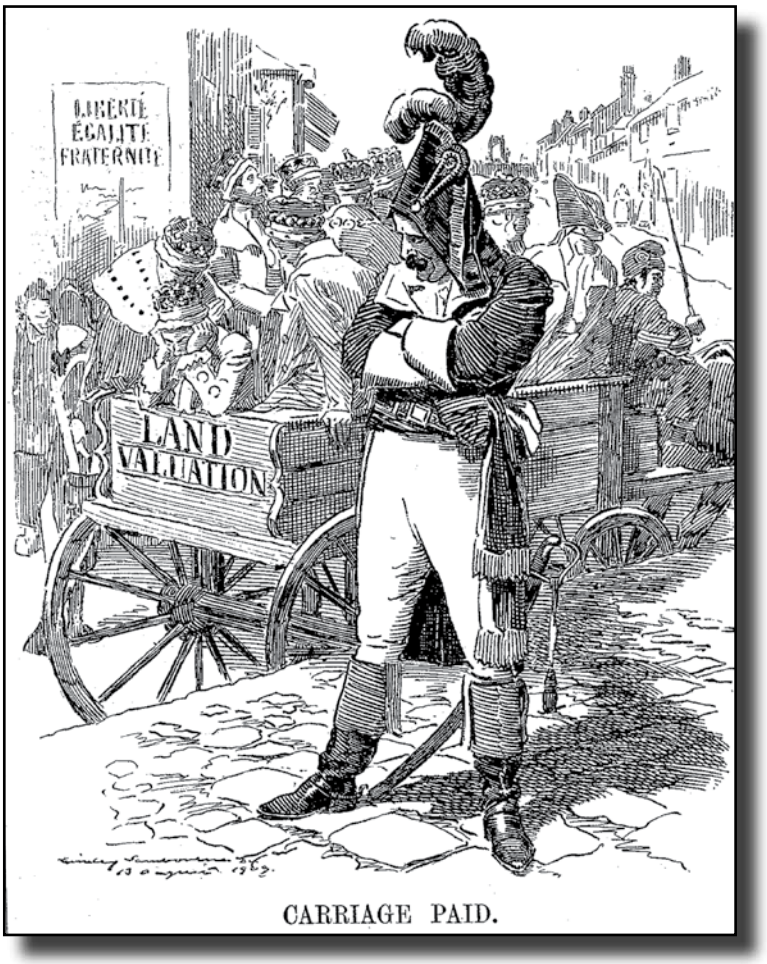
David Lloyd George as Chancellor

Preparation

In many respects, Lloyd George was a curious choice as Chancellor of the Exchequer. As he confessed to a banker friend, he needed to be given 'the a, b, c' of finance, his ministerial experience was limited to little over two years as President of the Board of Trade, and his temperament and work methods were alien to the traditions of the Treasury. His propensity to spend public money, his willingness to experiment, and his refusal to read papers, preferring instead to operate by interviews, certainly jarred with Sir George Murray, the Permanent Secretary and a traditional Gladstonian. In the event, Lloyd George largely ignored Murray, and worked instead with a younger generation of civil servants at the Treasury and Inland Revenue, notably John Bradbury, the principal clerk at the head of the crucial finance division



A 'SIXTEEN MILLION POUNDER'
Mr Lloyd-George: 'Of course, I shall land him all right. The only question is when?
The fish: 'Well, personally I'm game to play with you till well on into the autumn'.
(*Punch*, 2 June 1909)



CARRIAGE PAID
Citoyen George (to Condemned Aristocrats en route to Execution): 'Gentlemen, we wish to make every concession that may suit your convenience. There will, therefore, be no charge for the tumbril.'
(*Punch*, 18 August 1909)

of the Treasury, and Sir Robert Chalmers, the Chairman of the Board of Inland Revenue, who positively welcomed innovation.

Lloyd George owed his appointment as Chancellor largely to Asquith, who sought to ensure a political balance in his Cabinet between Liberal Imperialists such as himself and the Radicals. Lloyd George was also indebted to Asquith for having cleared the way for income tax reform during his tenure as Chancellor of the Exchequer, and support from the Prime Minister was crucial in securing approval for his Budget proposals from an otherwise sceptical Cabinet. On contentious issues, Lloyd George later told his son Richard, Asquith would lean back in his chair and say: 'Well, there seems to be substantial agreement with Mr. Chancellor's proposal. Next item …?'[12]

The commitment of Liberal finance under Asquith and Lloyd George was to raising new revenue primarily by direct taxes, sparking Lord Cromer's specific fear that it was 'almost certain that a very large number of shaky, even perhaps some rather strong Free Traders will practically combine with the Tariff Reformers rather than bear very heavy fresh burthens in the shape of direct taxation'.[13] In class terms, the problem was that of significantly raising direct taxation without at the same time alienating the bulk of the Liberal Party's middle-class support.

To this end Asquith had embarked on income tax reform during his tenure at the Exchequer. In his Budget for 1907/08 he introduced differentiation in the income tax on earned and unearned incomes by reducing the tax on earned incomes under £2,000 from the general rate of 1*s* down to 9*d* in the £, thereby giving relief to the large mass of income-tax payers as well as marking out particular categories of income for later increases in taxation. He had

also contemplated introducing a supertax. On these fronts the path forward had already been mapped out for Lloyd George, and Chalmers was well prepared with the main proposals that the Cabinet was ultimately to accept for the income tax and supertax. The general rate of income tax was to be increased to 1*s* 2*d* in the £, and a supertax of 6*d* in the £ imposed on incomes in excess of £5,000, to be charged on the amount by which such incomes exceeded £3,000. All persons with earned incomes of under £2,000, representing 750,000 out of roughly 1 million income-tax payers, were excluded from any increase in income tax, and at Lloyd George's own insistence child abatements were introduced for persons with incomes under £500.

In addition Lloyd George proposed a substantial increase in death duties in the higher brackets, a massive increase in the licence duties paid by the liquor trade, a rise in stamp duties, and the introduction of two land value taxes to be paid by the landowning classes – the one a tax on capital land value, and the other a duty on the increment value to be charged whenever land was sold or leased. In sum, Lloyd George planned to raise a little over £10 million by way of new direct taxes. Under the heading of indirect taxation, he confined his increases to 'luxury' items, tobacco and spirits, raising an additional £3,400,000.[14] The remainder of the deficit was to be made up by a diversion, which would become permanent, from the Sinking Fund.

In the Cabinet, Lloyd George's proposals were subjected to virtually line-by-line scrutiny. Between 15 March and Budget Day, 29 April, some fourteen Cabinet meetings were largely given over to a consideration of the Budget, and from all accounts a good many in the Cabinet thoroughly disliked what they saw. At least a third of the Cabinet objected to the fundamental design of the Budget, reckoning that Lloyd George was attacking too many major interests at once and fearing that the scale and nature of the proposed direct taxes would frighten off what Lord Morley described as 'the sober, sensible, middle class'. As a result, they would have preferred to see one or two of the direct taxes dropped, and to this end the education minister Walter Runciman, previously Financial Secretary to the Treasury, challenged Lloyd George's estimates, suggesting that the Chancellor had deliberately underestimated his returns from both old and new taxes in order to justify the full barrage of his proposed new taxes. In Runciman's calculation, as he wrote to Asquith on 7 April, the estimate for the new taxes alone was at least £2 million too low: 'That is in itself serious enough to justify our dropping one or part of the Direct taxes. I fancy that George anticipates pressure of this kind & will want to drop the new *Indirect* taxes, when he is run to earth.'[15] Asquith promptly asked Sir George Murray to inquire into the matter, and, ironically, Murray's dislike of the Budget's innovations came to Lloyd George's rescue. Murray advised that the revenue estimates were certainly on the safe side, but that he could hardly criticise the Chancellor for this as 'the whole thing is a leap in the dark, & we have absolutely no experience to guide us'. He also advised that Chalmers had assured him there had been no 'hanky panky' over the estimates for existing death duties.[16] It was to Chalmers, however, that Margot Asquith, the Prime Minister's wife, attributed the Budget's 'somewhat oriental method of asking for more than it intended to take'.[17]

In the final analysis, the Cabinet appreciated that they lacked any effective alternative; in the prevailing political circumstances, a tame Budget was simply out of the question.

In the reckoning of John Burns, the President of the Local Government Board, Lloyd George presented to the Cabinet 'the most kaleidoscopic Budget ever planned, and but for revision and pruning would have made us a laughing stock of Parliament'.[18] 'Revision and pruning' were the operative words, for the basic design of the Budget survived intact. Lloyd George's main loss was his tax on capital land value, but it was replaced by a tax on the capital value of undeveloped land and minerals, excluding purely agricultural land, and a reversion duty of 10 per cent on the value of any benefit accruing to a lessor by reason of the termination of a lease. His tax of 20 per cent on the future unearned increment in land values remained, ensuring the necessity for a valuation of all land. In the main, the changes made to Lloyd George's proposals in the Cabinet served to accentuate rather than to mitigate the progressive features of the Budget as a measure for raising revenue. This was particularly true of the income tax, where the relief Asquith had granted to earned incomes was extended by allowing persons with earned incomes not in excess of £3,000 to pay 9*d* on the first £2,000 and 1*s* thereafter, thereby excluding them from the increase in the general rate, at least in so far as their incomes were earned. This meant that the burden of the increase in the general rate was restricted to unearned income and to the 25,000 or so tax payers with incomes over £3,000.

For Lloyd George the passage of his Budget through a generally sceptical Cabinet represented a considerable political triumph. In the final analysis, the Cabinet appreciated that they lacked any effective alternative; in the prevailing political circumstances, a tame Budget was simply out of the question. One who thoroughly approved of the design of the Budget was Lord Carrington, the President of the Board of Agriculture. As he noted with satisfaction in his

diary, 'The chief burden is laid on the shoulders of people who have between 5 and 50 thousand a year but the working classes are only taxed on their luxuries drink, & tobacco: while the middle classes earning under £2,000 are not hit at all. Agricultural land escapes very easily and is hardly taxed at all.'[19] Meticulous care had been taken not to add to the tax burden of the mass of middle-class tax payers and voters, with those earning between £160, the starting point for income tax, and £500 positively benefiting from the child abatements.

The contest

Lloyd George introduced his historic Budget in the House of Commons on 29 April 1909, in a speech that went on for four and a half hours. By all accounts he spoke badly, stumbling over his sentences, but his message was clear. Far from being a mere 'temporary shift' to carry the country's finances over to the next year, his was a 'social reform' Budget that would provide the ongoing finance required for an advanced programme of change, and it also represented nothing less than the free trade solution to the 'financial emergency' brought on by the pressing demands of both defence and social reform. *The Times* of the next day complained that his Budget struck 'almost exclusively' at the wealthy and fairly well-to-do – hitting them through the income tax, the death duties, the stamp duties upon their investments, land and royalties, their brewing dividends, and, with the special petrol tax of 3*d* a gallon for road development, even their motor cars.

Among Liberal MPs the Budget speech generated a nervous excitement. Their general reaction was described by Herbert Samuel, the Home Undersecretary, as one of 'frightened satisfaction, the kind of feeling one has on being launched down an exhilarating, but steep and unknown toboggan run'. As he informed Herbert Gladstone, the Home Secretary, who had missed the day's proceedings: 'Some think we could never have anything better to fight the Lords on.'[20] Within the Liberal ranks, however, there was some hostility to the land taxes, with a 'cave' of about 30 MPs being formed to combat them. With the Unionists making a dead set against the land taxes in the Commons, Lloyd George came under intense pressure to abandon them, but he declined to contemplate retreat.

Among Liberal MPs the Budget speech generated a nervous excitement. Their general reaction was described by Herbert Samuel, the Home Undersecretary, as one of 'frightened satisfaction, the kind of feeling one has on being launched down an exhilarating, but steep and unknown toboggan run'.

From the outset, Unionists in the Commons reacted with hostility to the Budget, denouncing it as vindictive, inequitable, a socialist war against property, and unconstitutional in so far as it served as a vehicle to carry through Parliament a mass of controversial legislation which had nothing to do with meeting the deficit for the year. The Tariff Reformers instantly perceived the Budget to be a direct challenge to them, in so far as it was designed to destroy the revenue motive for tariffs, and they responded accordingly. As Austen Chamberlain, the leader of the Tariff Reformers since his father's stroke in 1906, put their position when the Finance Bill received its second reading in the Commons: 'We are told that it [the Budget] is the final triumph of Free Trade and the death blow to the policy of Fiscal Reform. Sir, in the spirit in which it is offered, I accept the challenge, and am ready to go to the country at any moment upon it.'[21]

The Unionist strategy in the Commons was to fight the Budget every inch of the way. As a consequence, it was not until 4 November that the Budget was finally approved by the Commons, its passage having occupied seventy parliamentary days, with frequent recourse to late-night and all-night sittings. By then the Unionist leaders had already decided that the Budget would be rejected in the Lords.

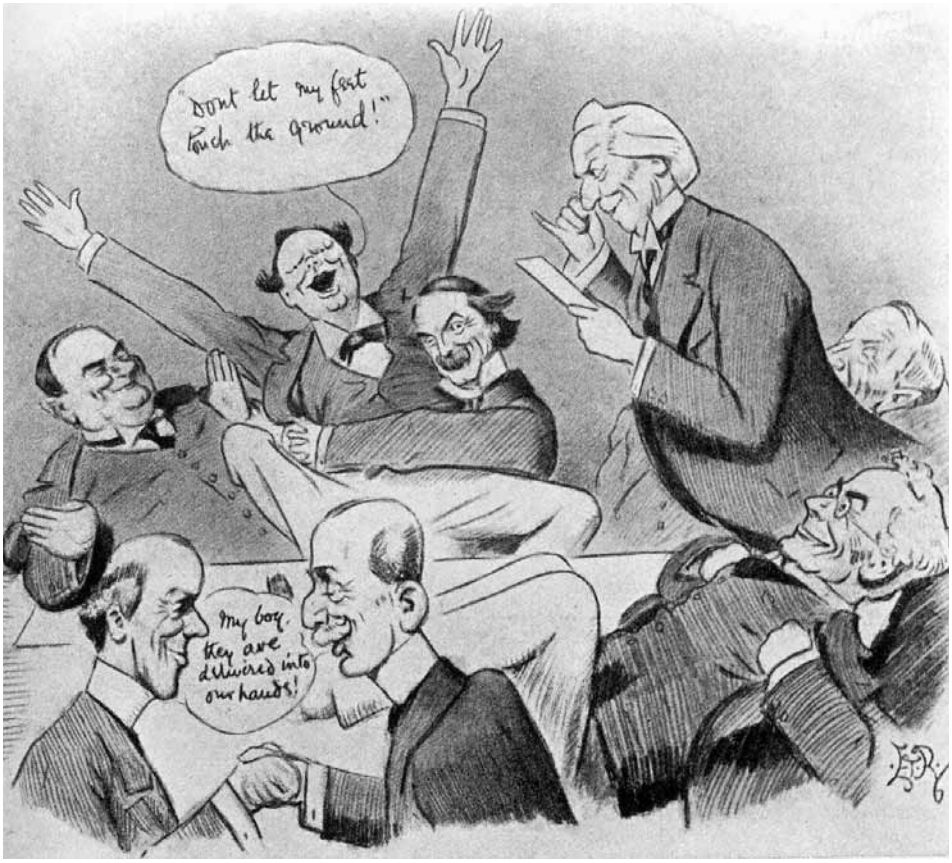
The decision by Balfour and Lord Lansdowne, the Unionist leaders in the Commons and the Lords respectively, to secure the rejection of the Budget in the Lords represented a change of mind. After the Budget had been unveiled, Balfour advised in private that they would only consider rejection if a great popular movement in favour of such a course developed in the country. Yet it was at the very moment when the opposite was happening, and the Budget was reaching the height of its popularity in the country, that Balfour decided on rejection. Lloyd George's attitude to the possibility of rejection likewise changed. His initial attitude was that rejection was a contingency to be guarded against as it would likely be a consequence of the government's weakness and the Budget's unpopularity, but in the late summer he began to change his tune and suggest that he might welcome rejection. It was Lloyd George's speech before a packed audience at Limehouse in London's East End on 30 July, perhaps the most famous in his career, that helped change minds and attitudes.[22]

Throughout July the Liberals, through the auspices of the Budget League, formed to counteract the Budget Protest League, sought to galvanise popular support for the Budget, culminating in Lloyd George's Limehouse performance. With the Unionists engaged in a prolonged opposition to the land taxes in the Commons, Lloyd George launched a sustained attack on the landlords, their means of wealth, and their determination to avoid their rightful share of taxation by resisting the land taxes. The rich generally, Lloyd George charged, refused to pay for the Dreadnoughts they had clamoured for. When the government sent the hat round to workmen to pay

for the Dreadnoughts, they all dropped in their coppers, but then: 'We went round Belgravia, and there has been such a howl ever since that it has wellnigh deafened us.' Limehouse had a remarkable impact on the political atmosphere, leaving many Unionists severely shaken. 'The cold fit will no doubt pass off,' Lansdowne sought to reassure Jack Sandars, Balfour's private secretary, on 9 August, 'but the fall of temperature was extraordinary.'[23]

Balfour's latest biographer, R. J. Q. Adams, insists that Limehouse did not cause Balfour's decision for rejection – it simply made it easier. A week earlier Balfour had told Lord Esher, confidant to King Edward VII, that he thought it 'not unlikely' that the Lords might reject the Budget; after Limehouse it became very likely indeed.[24] On 13 August J. L. Garvin, the editor of *The Observer*, learnt from Sandars that the Budget was doomed, that the general election was expected to come in January, and that the policy of the party was to be 'Tariff reform – full speed ahead!'[25]

For Balfour the Budget constituted an illegitimate and socialist assault on all the propertied interests represented by his party, notably land, and he seems to have convinced himself that its passage would reduce the Lords to near impotence and inflict such a setback on his own party that he had little option but to make a fight of it. His decision for rejection was taken before any group in the party sought to force him into it, but he no doubt foresaw that when the time came there would be overwhelming pressure for rejection from both the ardent Tariff Reformers, who feared that the enactment of the Budget would undercut their cause, and the peers themselves, who were paranoid over the land taxes.[26] In the event, he ensured an almost universal consensus for rejection within the party, apart from a handful of Unionist Free Traders.



Asquith's Cabinet reacts to the Lords' rejection of the Budget – a satirical cartoon, 1909 (Asquith makes the announcement while David Lloyd George holds down a jubilant Winston Churchill)

In the assessment of Adams, 'Balfour and his colleagues gambled that the electorate would endorse rejection by the Lords and reward the Unionists with an electoral victory'. The gamble was very much greater than that, for all the evidence suggests that Balfour and the party agents did not reckon that the Unionists would win a general election precipitated by the rejection of the Budget. They calculated on defeat by a fairly narrow margin, reducing the Liberals to dependence on the Irish Nationalists for their retention of office, thereby preparing the way for the return of the Unionists to office in the near future.[27] The January 1910 general election would deal with the Budget and tariff reform, but the Liberals would require a second general election to deal with the future of the Lords, and in that election the Unionists could hope to win outright, especially if the Irish Nationalists forced a revival of the Home Rule issue.

The decision for rejection was a huge gamble in so far as it risked everything the Unionists supposedly held dear: the composition and formal powers of the House of Lords; the preservation of the full Union with Ireland; the place of the Church in education; and, what was dearest of all to some, tariff reform. As Lord St Aldwyn, the Unionist Free Trader, put it to Balfour on 20 September, the stakes would be so high, and the risk of losing so great, as to make rejection 'the worst gamble' he had ever known in politics.[28]

This was Lloyd George's supreme achievement in 1909: his Budget, and the furious opposition it aroused, ultimately led the Unionists to force a general election that most of them knew they could not win, and when a loss would jeopardise the whole future position of the House of Lords.

On 30 November 1909, the Lords duly refused to consent to the Budget by a vote of 350 to 75, effectively forcing a general election. In the subsequent

campaign both Liberals and Unionists made the Lords, the Budget and tariff reform the dominant issues of the election, with the Liberals seeking to rouse 'the people' against the peers, the tariff reform food-taxers, and the various special interests lurking behind the rejection of the 'People's Budget', notably the landlords and the brewers. By playing on the theme that, through the tariff reform movement and the rejection of the Budget, the rich and certain great interests were seeking to transfer their tax burden to the people's food, Lloyd George found perhaps his most effective means of arousing democratic anger against both the Lords and the Tariff Reformers.

The result of the January 1910 general election gave the Liberals 275 seats in the new House of Commons, the Unionists 273, Labour 40, and the Irish Nationalists 82. The net Unionist gain was 105, fewer than most Unionists had anticipated, but enough to place the Liberal government in a position of dependence on the Irish Nationalists. While the Liberals had essentially held on to their working-class support, as well as much of their Nonconformist middle-class voters, they lost substantially among the middle classes and rural labourers of the South of England. 'It is the abiding problem of Liberal statesmanship to rouse the enthusiasm of the working-classes without frightening the middle-classes', Herbert Samuel commented to Herbert Gladstone on 22 January 1910. 'It can be done, but it has not been done this time.'[29] Technically, as some Liberals saw it, they should have retained the vote of the agricultural labourers, largely because of old age pensions, but, in the view of the Liberal journalist J. A. Spender, tariff reform 'got an unexpected hold of agricultural labourers' by promising 'to help agriculture and restore much prosperity by keeping out foreign foodstuffs'.[30]

The January 1910 general election was by no means the end of the Budget saga. The Irish Nationalists, who were intent on removing the absolute veto of the Lords as an obstacle to Home Rule and who had all along been opposed to the whiskey duties of the Budget, had first to be squared. This was finally achieved on 14 April when Asquith introduced the Parliament Bill in the Commons and intimated that, if the Bill was rejected by the Lords, the government would go to the King for a dissolution on condition that, in the event of the Liberals being returned to power, he would guarantee to create enough new peers to overcome the opposition of the Lords. On 19 April the Budget was reintroduced in the Commons, and finally passed its third reading on 27 April, with the main body of the Irish Nationalists voting for it even though the whiskey duties remained intact. On Thursday 28 April, the Lords passed the Budget through all its stages in a single sitting, and the next day the Budget received the royal assent. Exactly one year after Lloyd George had introduced his proposals in the Commons, the 'People's Budget' had finally become law.

Legacy

It is nigh on impossible to think of another Budget that has had as many ramifications as the 'People's Budget'. Much that was to be of long-term importance flowed from it: the modernisation of the British system of taxation, the financing of the formative social welfare state, the defeat of Chamberlain's crusade for tariff reform, the destruction of the absolute veto of the House of Lords, and the plunge towards civil war in Ireland.

As a revenue-raising measure the 'People's Budget' proved an enormous success, apart from the land value taxes. In the

THE LITTLE DOTARD
Registrar John Bull (to bearer of venerable infant): 'Well, what I can do for it – birth certificate or old-age pension?' (*Punch*, 20 April 1910)

opinion of *The Economist* in May 1911: 'Mr. Lloyd George may stand on record as the author of the most successful Budget, from the revenue producing point of view, which the financial historian of this, or, perhaps, any other, country can recall in times of peace.' Once he had resolved on a 'taxing' Budget, Lloyd George's design had been to cater for several years ahead, in particular to provide the financial basis for further social reform, and in this enterprise he was richly rewarded. Despite considerable increases in expenditure, including the state's contribution to national health and unemployment insurance, introduced in 1911, Lloyd George realised a succession of surpluses, and no new taxation was required until 1914. By 1912/13 the amount raised by direct taxes had reached 57.6 per cent of total tax revenue, up from 52.6 per cent in 1908/9 and 50.3 per cent in 1905/6.

The great exception to this record of success in raising new revenue were the land value taxes, which cost more to implement than they collected in revenue. In 1920 they were repealed

by Lloyd George's own coalition government, and the revenue collected was returned to those who had contributed to it.

The failure of the land value taxes aside, the 'People's Budget' was a hugely important milestone in the history of British taxation. Together with Sir William Harcourt's reform of the death duties in 1894, and Asquith's differentiation between earned and unearned income for income tax purposes, it helped to establish the basic structure for progressive direct taxation in Britain for much of the twentieth century. Founded on the new principle that taxation should serve as a major instrument of long-term social policy, the 'People's Budget' constituted a distinct break from the previously entrenched principle that taxation was to be imposed for revenue purposes only. Asquith and Lloyd George's reforms firmly established the income tax, previously still formally regarded as a temporary expedient, together with the new supertax (later surtax), as the main engine of progressive direct taxation, with Lloyd George providing for a more fully graduated income tax in his Budget for 1914/15. In the assessment of Martin Daunton, 'the revision of the income tax meant that Britain, unlike France and Germany, entered the First World War with an effective national tax regime'.[31] It also helped ensure that Britain would become 'the quintessential high income tax country among the major nations of Europe'.[32]

For the House of Lords, their rejection of the 'People's Budget' was the key event that made possible the Parliament Act of 1911, which placed statutory limits on the powers of the upper house. Following their return to office in the general election of January 1910, the Liberal government found themselves divided as to whether to focus on the reform of the composition of the Lords or on the veto, finally deciding on the latter as a consequence of pressure from both the Radicals in their own party and the Irish Nationalists. The Parliament Act, finally passed by the Lords after a second general election in December 1910 and the threatened creation of new peers, replaced the absolute veto with a two-year suspensory veto, while the preamble asserted that 'it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis'. The question of the composition of the upper chamber that the Liberals dodged in the wake of the 'People's Budget' remains a contentious part of the political agenda a century later.

The failure of the land value taxes aside, the 'People's Budget' was a hugely important milestone in the history of British taxation.

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JOHN STUART M

ILL'S *ON LIBERTY* 150 YEARS LATER

Michael Levin analyses the most well-known work of the greatest of the Victorian Liberal philosophers, published 150 years ago this year, and assesses its relevance to 2009.

John Stuart Mill grew up in a highly intellectual, liberal and campaigning environment. His father was the historian, philosopher and economist James Mill – a populariser of the utilitarian theories of his friend Jeremy Bentham. In 1823, at the age of seventeen, Mill followed his father into the services of the British East India Company. In 1858, the year he finished writing *On Liberty*, his life was utterly transformed. In September he retired from the East India Company in protest at its being taken under direct state control following the Indian Mutiny. Mill believed that this would make Indian policy subservient to British party-political considerations. Then in November his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill, died of a fever. *On Liberty* was sent to the publisher the same month. Mill thought that it was as much hers as his, and it is dedicated to her. As for Mill's intellectual reputation, by 1859 he was already an established figure. His *A System of Logic* (1843) has been rated the most widely used logic textbook of the nineteenth century, while his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848) was perhaps even more influential, and went into seven editions during Mill's lifetime. He had also gone public with highly controversial views in favour of the Irish poor during the great famine of 1845–46 and in his essay 'Vindication of the French Revolution of February 1848'.

John Stuart Mill (1806–73)

Mass society

Mill decided to write *On Liberty* in 1854, although its intellectual roots can already be seen in essays written in the 1830s. In 1835 and 1840 he had reviewed the two volumes of Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and thereby did much to make that work known and appreciated in Britain. Mill himself was much influenced by de Tocqueville's analysis of mass society. This was a condition in which the old social gradations were breaking down. Individuals were now no longer members of a particular class or group, instead being members of society in general. An atomised society of individuals was emerging, in which, said Mill, 'individuals are lost in the crowd'. In consequence, mediocrity was becoming 'the ascendant power among mankind'.

This has sometimes been seen as an opposition to rising working-class influence, and Mill certainly believed that the uneducated were not qualified to vote. Here, however, he was quite explicit as to the people to whom he was referring: 'Those whose opinions go by the name of public opinion are not always the same sort of public: in America they are the whole white population; in England, chiefly the middle class. But they are always a mass, that is to say, collective mediocrity'[1] – and a mass that imposes its norms and prejudices on everybody. Mill called this 'the tyranny of the majority'.[2]

Liberty's old enemies were found at the apex of society: kings, governments and churches. The new enemy, the mass, was in the middle rather than at the top of the social pyramid. This could lead to liberty's defenders being caught off their guard by the new direction from which the current danger came. Mill thought the threat mattered

for three reasons. Firstly, liberty leads to the discovery of truth. Progress in thinking can only be made when diversity of opinion is tolerated. Secondly, liberty is a requirement of our natural being. He described human nature as like 'a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing'.[3] Just as the body, by its very nature, needs exercise, so, thought Mill, did the mind. Individuals simply could not develop themselves in a climate of mental constraint, and this had important social consequences.

Thirdly, then, liberty was the basic prerequisite for societal advancement. Mill's generation had witnessed immense developments. Industry was transforming the country, shifting traditional class patterns as new commercial powers emerged and populations aggregated in the rapidly growing cities. There had, within not-too-distant historical memory, been the European revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848. Britain was proud to have remained immune from the full force of these outbreaks but still felt insecure as a result of the dangers they had posed. A common intellectual preoccupation was the question of origins and destinations. How had human and social advancement occurred? What were their mainsprings? Where were we heading? These concerns were particularly marked in 1859, which, apart from Mill's *On Liberty*, saw the publication of two other immensely significant works containing theories of progress: Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Karl Marx's brief but still influential 'Preface to a Critique of Political Economy', which outlined the path of social development successively through Asiatic, ancient, feudal and capitalist modes of production.

In *On Liberty* Mill warned that 'he who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation'.

Mill's theory of progress had diversity of character and culture as its cause. These were the factors that had gradually elevated European societies above all others. In *On Liberty* he argued that all improvements to the institutions and mind of Europe could be traced back to three periods of free intellectual ferment. One was the period immediately following the Reformation. Another was the Enlightenment, which Mill described as 'limited to the Continent'. The third was the 'intellectual fermentation of Germany during the Goethian and Fichtean period', that of German Romanticism. Though two of these instances were comparatively recent, Mill felt that their influence was coming to an end. 'Appearances have for some time indicated that all three impulses are well nigh spent'.[4] Europe's progress, therefore, derived from its diversity – which was now endangered.

Mill held before his readership the dreadful warning example of China. It was not a primitive or barbarian society, but an ancient civilisation that had, at one time, achieved considerable progress. It had, however, ossified at the point when freedom was curtailed. China had then become a backwater: world development had passed it by. This was a vital lesson for Britain and the western world in general. It should not take its dominant position for granted but, rather, urgently needed to maintain and fortify the basis from which its current elevation derived. As it was, Europe seemed to be squandering its inheritance, for it was 'decidedly advancing towards the Chinese ideal of making all people alike'.[5]

The defence of individuality

In *On Liberty* Mill warned that 'he who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the ape-like one of imitation'.[6] This is a poignant sentence which indicates the psychological background to the book, for Mill has been described as a manufactured man. His father did, in fact, 'choose his plan of life for him', and brought him up to be a disciple, and so a propagator, of Bentham's utilitarian creed. This brought about a mental crisis from which Mill gradually emerged through his acquaintance with Coleridge and other Romantic writers who reached the parts that austere Benthamism was barely willing to acknowledge. That, however, was not the end of the matter, for later two rather forceful characters, Thomas Carlyle and Auguste Comte, both presumed, quite wrongly, that they had found in Mill a devoted follower who would do their intellectual bidding. The need to assert individuality against outside pressures, then, was one that he felt very keenly.

So, in order to defend individuality, Mill searched for a principle by which social interference could be limited. He declared that 'the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection'. Consequently, the 'only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute'.[7] Implicit here is the belief that it is possible to draw an operational distinction between two kinds of action: self-regarding and other-regarding. Mill decided that only in the latter case had society a right to interfere with individual actions. Contemporary and later critics have found it hard to draw a clear dividing line between these two kinds of action. What remains significant is less the intrinsic value of the distinction Mill was trying to draw than the

very liberal attempt to establish a limit to social and political interference.

Thus far it might appear that Mill solely defined liberty negatively as consisting in the absence of outside pressures, but he also added a positive side. This consisted in liberty as the free exercise of rationality. Rationality, however, was not attainable by everyone, so some people were not yet fit for liberty. In his *Autobiography* Mill asserted that representative democracy was not an absolute principle. Its application was a matter of time, place and circumstances. Mill, then, may be described as a developmental liberal in that people only qualify for the liberal rights and freedoms when they attain a fairly high level of general development. In the first chapter of *On Liberty* Mill explicitly left out of account 'those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage'.[8] Mill, presumably, had in mind, among others, the Indians who had been the subject of his employment. His father had written a famous *History of British India* and it seems that neither father nor son had what would now count as proper respect for the level of civilisation, culture and philosophy that the sub-continent had achieved. For them: 'despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end'.[9]

Freedom of speech

Liberty, then, was a principle only applicable to the more advanced societies: those deemed 'capable of being improved by free and equal discussion'. This was the condition 'long since reached' in what Mill, all too vaguely, described as 'all nations with whom we need here concern ourselves'.[10] For these advanced societies, freedom of speech was central to the defence of individuality. Mill's argument here is perhaps the most famous part of the book. His striking basic statement on this is as follows:

> If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.[11]

Mill then provided a number of justifications of varying plausibility for his position:

i. To silence the expression of an opinion is to rob the human race.
ii. The opinion may be right, in which case suppression would deprive people of the chance to exchange error for truth.
iii. The opinion may be wrong but suppression is still unjustified, for people would lose 'the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error'.[12] So even false opinions have a positive function.
iv. 'We can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavouring to stifle is a false opinion.' It may actually be true. Of course, those who attempt to suppress an opinion may think it false but 'they have no authority to decide the question for all mankind'. 'All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility.'[13]
v. Even if a whole society think an opinion false, they still have no right to suppress it, because the opinions of the age are no more infallible than those of the individual. 'It is as certain that many opinions now general will be rejected by future ages, as it is that many, once general, are rejected by the present.'[14]
vi. The opinion we wish to suppress may be basically wrong, but still 'contain a portion of truth'.[15] Since prevailing opinions seldom contain the whole truth, they might well benefit from contact with further portions of it.

Finally, one chapter later, Mill made a partial but significant withdrawal. He now considered the possible social consequences of free speech and decided that law and order had to be given priority. Opinions, then, should still be free, but their expression should be limited if they are likely to have detrimental consequences in practice:

> An opinion that corn-dealers are starvers of the poor, or that private property is robbery, ought to be unmolested when simply circulated through the press, but may justly incur punishment when delivered orally to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn-dealer, or when handed about among the same mob in the form of a placard.[16]

This modification of his free speech principles in the light of their application is typical of Mill.

The limits of state action

This modification of his free speech principles in the light of their application is typical of Mill. More than just being a philosopher, he was always concerned with the implementation of the views he advocated. His concern with the practical consequences of his analysis led Mill to ponder the legitimate limits of state action. He gave a number of examples of wrongful state interference. One instance was sabbatarian legislation where he pronounced that it was not one person's duty that another should be religious. It was also wrong to prevent free trade, for any restrictions on trade infringe the liberty of the potential purchaser. Mill pointed out how the advantages of free trade were conceded only 'after a long struggle' and that in

general 'restrictions on trade, or on production for purposes of trade, are indeed restraints; and all restraints, *qua* restraint, is an evil'. The extent of the doctrine, however, was limited so as to allow the authorities to prevent 'fraud by adulteration' and to enforce 'sanitary precautions' and to 'protect workpeople employed in dangerous occupations'.[17] Mill then turned to another category of interference where the liberty of the buyer made restrictions unacceptable. Here he denied that the export of opium into China had been an improper source of revenue for the East India Company. Its sale and consumption was, after all, legal in Britain at that time. Mill was here implicitly taking his government's side in the current Opium War of 1856–60.

Another area that deeply concerned Mill was that of education. His own education had been quite extraordinary. He had never been to school but had his father's rigorous regime imposed on him. This involved commencing Greek at the age of three and Latin at the age of eight in a childhood without either playthings or the company, so he said, of other boys (although his brothers must have been around). In his *Autobiography*, Mill mentioned that 'no holidays were allowed, lest the habit of work should be broken, and a taste for idleness acquired'.[18] When he was thirteen his father informed him that he knew more than other boys of his age. It must still have come as rather a shock to learn that many children received very little education or even none at all. This situation had to be remedied, and here the state had a responsibility. 'Is it', he asked, 'not almost a self-evident axiom, that the State should require and compel the education, up to a certain standard, of every human being who is born its citizen?' The state, though, should facilitate more than provide. It would be wrong to allow the state to provide 'the whole or any large part of the education of the people', for this would produce a society all in the same mould, 'a despotism over the mind',[19] exactly what Mill was most concerned to prevent. His solution was effectively a voucher scheme for parents unable to pay for their children's education. This was a situation that ideally should not occur, for Mill (like Darwin, very influenced by Malthus on population) did not consider it beyond the legitimate powers of the state to forbid marriage to couples deemed unable to support a family financially.

Apart from issues concerning liberty itself, Mill provided three guiding principles against government interference. The first involved those situations where the task would be better performed by individuals than by the government; the second, where it was desirable, in terms of personal development and education, that individuals should act; and, as for the third, 'the most cogent reason for restricting the interference of government is the great evil of adding unnecessarily to its power'.[20] In *On Liberty*, as earlier in *Principles of Political Economy*, Mill's writings on the state were marked more by pragmatism than dogmatism. For example, he basically favoured laissez-faire but found grounds for considerable modifications. In terms of the conventional categories this did not so much distance Mill from liberalism as indicate his place within it. His writings mark a transition between the so-called classical liberal political economy of Adam Smith and his father's friend David Ricardo and the later 'New Liberalism' associated first with T. H. Green and then with J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse.

Fight-back

Mill had suggested how social developments were producing a more homogeneous and conformist society. Yet, clearly, he wrote more than an analysis of the causes and possible consequences of mass society, for he produced what amounts to a manifesto of spirited resistance to it: a call to action. He called on individuals, especially exceptional individuals, to fight back against the pressures to conformity. They should assert their own distinct identity. Every refusal to bend the knee, even eccentricity, was a service in the battle against the stifling pressures of mass society.

It was, it seems, a fight back by individuals alone. Mill at no time suggests a pressure group or even a political party as the appropriate agency. So these lone individuals are trying not just to withstand but even to counteract the dominance of a mass society that has all the major tendencies of the age augmenting it: technology, communications and education. It is rather hard to see how the few can have a chance against the many, especially so when, in his view, the few want liberty but the many are indifferent to it. It is hard to tell the extent to which Mill considered the precise tactics of the proposed fight-back, but we may surmise that, like minority individual behaviour today, such as Mohican haircuts or body piercing, the more people do it the easier and more tolerable it becomes.

His writings mark a transition between the so-called classical liberal political economy of Adam Smith and his father's friend David Ricardo and the later 'New Liberalism' associated first with T. H. Green and then with J. A. Hobson and L. T. Hobhouse.

Reception

In 1859 Queen Victoria's speech opening the new session of parliament included the following note of serenity: 'I am happy to think that, in the internal state of the country, there is nothing to excite disquietude and much to call for satisfaction and thankfulness'.[21] This was not Mill's view. At perhaps the height of British pre-eminence he had sounded a highly discordant note: that those factors which had produced global dominance

were ceasing to operate. For his contemporaries this was so implausible that they barely responded. They did, however, answer the 'mass society' charge – and totally rejected the notion that people were becoming more alike. Mill's foremost contemporary critic, the lawyer James Fitzjames Stephen, found no evidence of widespread conformity or similarity:

> I should certainly not agree with Mr Mill's opinion that English people in general are dull, deficient in originality, and as like each other as herrings in a barrel appear to us. Many and many a fisherman, common sailor, workman, labourer, gamekeeper, policeman, non-commissioned officer, servant, and small clerk have I known who were just as distinct from each other, just as original in their own way, just as full of character, as men in a higher rank in life.[22]

So the important corollary, that sameness threatened decline, was not even considered. *On Liberty* was an instant success in that it attracted much interest and went into a second edition six months after first publication. It was not, however, a full critical success, as the critics tended to praise the philosopher yet dissent from his opinions. Most of them saw no danger in current conditions and suggested that Mill's message was actually most needed in Spain, Italy, Portugal and Russia. It seemed to them that this man living comfortably in Blackheath had adopted the tone of a dissident imprisoned by a despotic government. This rather missed the point, for Mill's complaint about his own country focused more on the society than the state: 'in England … the yoke of opinion is perhaps heavier, that of law is lighter, than in most other countries in Europe'.[23]

Anyway, where was this suppression of free thought that Mill bemoaned? Contemporary critics could not see it, for orthodoxies impose little constraint on the orthodox. Limitations on free thought are mainly apparent to those with controversial beliefs and there were two respects in which Mill held subversive views on highly sensitive topics: religion and sexual equality. It is fairly clear that the intolerance of which Mill complained related to religion. He mentioned that in 1857 two people were rejected as jurymen 'and one of them grossly insulted by the judge and by one of the counsel, because they honestly declared that they had no theological belief'. Denial of the right to give evidence in a court of law to those who do not believe in God was, said Mill, 'equivalent to declaring such persons to be outlaws' who could be 'robbed or assaulted with impunity … if the proof of the fact depends on their evidence'.[24] Religious speculation was both socially unacceptable and also circumscribed by the laws against blasphemous libel. Unbelief was then the intellectual sin that dare not speak its name.

His status among respectable opinion may be compared to that of Russell and Sartre in the third quarter of the twentieth century: acknowledged as a great mind but seen as rather wayward in certain respects.

The publicity given this year to Darwin's speculations is a reminder of the difficulties respectable Victorians had in expressing doubts not just about religion directly but also about anything else that might have a bearing on it. According to later critics, it was on the subject of religion that Mill felt unease at not being able to speak out, although in my opinion his Chapter Two, 'Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion', is as bold and explicit as could reasonably be expected. In a later chapter his call for toleration includes the marvellous statement, still sadly all too relevant today, that 'the notion that it is one man's duty that another should be religious, was the foundation of all the religious persecutions ever perpetrated, and, if admitted, would fully justify them'.[25] This amounts to indicating that an individual's religion, or lack of it, is nobody else's business.

On the issue of sexual equality, Mill noted that the 'almost despotic power of husbands over wives needs not be enlarged upon here, because nothing more is needed for the complete removal of the evil than that wives should have the same rights, and should receive the protection of law in the same manner, as all other persons',[26] which was very much not the case at the time. Mill's *The Subjection of Women* appeared ten years later and can be seen as an extended discussion of this same principle. It was the only one of his books on which the publisher lost money, although it is now acknowledged as a feminist classic, and, indeed, the only one to be written by a man. Ironically, its initial reception precisely confirmed Mill's point concerning society's scathing intolerance of divergent opinions.

Mill died in 1873. *The Times* granted him an obituary but it was not exactly respectful. His status among respectable opinion may be compared to that of Russell and Sartre in the third quarter of the twentieth century: acknowledged as a great mind but seen as rather wayward in certain respects.

150 years later

Sir Isaiah Berlin is, to the best of my knowledge, the only person to have been knighted for services to political theory. He is also one of the most significant liberal thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century, so his judgements have no little authority. He once described Mill as the man who 'founded modern liberalism' and *On Liberty* as 'the classic statement of the case for individual liberty'.[27] These are standard viewpoints and so it is very much in order to note and celebrate the 150th anniversary of the book's

Further reading

Paperback editions of *On Liberty* have been published by Penguin Books, Cambridge University Press, Hackett, Pearson Longman and Oxford University Press.

An extensive scholarly debate exists concerning various matters of interpretation. What counts as harm? Is *On Liberty* really the utilitarian work that Mill declared it to be? Is liberty a means or an end? How liberal was Mill? These and other issues are explored in the secondary literature. Particularly worthy of attention are:

- I. Berlin, 'John Stuart Mill and the Ends of Life' in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press)
- J. Gray, *Mill on Liberty: A Defence* (Routledge)
- J. Hamburger, *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* (Princeton University Press)
- J. Riley, *Mill on Liberty* (Routledge)
- A. Ryan, *J. S .Mill* (Routledge and Kegan Paul)
- J. Skorupski, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (Cambridge University Press)
- J. Skorupski, *Why Read Mill Today?* (Routledge)

The most recent biography of Mill – *John Stuart Mill, Victorian Firebrand* (Atlantic Books, 2007) by Richard Reeves – was reviewed by Eugenio F. Biagini in *Journal of Liberal History* 60, Autumn 2008.

publication. It would, however, be contrary to the spirit of Mill himself to revere him as an infallible authority. He noted that the opinions of one age are not those of another and so, not surprisingly, some of his views are no longer acceptable. His advocacy of liberal imperialism now seems less liberal than it did then, as does his declaration that the message of *On Liberty* was not for 'backward states of society'. Also, in terms of defending individual liberty, his utilitarian heritage has lost out to the more fashionable notion of universal human rights. However, his views on religious toleration and sexual equality are clearly, partially through his own efforts, more acceptable today than when he wrote about them.

Furthermore Mill raised vital issues that still concern us. His treatment of the limits of free speech is even more relevant today when the media are so much more extended and influential. Consider, for example, the issues raised by 'speech codes', 'political correctness', Salman Rushdie and *Satanic Verses*, Jade Goody versus Shilpa Shetty on *Big Brother*, Jonathan Ross and Russell Brand discussing a particular sexual conquest, and Carol Thatcher using a racist term in a BBC 'green room'.

There is also the unresolved issue of when society has a right to interfere with individual actions. To take just one example, only at first blink can we regard drug-taking as a self-regarding action. A moment's reflection will recall the consequences for families, employers and the health services. Mill recognised this and saw that such consequences transfer the initial action into the other-regarding category. So are clear-cut self-regarding actions so trivial that they fail to provide the significant dividing line that the defence of individuality requires? A more difficult example is the case of the nude walker who seems to continue, undaunted by the punishments he receives. Does he cause harm to others in ways that justify suppression? And to what extent have we a right to be offensive? In multi-faith Britain this is a particularly moot point with regard to religious and anti-religious opinions. In 2005 the play *Bezhti* was withdrawn from the Birmingham repertory theatre due to the actions of Sikh protesters. This year the Dutch MP Geert Wilders was refused entry to this country for a showing in the House of Lords of his film *Fitna*, which linked Muslim violence with verses in the Koran. On various issues you might draw the line differently from where Mill did, but somewhere a line always has to be drawn and justified, and so the concerns he raised will remain with us. On many of these issues there are clearly no easy answers, but Mill certainly asked all the right questions. Some of his principles concerning freedom have stood the test of time and it is hard to see them being superseded; others remain as valuable starting points. Mill 'feared'[28] that the lessons of *On Liberty* would retain their value for a long time. He was right.

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Coming into Focus

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The survival of the Liberal Party after 1945 is one of the most surprising phenomena in modern British political history. By the late 1940s, the Party's lingering death throes seemed to be reaching their conclusion. With only a handful of parliamentary seats and no message to offer the electorate, the flame carried by Gladstone and Lloyd George was nearly extinguished. But the Liberal Party clung on and then revived in the 1960s.

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A new wave of recruitment after 1955, inspired by Jo Grimond's leadership, facilitated the Liberal revival, but a key factor was the development of early forms of community politics in a number of towns and cities in England and Scotland. This led to an explosion in the number of Liberal councillors, particularly in suburban areas. Not only was the Party saved, but the foundations for the modern Liberal Party and its successor were laid.

About the author

Mark Egan was educated at University College, Oxford and completed his doctorate on the grassroots history of the Liberal Party in 2000. He is a regular contributor to the *Journal of Liberal History* and has also recently completed a book on the history of pilotage on the River Tyne.

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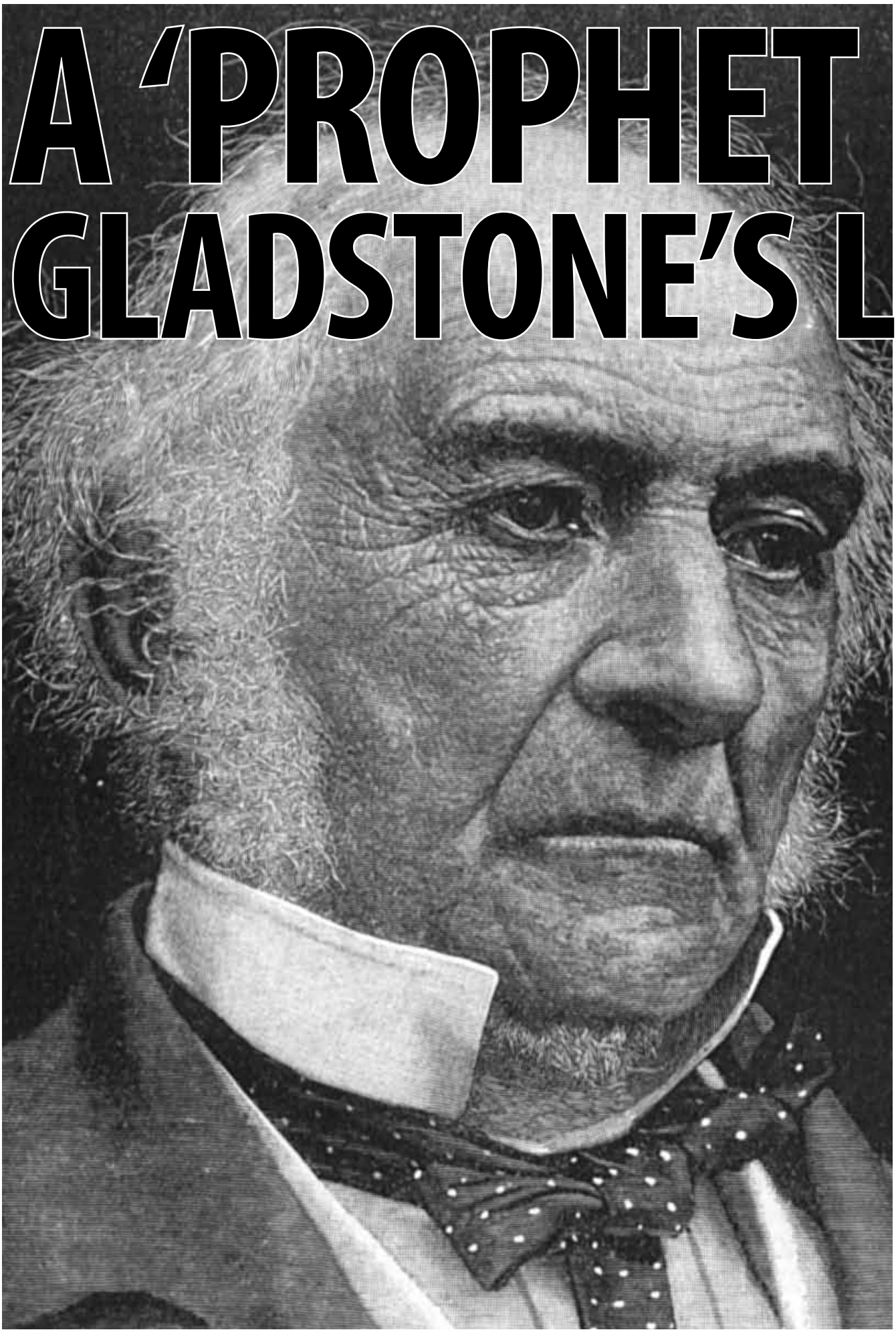


OR THE LEFT'?
GACY 1809–2009

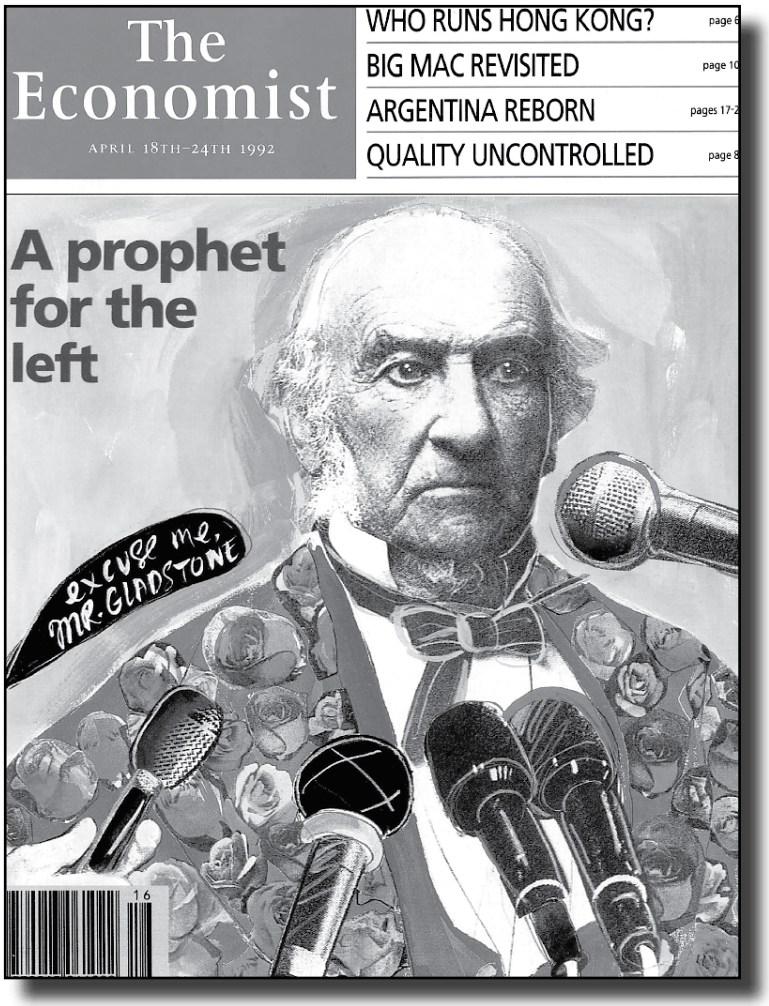
In the year of the 200th anniversary of his birth, what relevance has Gladstone to today's politics? **Eugenio F. Biagini** examines his legacy.

On 18 April 1992 *The Economist* devoted its leading article to 'A prophet for the Left': this was neither Marx nor Gandhi, but Gladstone. He dominated the magazine's cover illustration, where he was represented surrounded by the microphones of journalists eager to pick his brain on current political affairs. For the occasion the Grand Old Man (GOM) was made to wear a colourful green coat, embroidered with red, yellow and purple roses. As the roses and their colours suggested, *The Economist* recommended this 'post-modern' rendition of the great Victorian reformer as a model for 'the left'. It was quite a remarkable claim to make after over a decade of Thatcherism, during which 'Victorian values' had become almost a Tory battle cry. However, what was even more interesting is that the leaders of both the Liberal Democrats and the Labour Party started soon to behave as if they were actually taking *The Economist*'s advice to heart. Certainly at the time they were perceived to be doing so, not only by the press but also by political analysts and historians.

William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98)

So, what made Gladstone's legacy politically relevant on the eve of the new millennium? And which legacy are we talking about? Gladstone enjoyed an extraordinarily long career, starting out as a Tory idealist in 1832 and ending up as the hero of the Liberal left in 1896 (when he delivered his last, famous public speech on the duty of the international community to stop the Armenian massacres). From 1846 he moved away from the Conservative Party after it rejected Sir Robert Peel – to whom Gladstone was very close – and between 1853 and 1859 he drew closer to the Liberals over the Italian Risorgimento, which polarised both public opinion and the parties in Parliament. As Chancellor of the Exchequer (1853–55, 1859–65) he established the free trade fiscal system which soon become a new consensus, defining the relationship between citizens and the state for the next seventy years.[1] Later, between 1868 and 1885, Gladstone became the great 'moderniser' of British politics and society, presiding over two of the most significant reform governments in the history of these isles. Separation between church and state in Ireland, a democratically managed system of primary education, the reform of trade union legislation, the first major steps towards 'meritocracy' in the armed forces, reform of university education, and the most radical restructuring of the electoral system hitherto attempted (in 1883–85) – these were some of the historic achievements of the Gladstone governments.

However, the ultimate reason for the GOM's enduring appeal is not his record as a reformer, but his ability to reinvent and redefine liberalism as



Cover of *The Economist*, 18 April 1992

the politics of human rights. Traditional liberalism was a creed of gradual constitutional reform, combined with classical political economy, free trade and self-help as the basic rules defining the relationship between state and society. Having established these principles as government practice, Gladstone himself began tinkering with them from as early as 1870 with his first Irish Land Act, which interfered with property rights in an attempt to improve the lot of the tenants. This was a departure from laissez-faire, although we must bear in mind that Gladstonian liberalism was not really about the 'minimalist state', but about 'dismantling protectionism and chartered state monopolies, creating a sense … that the state was not favouring a group over another through tax breaks or privileges', and therefore 'about a new form of regulation and anti-monopolism'.[2]

In fact, in Gladstone's day government intervention became increasingly popular. Although most of it was carried out by local authorities – as exemplified by Joseph Chamberlain's municipalisation of gas and water supplies in Birmingham – Whitehall was prepared to step in whenever necessary: Gladstone nationalised the telegraphs, which became a state monopoly in 1870,[3] and in 1881 his second Irish Land Bill established farmers' rights through a system of joint ownership. This measure was an attempt to stabilise social relations in the Emerald Isle by giving tenants a stake both in their country and in the rule of law. But there was a further dimension to Gladstone's argument, which emerged during the parliamentary debate leading to the adoption of this measure. When the free-market MP and economist Bonamy Price criticised the Prime Minister for his cavalier handling of property rights, Gladstone promptly answered that Price spoke as if the government's task was to legislate 'for the inhabitants of the Moon', rather than for British subjects in flesh and blood. The point he was trying to make was that the needs of real people in their historical context were to be given priority over ideology and economic dogmas. The latter should be modified to suit human needs, not vice versa.

The realpolitik of Christian humanitarianism

If this emphasis on needs creating rights was a new departure, the reasoning behind it had gradually emerged over the years, particularly in the aftermath of the Irish famine of 1845–50. However, for Gladstone himself the real turning point had less to do with either Ireland or political economy than with the 1875–78 Balkan crisis. The Turkish Empire in Europe was crumbling under the combined impact of external pressure and domestic revolts. In trying to crush a rebellion in Eastern Rumelia, Ottoman irregular troops killed thousands of civilians (as many as 15,000, it was claimed at the time), in the course of what came to be remembered as the Bulgarian Atrocities. Similar episodes had taken place in previous decades in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, but this time the massacres received extensive media coverage, with the *Daily News* and other newspapers describing them in chilling detail. British opinion was outraged, with the Nonconformists and other pressure groups demanding government action to stop the atrocities, whether or not this was consistent with British realpolitik. But Disraeli – who was then Prime Minister, his party having defeated the Liberals in the 1874 election – was sceptical about the reports and remained supportive of the Ottomans,

Britain's traditional allies in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Gladstone was at first reluctant to intervene: although he had long been interested in human rights, he was weary of popular imperialism, which had humiliated him more than once, and in any case at the time he was not Liberal Party leader, having stepped down in 1875. But as the Parliamentary Liberal Party failed to challenge the government and the groundswell of protest continued to grow, in September 1876 he finally threw himself into the agitation. He articulated his views in a pamphlet, *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, which became an immediate best-seller, and in public speeches which attracted wide audiences and sparked off a national debate. He criticised both the Tory government and, indirectly, also the leaders of the Liberal Party. They were all 'guilty men' for their complacency about human suffering, to which they turned a blind eye for the sake of misconceived British imperial priorities. The debate went on for years. In 1878 Disraeli (by then Lord Beaconsfield) secured a temporary triumph for his approach to the crisis at the Berlin Congress, but Gladstone struck back in 1879 with his first Midlothian campaign, during which he enunciated the principles of a Liberal foreign and imperial policy based on European cooperation and a Christian understanding of international law. Effectively, he claimed that Tory politics were both immoral and counterproductive, and that humanitarianism was the best form of realpolitik.[4]

The Liberal front bench was not pleased, but in the country activists revelled in the sense that party stood for 'righteousness' and 'truth'. This was particularly important for both the Nonconformists and working-class radicals, for whom humanitarianism had always been part of politics, as illustrated by the anti-slavery campaigns and other moral and social reform agitations. Not only did humanitarian rhetoric appeal to radicals across the class divide; it also spanned the gap between the genders, evoking a strong response among women, who perceived Gladstone's new liberalism as a natural development of the religious and charitable work which was – according to contemporary expectations – part of their social and civic duty. In the 1876 Bulgarian agitation women had played a large role, and, by encouraging their further involvement in later Liberal crusades, such as those for Irish Home Rule, Gladstone brought about a significant redefinition of civic identity, the Liberal 'self', and the public conscience.[5] That this happened, despite him and the party being opposed to political rights for women in parliamentary elections, was entirely typical of this age of transition from a system based on a restricted franchise to one of fuller democracy.

'Come back, William Gladstone, the saddened left has need of you.' Thus pleaded *The Economist* in 1992.

Gladstone's legacy in the twentieth century

'Come back, William Gladstone, the saddened left has need of you.' Thus pleaded *The Economist* in 1992, inviting reformers to embrace his legacy, which '[had] gone begging for a proper party champion ever since Labour displaced the Liberals in the 1920s'.[6] The strategy it endorsed was 'Gladstonian' not only in its disdain of class politics and its reclaiming of individualism as part of the tradition of the 'left', but also in its championing of a revival of the Lib–Lab alliance reminiscent of that over which Gladstone had presided in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

If the GOM was now *The Economist*'s 'prophet', this article proved prophetic indeed. On 9 May 1992 Paddy Ashdown delivered what he regards as '[his] most important speech as Lib Dem Leader, and one [he] had been thinking about for almost a year': '[i]t proposed … a new coming together of the Left to form a progressive alliance dedicated to ending the Tory hegemony and bringing in radical reforms to the British Constitution, beginning with a Scottish Parliament.'[7] He also championed a more active foreign policy: rejecting the pragmatic empiricism of John Major, he wanted Britain to stand up for human rights. His adoption of such a platform was a direct consequence of his witnessing the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans – in a region not far from the setting of the 1876 'Bulgarian Atrocities'.[8] He himself became more and more Gladstonian in his commitment to the rights of persecuted minorities in the Balkans and elsewhere.

Almost simultaneously, from as early as 1993–94, his rival Tony Blair was reaching similar conclusions about the new politics of the left. As Denis Kavanagh has observed, there was the sense that Blair was taking an approach to politics which was 'an echo of Gladstone', in that it had 'deep moral and ethical rather than ideological roots'.[9] Something like a Lib–Lab electoral pact did take shape in the run-up to the general election of 1997, at which each of the two parties secured a historical electoral victory. Was it the beginning of a neo-Gladstonian phase in British politics? Certainly 'New Labour' managed the Treasury along post-Thatcherite lines, Robin Cook proclaimed the government's adoption of an 'ethical' foreign policy, and Blair started to apply what looked like Ashdown's militant humanitarianism to troubled areas of the world. Over the following five years the press had plenty of opportunities to explore the GOM's relevance to twenty-first-century politics – and to

criticise Blair as the new Gladstone.[10] Political analysts and, soon, historians did the same, noting that that there was the sense of Blair trying to deal with Gladstone's 'unfinished business' – in particular with Scottish and Welsh devolution (first debated in the late 1880s), the reform of the House of Lords (which Gladstone had recommended in his last speech in the Commons, in 1894), and the attempt to 'pacify Ireland'.[11]

It was ironic that, in order to 'modernise' the Labour Party at the beginning of the twenty-first century, its leader felt compelled to hark back to the man who had led the Liberal Party a century before. It was – or ought to have been regarded as – a major admission of failure of the whole Labour project. However, Blair claimed that he was merely returning to the movement's origins. After all, in the 1880s Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden, Arthur Henderson, and George Lansbury had all started from Gladstonianism, which was then the common ground among all the 'currents of radicalism' in Britain.[12]

When did such Lib–Lab fraternity come to an end? It is not easy to say, because within Labour there were always 'liberals' of one type or another. The First World War was not necessarily a turning point: from 1914 to 1917 both Herbert Asquith and Arthur Henderson sang from the same Gladstonian hymn sheet. Henderson in particular was fond of quoting Gladstone about:

> public right as the governing idea of European politics … the definite repudiation of militarism as governing actor in the relations of states. … the independent existence of smaller nationalities … And … [the development] of a real European partnership based on the recognition of equality of rights and established and enforced by a common will.[13]

It was ironic that, in order to 'modernise' the Labour Party at the beginning of the twenty-first century, its leader felt compelled to hark back to the man who had led the Liberal Party a century before.

Similar ideas – that the war was a 'crusade' and that foreign politics was a matter of humanitarian intervention – were at the time canvassed by Liberal intellectuals, such as Gilbert Murray.[14] Even the rise of 'Parliamentary socialism' did not diminish the relevance of Gladstonianism to international relations and matters of civil rights. Thus the Labour manifesto of November 1918 included the idea of Home Rule ('freedom' for Ireland and 'self-determination within the British Commonwealth' for India), the repeal of wartime restrictions on civil and industrial liberty, a commitment to free trade and to 'a Peace of International Co-operation'.[15] Labour's bold reassertion of Gladstonianism, at a stage when the Liberals were both divided and discredited by coalition politics, appealed to radical intellectuals and publicists – such as C. P. Trevelyan, Norman Angell, Arthur Ponsonby, J. A. Hobson, E. D. Morel and H. N. Brailsford – who abandoned the Liberals because they felt that Lloyd George had betrayed the cause of freedom.

Meanwhile, the Liberals, too, continued to use the GOM's language and further develop his legacy, with Francis Hirst defending Gladstone's record as a financier and an economist, J. L. Hammond celebrating his campaigns for democracy and Irish freedom, and many others looking up to his approach to foreign policy as the Liberal blueprint.[16] From 1919, in foreign policy the League of Nations was the Liberal orthodoxy. Although the historical context was different from the one in which Gladstone had operated, Liberal historians such Hammond and Paul Knaplund 'made it [their] task to address the problem of international security and the League of Nations, as well as the spasmodically emerging concept of the "Commonwealth", through the idiom and the ideals of Gladstonian Liberalism.'[17] As late as 1930, Herbert Samuel – supporting a parliamentary resolution in favour of compulsory arbitration – cited Gladstone's authority and contrasted the Liberal advocacy of the rule of international law with Conservative unilateralism, which, he said, was no better than international anarchy.[18]

It seemed as if in 1930 as in 1876, an updated but perfectly recognisable version of 'Gladstonianism' continued to represent one of the main differences between the Liberals and the Tory Party.[19] Yet, after 1918, the circumstances of the times forced even the Conservatives to adopt many of the policies which the GOM had cherished, including self-government for Ireland and the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, free trade (in 1925–29), and a rejection of their traditional approach to the Empire and foreign policy in favour of a conciliatory strategy which owed more to Gladstone than to either Bonar Law or Salisbury. Thus we have a paradox: in 1918–29 Liberal *principles* dominated post-war British politics, although the *party* was unable to win a majority at the elections.

By contrast, during the period from 1931 to 1979 politics was dominated by continuous domestic and international emergencies which seemed to demand the adoption of policies which were the opposite of what Gladstone had advocated. This applied particularly to social reform: what was incompatible with Gladstonian liberalism was not state intervention as such, but corporatism – the brokerage between organised interests outside the legislature, especially in the shape of the involvement of the TUC in policy-making – which became a feature of the British economic 'malady' in the post-war years. The Tory reaction against such practices in the period between 1979 and 1990 is one of the reasons why some scholars have claimed that the Thatcher years represented the

Conservative Party's 'Gladstonian moment'. Although this is controversial,[20] as late as 1996, in her Keith Joseph Memorial Lecture, the 'Iron Lady' herself staked her claims to 'the liberalism of Mr Gladstone'.[21]

Could she have made the same claim about her foreign policy? Were her liberal imperialism and rhetoric of human rights abroad in any way 'Gladstonian'? And what about Thatcher's own legacy to Tony Blair in these particular areas? Both Thatcher and Blair were inconsistent champions of human rights, but then Gladstone himself was more ambiguous than his great speeches suggested, as illustrated by his invasion of Egypt in 1882. The latter was a grand example of 'regime change', which Blair and Bush would have been well advised to study before embarking on their own campaign to 'democratise' Iraq.[22] However, to be fair to the GOM, we should also remember that liberal imperialism was not something which he had invented, but rather part of an older British tradition which he had inherited from Palmerston and Canning, and which, at the time, was dictated by Britain's role and interests as the nineteenth century's only global superpower.

It is evidence of Gladstone's grip on the radical imagination that his reputation remained almost untarnished despite the glaring inconsistency between his liberal rhetoric and his imperial policies. That he continues to speak to the political imagination of left-wing reformers in the twenty-first century must, however, generate further historical questions. The answer proposed in the present article is that, by injecting a massive dose of politicised humanitarianism into the Liberal creed, Gladstone extended its scope and meaning. The long-term appeal of his vision depends on the fact that many of the issues that Gladstone raised – in particular, the 'atrocities' of ethnic cleansing, the struggle to affirm human rights and the need for public scrutiny of foreign policy – have become even more pressing since he first boarded the campaign train to address his constituents in Midlothian.[23] Sadly, in the twenty-first century we desperately need to go back to Mr Gladstone.

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21 Cit. in E. Green, *Thatcher* (London, 2006), p. 31.
22 E. F. Biagini, 'Exporting "Western & Beneficent Institutions": Gladstone and Britain's Imperial Role', in D. Bebbington and R. Swift (eds.), *Gladstone's Centenary Essays* (Liverpool, 2000).
23 As Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, the 'erosion of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants' – which Gladstone had denounced in 1876 and again in 1896 – became a leading feature of post-1914 conflicts, to such an extent that '80 to 90 per cent of those affected by wars today are civilians' (in contrast to 5 per cent during the First World War): E. J. Hobsbawm, *Globalisation, Democracy and Terrorism* (London, 2008), p. 18.

DEBATE: HOLDING THE BALANCE

In his review of Mark Oaten's *Coalitions: The Politics and Personalities of Coalition Government from 1850* (Harriman House, 2007) in the summer 2008 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*, **Duncan Brack** concluded that 'Oaten deserves credit at least for raising a series of good questions. Let's hope that the hung parliament that might provide the answers isn't too long coming.' The author **Roy Douglas** wrote to take issue with this viewpoint. We have developed this exchange of views into a debate between the two.

Roy Douglas to Duncan Brack

Dear Duncan,

I disagree profoundly with the concluding words of your recent book review:

> Let's hope that the hung parliament that might provide the answers isn't too long coming.

If this means a parliament in which Conservatives and Labour have approximately equal representation and the Liberal Democrats will be invited to choose which of them takes office, I cannot conceive of a more certain cause of disaster.

When the Liberals held the balance of power in 1924 and allowed a Labour government to take office, the party's representation was quartered after less than a year. When they held the balance of power in 1929–31, and Lloyd George tried to squeeze a deal out of Labour, the parliamentary party split down the middle, with half of them going into permanent alliance with the Tories. When the Liberal Party almost, but not quite, held the balance of power in 1950, again there was a deep split, and it was soon reduced to its lowest representation ever. The balance-of-power position in the late 1970s would soon have shattered the party if the rank and file had not pulled their leaders out of the 'Lib–Lab Pact'. The mind boggles as to what would have happened if there had been a balance of power in 1997 and Ashdown had gone into Blair's Labour government; or if Clem Davies in 1951 or Jeremy Thorpe in 1974 had succumbed to Tory blandishments and accepted ministerial office in a Conservative administration. The one certainty is that there would have been massive secessions.

The whole idea of balance of power is predicated on the view that the Liberal Democrats are in some sense intermediate between the other two parties. This is fundamentally flawed. It would be difficult to drive a sheet of paper between Brown and Campbell, still less a political party. The most impressive Liberal Democrat action so far this century was to vote against the Iraq war, when the official line of both the other parties was to vote in favour. The next most impressive action was their principled vote against

forty-two days' detention without charge.

As Liberal historians, we should delve into what the Liberals did, and tried to do, in the days of their glory, and consider how far it is still applicable today. We could give far more emphasis to land value taxation, to replace many existing taxes. LVT was immensely popular before 1914 and is even more appropriate now than it was then. We could revive Gladstonian ideas of public finance as a trust and commence a thorough-going attack on the squander, bureaucracy and often plain dishonesty prevailing today. We should consider the Liberal plans of 1929 to conquer unemployment, and the relevance of Beveridge at a time when unemployment is twice the 'frictional' level he envisaged. We should take up the ideas of Cobden and Bright both on the question of free trade and on avoiding unnecessary 'defence' expenditure and unnecessary wars. The Tories and Labour would be united against us; only the electorate would be on our side.

To return to the 'hung parliament', the wisest course for Liberal Democrats in such circumstances would be to refuse membership of or support for any Conservative or Labour ministry, but to judge each issue that arises on its merits. Where possible, we should seek to divide parliament on distinctly liberal issues where both other parties will vote together against us.

Duncan Brack to Roy Douglas

Dear Roy,

I have to admit that I concluded my review with the phrase you object to more in an academic than a political spirit: it would just be very interesting to see what would happen if the Liberal Democrats held the balance of power. And it's in the same spirit of political-historical analysis that the History Group is organising its fringe meeting at this year's autumn Liberal Democrat conference, looking at what actually happened in the 1920s, 1970s and 1990s/2000s (in Scotland) when the party found itself in that position (for details, see back page).

It's precisely because of the historical experience of the Liberal Party, however, that I stand by my argument. When a party finds itself genuinely holding the balance of power – i.e. being a third party in terms of seats but able to put either of the bigger two parties into power, either by supporting it in government or by participating in a coalition – it has a tricky, but immediate, choice to make. If it decides not to try to negotiate a coalition deal, or is not offered one, it has to decide what to do on the Queen's Speech presented by the minority government (I'm assuming here that the two larger parties don't negotiate a coalition between themselves, and also that no other 'third party' is able to put one of the bigger parties into power – which both seem a reasonable bet in current circumstances). It either has to vote for the Queen's Speech, vote against it or abstain.

The problem with either voting for, or abstaining, is that the party immediately risks being seen as a mere appendage of the government without reaping any of the potential benefits of actually being in power. As you point out, this is what happened in the 1920s: the Liberals supported Labour's King's Speech in 1924 (when Labour was the second party), and abstained in 1929 (when Labour was the biggest party). In both cases, in the Parliaments that followed, the Liberals were perpetually placed in the position of either voting with the government, and appearing as a mere accessory to it, or voting against it, probably on an issue which most Liberals supported anyway, and facing an election which they could ill-afford to fight. In practice they split, repeatedly and disastrously.

The wisest course for Liberal Democrats in such circumstances would be to refuse membership of or support for any Conservative or Labour ministry, but to judge each issue that arises on its merits.

It would be nice to think that the party would have the option, as you suggest, of 'judging each issue … on its merits … [and seeking] to divide Parliament on distinctly Liberal issues' – but in practice the Liberal Democrats wouldn't often have this choice. The government would control the agenda, not the Liberal Democrats. To look at another example from history, the minority government would hold off from implementing anything particularly controversial, stick to legislating on topics that the Liberal Democrats probably more or less supported, and then call another election a few months later when it thought it could win. This worked (just) for Labour in 1974, when they converted their minority following the February election into a slim majority following the October contest. The Liberals lost votes in the second 1974 election, even though they fought more seats.

The other option would be to vote against the minority government's Queen's Speech, which would certainly avoid the problem of being seen as its hanger-on. What happens then is not completely clear, and is largely without precedent, but presumably the next largest party would be offered the chance to form a government, and the Liberal Democrats would be faced with the same dilemma all over again. Would the party be prepared to vote down *both* the other parties' attempts to form a government? If so, it risks forcing a second election, perhaps just weeks after the first, with no money left in the bank and with exhausted activists and candidates.

Of course, the other parties would be in the same position, so possibly one of them would abstain on the crucial vote, allowing a minority government to be formed, with the Liberal

Democrats clearly opposed. But that just ends up in much the same position as before, with the government determined to avoid doing anything too controversial, and trying to achieve a majority in a second election following a few months later.

I'm not saying I look forward to these eventualities, but if the Liberal Democrats continue to gain votes and seats, arithmetically it's almost certain that they will be faced with this position at some point; it seems highly implausible to assume that the party can leap straight from third position to largest party in one election.

If a coalition can be negotiated (and I accept that's a big if), I believe it offers a much more desirable outcome: Liberal Democrats taking part in government, having a say in legislation and actions, implementing at least some Liberal Democrat policies, and demolishing the image of the party as one doomed to perpetual opposition. That's what the Scottish Liberal Democrats aimed for in 1999, and achieved. I don't believe that they would have been better off in opposition for the following eight years, and I don't believe that it would be the best outcome at a UK level should the party end up holding the balance of power after a general election.

Roy Douglas to Duncan Brack

Dear Duncan,

Considering your reply to my initial letter, I am not sure that we really disagree that a 'balance of power' situation would be disastrous to the Liberal Democrats if they allowed the other two parties to make the political agenda. Where we disagree is whether the Liberal Democrats should do all in their power to make the agenda themselves.

Consider the 'balance-of-power' situation presented at the beginning of 1924. The Liberals rightly backed the motion of no confidence in Baldwin's Conservative government. They had no alternative: he had called the election on the issue of Protection, and they profoundly disagreed with him. Winston Churchill, still a Liberal, suggested that they should have followed this up with a resolution condemning socialism, which the Tories would have had to support. There would have been strong majorities against both parties, and the King would have been bound to invite a Liberal to form a government. When they failed to do so, disaster was sure to follow – as it did.

In 1929–31, again, there was a 'balance-of-power' situation. The Liberals could have divided the Commons again and again on their 'Green', 'Red' and 'Yellow' Book policies, and on the theme 'We can conquer unemployment', which had played such an important part in their election campaign. They could easily have pointed out the failure of both the Labour government and the Conservative opposition to advance useful policies to contain the developing slump.

Coming to the 1997 Labour government, the Liberal Democrats rightly opposed British participation in the Iraq war, which was supported by both the Labour government and the Tory opposition. Where they missed an important trick was in failing to make full public use of the need for Britain to withdraw from Bush's war. Today they could usefully campaign against British participation in Afghanistan. What they have said about the current recession has been good and helpful, but they should now press strongly for Britain to follow the traditional Liberal policy of land value taxation in order to prevent a recurrence. Issues like these put the Liberal Democrats on one side and both other parties on the other.

If tacit external support for a government of a different party is unwise, actual participation in a mixed ministry in which the Liberal Democrats were the smaller party would be catastrophic. Constitutional practice requires ministerial solidarity. It follows, therefore, that Liberal Democrats would be forced to vote with the larger government party for policies determined by that party. The public would give credit for all that it liked to the larger party and visit blame for what it didn't like on the Liberal Democrats. It would be 1924, only more so.

Coalition or opposition; I don't see a viable third way.

Duncan Brack to Roy Douglas

Dear Roy,

I certainly agree with you that holding the balance of power could well be a perilous experience, and should the Liberal Democrats find themselves in that position they would need smart leadership to avoid catastrophe.

My preference in that situation is a coalition, if negotiating one should prove possible. I disagree with the arguments in your last paragraph: if the coalition is negotiated intelligently, Liberal Democrats would *not* simply be forced into accepting whatever the larger party decides. As in Scotland in 1999, the coalition partners need to agree a full programme for government, lasting for a given number of years with an agreed set of objectives, and agreed procedures for dealing with new issues, which give as near equal weight as possible to both parties. (And needless to say, one of the objectives, in the Westminster situation, would have to be PR.) There's no reason why the public should see such a set-up as the larger party dominating the smaller – although, as I argued above, such an outcome *is* quite possible if the Liberal Democrats allow the other party to form a minority government, by abstaining on or voting for the other party's Queen's Speech.

Coalition or opposition; I don't see a viable third way.

From what you've argued, your prescription seems to be permanent opposition, at least until the party finds itself holding a majority in parliament. I'm afraid I don't see this as an attractive proposition either. If the Liberal Democrats are to grow significantly – as they may well do, at Labour's expense, in the next one or two elections – sooner or later the party is almost certain to find itself holding the balance. The same thing happened twice between 1918 and 1945, when Labour was effectively replacing the Liberals as the main anti-Conservative Party. (The Liberal Democrats could in theory leap straight to majority status, but it seems highly unlikely, particularly given the targeting strategy that the party has followed since the 1990s, which has led to a much greater concentration of the Liberal Democrat vote than hitherto.) Given such an eventuality, is the party really best advised to refuse any chance of putting its programme into practice? What, after all, are we in politics for?

Not that I think a coalition deal is likely to be offered; far from it. A hung parliament is such a rare outcome at a UK level that most politicians would not expect it to last. Instead, one of the two bigger parties is likely to pursue the minority government option I outlined above: avoid doing anything controversial, dare the other parties to vote it down and then call another election as soon as it looks likely it could win one. Only if the Liberal Democrats end up holding the balance of power again, after the *second* election, do I think that coalition would become a serious possibility. But, in the mean time, that would require the party to vote against the minority government's Queen's Speech (even if it risked another election immediately – a need for strong nerves there!), making it clear that they oppose the government. And then, assuming the minority government does take power, putting forward a strong, consistent and distinctive Liberal Democrat position on what would be better. And on that note I think we completely agree.

Duncan Brack is the Editor of the Journal of Liberal History*, and co-editor of all four of the Liberal Democrat History Group's books (*Dictionary of Liberal Biography *(1998),* Dictionary of Liberal Quotations *(1999),* Great Liberal Speeches *(2001) and* Dictionary of Liberal Thought *(2007), all published by Politico's).*

Roy Douglas is the author of several books on political and diplomatic history, including The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970 *(Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971),* Liquidation of Empire: The Decline of the British Empire *(Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), and* Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties *(Hambledon & London, 2005).*

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.*

The Lib-Lab Pact

The period of political co-operation which took place in Britain between 1977 and 1978; PhD research project at Cardiff University. *Jonny Kirkup, 29 Mount Earl, Bridgend, Bridgend County CF31 3EY; jonnykirkup@yahoo.co.uk.*

'Economic Liberalism' and the Liberal (Democrat) Party, 1937–2004

A study of the role of 'economic liberalism' in the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats. Of particular interest would be any private papers relating to 1937's *Ownership For All* report and the activities of the Unservile State Group. Oral history submissions also welcome. *Matthew Francis; matthew@the-domain.org.uk.*

The Liberal Party's political communication, 1945–2002

Research on the Liberal party and Lib Dems' political communication. Any information welcome (including testimonies) about electoral campaigns and strategies. *Cynthia Messeleka-Boyer, 12 bis chemin Vaysse, 81150 Terssac, France; +33 6 10 09 72 46; cynthia.boyer@univ-jfc.fr.*

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16

Andrew Gardner, 17 Upper Ramsey Walk, Canonbury, London N1 2RP; agardner@ssees.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.*

The Liberal Party in the West Midlands December 1916 – 1923 election

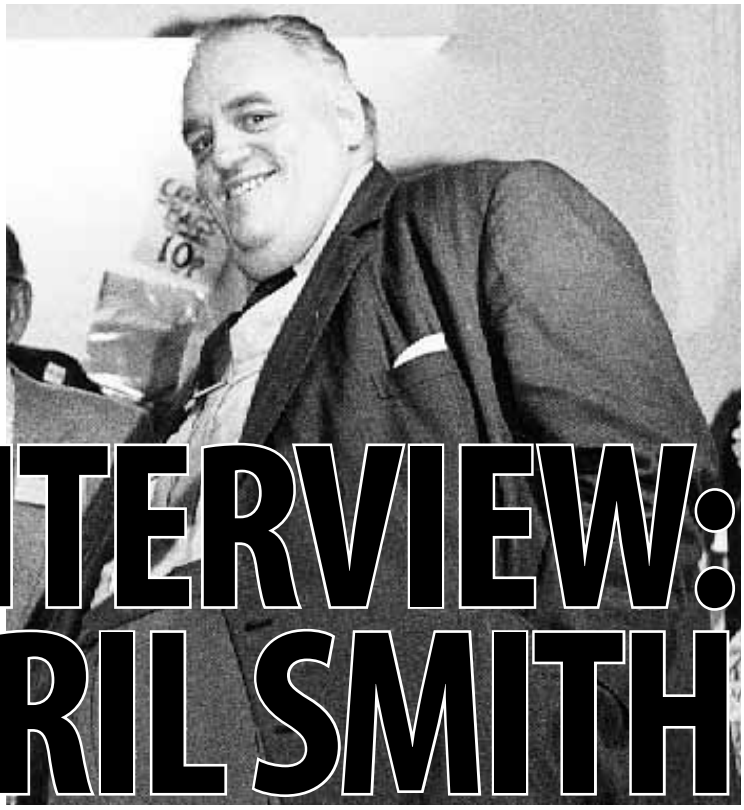
Focusing on the fortunes of the party in Birmingham, Coventry, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Looking to explore the effects of the party split at local level. Also looking to uncover the steps towards temporary reunification for the 1923 general election. *Neil Fisher, 42 Bowden Way, Binley, Coventry CV3 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.*

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*



INTERVIEW: CYRIL SMITH

Sir Cyril Smith MBE, 81, served as Liberal / Liberal Democrat MP for Rochdale from 1972 (following a famous by-election triumph) until retiring in 1992. His larger-than-life personality – and stature (he once topped the scales at 29 stone, but is now considerably slimmer) – made him one of the Commons' most instantly recognisable figures, while his blunt, populist, no-nonsense way of talking helped make him one of the country's most popular politicians. However, he also possessed considerable political acumen, gave the Parliamentary Liberal Party a distinctive northern voice and, during his time as Chief Whip in 1975–77, had to deal with the fallout from the Thorpe affair. **York Membery** visited him at his Rochdale home to discuss the Liberal Party past and present, and 'Big Cyril' was typically frank …

Q: You joined the Young Liberals in 1945 as a teenager. Why?

CS: I was working as a junior clerk at the income tax office and there was a man there called Frank Warren who was a lifelong Liberal and had a tremendous influence on me, took me to a couple of meetings and sowed the seeds of my Liberalism. What's more, I always had a streak of independence and wanted to make my own mind up about things and arrive at my own conclusions, and I felt the Liberal Party offered more scope for my taking such a position. Lastly, there was also a historical streak of Liberalism in my family and that had an influence, as did Rochdale's Liberal tradition.

Q: You became the Liberal election agent in Stockport South in 1950. What do you remember about fighting that election?

CS: The candidate was an absolute gentleman in the real sense of the word. His name was Reg Hewitt. The trouble was that time after time on election night they announced that the Liberal candidate had forfeited his deposit, and that was a tremendous blow to us all at the time.[1] Afterwards Reg telephoned me and said, 'Cyril, if you have any sense you'll leave the Liberals and join the Labour Party because it's the only place you're going to have a political future.' I reluctantly took his advice.

Q: *You spent a long time as a (mostly Labour) councillor in Rochdale (1952–75). What are you proudest of achieving during that time?*

CS: Let's be clear. I was a very active councillor, not just one to do a bit of yapping. I spoke regularly and sought to make my mark. One of the first things I did was to call for a public inquiry into the Rochdale police authority, a big thing for a young councillor to do. But whatever I did during that time, I sought first and foremost to put the people of Rochdale first, and I like to think I succeeded.

Q: In 1966 you quit Labour when you were mayor, becoming first an Independent Labour councillor

and then rejoining the Liberals. Why?

CS: We needed to make some financial savings, and we [Labour] voted to put up both the rates and the council tenants' rents. That seemed a fair compromise. Then a secret meeting took place at which a few Labour councillors decided to only raise the rates. It made a mockery of the party's supposed democratic procedures and that was the final straw as far as I was concerned.

Q: You were welcomed back into the Liberal political fold and went on to fight the 1970 election. What do you recall about that election?

CS: It was a tough election for the party nationally, but I managed to improve the party's vote locally, which I believe was a considerable achievement given the wider picture.

Q: Two years later, in 1972, you went on to win the seat at a famous by-election. What do you recall about that by-election?

CS: I was pretty well known in Rochdale, and I've always loved campaigning, so I went out and just met as many people as I could, banging the drum for the Liberal Party and telling people why they should vote for me and not the other lot. A lot of big-name Liberals made the trip north to support me, and Jeremy Thorpe made several visits to the constituency. I predicted right from the start that I would win, and during the campaign the appearance of more and more Liberal posters in windows just made me more confident as election day approached. And we won a handsome victory.

Q: That by-election was the first in a string of Liberal by-election victories in the 1970–74 Parliament. How important do you think the Rochdale result was in giving the party electoral momentum?

CS: What do you expect me to say?! Naturally, a bighead like myself is happy to claim some credit for the other by-election victories too. But I think it should be remembered that Jeremy Thorpe was also a charismatic, energetic figure, and in the early days at least his personality proved a great electoral asset.

Q: You went on to become the party's employment spokesman and Chief Whip in the 1970s. The latter role in particular must have presented quite a challenge given the fallout from the 'Thorpe affair'?

CS: There is no doubt that the affair had an adverse affect on the party, and I just did the best I could to manage the situation. It was a great shame, because I had a great regard for Jeremy and still have a lot of respect for him, but there's no doubt the affair itself was damaging to the party.

Q: How do you look back on the Lib–Lab Pact and how do you think it affected the party's fortunes in the 1979 general election?

CS: I always had my doubts about the pact, and, if anything, I think it had an adverse affect on the party. In fact, my experience is that pacts always have an adverse effect on us as a party, be it at national or local authority level. I think we as a party need to approach the signing of any future pacts with caution, although at the same time I think it's probably inevitable.

Q: Back in the 1980s, you memorably said that you'd like to have seen the SDP strangled at birth. Do you stand by what you said or would you retract that in hindsight?

CS: I think I was right at the time. I think the Liberal Party would have been better off without being shackled to the SDP. And I think that the Liberal Democrats need to preserve themselves as a party of independence. We can't be seen to be dependent on another party: if you ask me, that's the political kiss of death.

Q: However, couldn't one argue that the Liberal Party has, to all intents and purposes, absorbed the SDP and become a more powerful force as a result?

CS: Very possibly — but we may still have emerged as a much-strengthened force if we had killed off the SDP at birth.

Q: How do you rate David Steel as leader of the party in the 1970s and early 1980s and at the time of the Liberal–SDP Alliance?

CS: We had our differences, not least over the Lib–Lab Pact — which, as I've already said, in my opinion didn't do us any electoral favours. Nor did we see eye to eye over the alliance with the SDP. That said, the party found itself in a difficult situation in 1979 and there is no doubt he put everything he could into that year's electoral campaign.

Q: You retired as an MP in 1992 because of ill health. What are you proudest of during your parliamentary career?

CS: Probably my time as Chief Whip [1975–77]. It was a difficult time for the party, a time dominated by having to deal with the fallout from the

Cyril Smith today (with Chris Davies MEP)

Jeremy Thorpe affair. I like to think I helped the party get though one of its stickiest periods in relatively good shape.

Q: You were succeeded as MP in 1992 by Liz Lynne, who held Rochdale for the party, albeit with a reduced majority. How do you feel about your successor and what factors lay behind her losing the seat in 1997?

CS: I was agreeably surprised we won it in 1992, to be perfectly honest. For, while Liz was – is – a very likeable personality, she's not what I would call a flamboyant personality, nor would I say a political personality. I think my 'personal vote' may have helped get her elected. That said, I'll never forget her sitting in the front room of my house after losing the seat five years later, crying her eyes out.

Q: Of course, Paul Rowen recaptured the seat for the Liberal Democrats in 2005, which you must have found heartening?

CS: Now he's a different cup of tea entirely. He has a point of view and stands up for what he believes in. I might not always agree with him, but there are more times when I do than when I don't. And I think he's doing a pretty good job.

Q: How do you rate Paddy Ashdown's time as leader during the 1980s and 1990s?

CS: I always regarded Paddy as a very likeable man before he became leader. Although afterwards I think he changed a bit as a person, and not altogether for the better. Having said that, being the leader of a political party isn't easy, and overall I think he did a reasonable job.

Q: What are your thoughts on the 'secret' talks that Paddy Ashdown engaged in with Tony Blair both in the run-up to and after the 1997 general election?

CS: I have no doubt at all that we – he – got too close to Tony Blair, and I think certain people in the Labour Party, not least Tony Blair himself, led him into that position … And would perhaps, if they were entirely honest, have preferred a merger to have taken place.

I think the Liberal Party would have been better off without being shackled to the SDP. And I think that the Liberal Democrats need to preserve themselves as a party of independence.

Q: Ironically, though, the Liberal Democrats are now posing a greater challenge to Labour in its 'northern heartlands', at least at a council level, than ever before. Do you think you have played a part in the party's northern renaissance?

CS: Any bigheaded soul would, of course, love to claim some of the credit, and I'm no different! And, yes, it's heartening – and in a way it proves we were right to keep our distance from Labour. What worries me is the possibility that we as a party, both in the north and nationwide, are as strong as we're going to get …

Q: How does it feel to be, so to speak, one of the party's 'elder statesmen'?

CS: I like to think – indeed I believe – that I still have an influence in the party. Of course, I could be wrong!

Q: Finally, what lessons can the Liberal Democrats draw today from the time when you were most politically active in the old Liberal Party?

CS: I think the party has to remain active at the grassroots, and, just as importantly, has to remain the third most electorally powerful party in the land. However, I admire the way it's being led now, because Nick Clegg and Vince Cable comprise a very strong team. I think the party's in good hands.

York Membery is a contributing editor to the Journal of Liberal History.*The* Journal *expresses its thanks to Virgin Trains (www.virgintrains.com; 08457 222 333) for helping with the travel arrangements for this interview.*

1 In fact Hewitt just saved his deposit, achieving 13.84 per cent of the vote (the threshold was at that time 12.5 per cent).

REPORTS

The strange birth of Liberal England

Joint meeting of the History Group and the National Liberal Club, 20 July 2009, NLC, with Professor Anthony Howe, David Steel (Lord Steel of Aikwood) and Ros Scott (Baroness Scott of Needham Market. Chair: William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire)

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

On 6 June 1859, at Willis's Rooms in St James Street, Westminster, Radical, Peelite and Whig Members of Parliament met to formalise their parliamentary coalition to oust the Conservative government of Lord Derby and bring in a Liberal administration.

To commemorate the compact made at Willis's Rooms and the consequent formation of the Liberal Party, the Liberal Democrat History Group and the National Liberal Cub

organised a joint event at the Club on the evening of 20 July 2009. Over a hundred guests gathered for a reception in the Smoking Room, followed by dinner in the Lloyd George Room. The evening was chaired by Lord Wallace of Saltaire, the President of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

Our first speaker was Professor Anthony Howe of the University of East Anglia. Professor Howe is a specialist in the history of nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Britain. His books include *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* and *Rethinking Nineteenth-century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays*. He is currently editing the letters of the leading British radical Richard Cobden.

Professor Howe observed that, if you ask the average educated layman or laywoman when the Liberal Party was founded, the odds are that, after some scratching of the head, the date they will come up with is 1868. So why were we celebrating an event which took place in 1859, when approximately 280 MPs, described, with varying degrees of accuracy, as 'liberals', met at Willis's Rooms? In retrospect, although by no means at the time, this event has been conceived as the moment at which the old Whig Party gave way to a new political formation, a Liberal Party to which a motley crew of Whigs, Liberals, Radicals, Irish Independents, and Peelite Tories adhered. Such a political formation was not unprecedented; indeed, Lord Aberdeen's coalition of 1852–55 had brought together similar elements, although they had fragmented under the pressure of the Crimean War. In June 1859, it was assumed that a similar fate awaited the new coalition, 'a great bundle of sticks', in the words of Lord Clarendon, or, as the political operator Joseph Parkes put it, 'Ruffles without a shirt' which 'would serve the vessel of state only for a short cruise'; one Liberal backbencher forecast the 'speedy return of the Conservatives to office'. These gainsayers were proved wrong. The Liberal government formed in 1859 endured. Palmerston survived as prime minister until his death in 1865, to be followed briefly by Lord John Russell, Palmerston's disappointed competitor for the leadership in 1859. After a short but important Tory interlude in 1866–67, the ascendancy of Liberalism was confirmed in the shape of the great Gladstonian Liberal Party in 1868.

Such, then, was the genesis of the classic nineteenth-century Liberal Party which still survives in the lay memory, and which clearly identifies the party with Gladstone. But political parties are not like colleges or public companies with foundation dates. Most historians would trace Liberal Party origins back to the Whigs of the 1680s, but by the 1830s the term liberal was in common parlance and most anti-Tory MPs described themselves as liberal. Many past liberal historians have had difficulty in considering Palmerston, the old Canningite Tory, as a genuine founder of the Liberal Party, but recently this tide has turned. Historians are more ready to detect a genuine turning point in political history in June 1859 and have been more generous in their appraisal of Palmerston, now often considered more important than Gladstone in making Liberalism the supreme political force in nineteenth-century Britain.

The scene of those events, Willis's Rooms, was not a traditional political venue but formerly the premises of Almack's Club, a superior marriage market (where it is said that Palmerston, in his Lord Cupid days, had first met Lady Cowper, his wife to be, and herself not an unimportant figure in 1859). More recently, Willis's had achieved greater bourgeois respectability as a venue for lectures and concerts. Party meetings were normally held in the London homes of the political leaders, but the decision to meet at Willis's was a deliberate search for neutral ground, avoiding a choice between the London mansions of the two great political rivals of 1859, Palmerston's Cambridge House and Russell's Chesham Place. Even so, we might note that many Liberal MPs had been welcomed at home by Lady Palmerston, whose parties were far superior to those of Lady Russell, who, it has been said, 'exemplified to her contemporaries how a political wife should not behave', not perhaps the least of factors in Palmerston's favour as Liberal MPs gathered that afternoon.

The scene of those events, Willis's Rooms, was not a traditional political venue but formerly the premises of Almack's Club, a superior marriage market.

The meeting had been called jointly by those political leaders opposed to Lord Derby's minority government, which had been in office since February 1858 but had failed to achieve the majority it sought in the 1859 general election. Its purpose was to agree to vote against Derby's continuance in office and to form a Liberal government. Arguably, the birth of the Liberal Party was the indirect consequence of the failure of the Conservatives to consolidate their government; one possibility much mooted at the time was that Peelites and Palmerstonian Liberals would join Lord Derby to create a new centre party. The obstacle to this lay primarily in the personal antipathy of the Peelites to Disraeli – which allowed the late Lord Blake to suggest that Disraeli himself should be considered the 'unconscious founder of the Liberal Party'. More credibly, however, we can say that the Willis's Room meeting ended (at least until 1886) any attempt to create a centre party and heralded the golden age of the Victorian two-party system.

So, it was primarily hostility to the continuance of the Tories

in office rather than support for an agreed set of principles which brought together the MPs who accepted the summons to Willis's Rooms. Those MPs had mostly voted together as the Whig-Liberals under Palmerston between 1855 and 1858, and for them the key issue still to be decided was whether Palmerston or Lord John Russell should be the next prime minister. These two 'dreadful old men', as Queen Victoria called them, had been rivals for the leadership for the last decade, but, since Palmerston's defeat in February 1858, Russell had made a strong comeback, primarily on the grounds that he would be more sympathetic to a generous measure of parliamentary reform. In fact, before the meeting took place, the two rivals had agreed that the choice between them should be left to the Queen, although it was deemed symbolic when, at the meeting, the seventy-five-year-old Palmerston jumped up first on to the dais and helped up his younger (sixty-six-year-old) rival. Even so, the patching-up of the quarrel between Palmerston and Russell was subordinate in significance to two crucial respects in which the meeting was to herald new political ground. First, ever since the Tory split over the Corn Laws in 1846, the Peelites, supporters and venerators of Sir Robert Peel, had proved an unstable element in political calculations – although diminishing in number. The Willis's Room meeting marked the end of Peelism, as the leading remaining Peelites (with one important exception) agreed to attend and support a Liberal government. Sidney Herbert had played a crucial role, as documented in the letter to his wife which you can find on the website of the Liberal Democrat History Group, with important support from Sir James Graham. To counter Blake's assertion that Disraeli was the creator of the Liberal Party, there is perhaps more truth in the view that Peel was its founder.

However, the most famous Peelite – also the most famous Liberal – was absent from the Willis's Rooms meeting. Gladstone had only recently returned to the domestic political fray, after a spell as High Commissioner of the Ionian Islands, and was still ready to join a Tory administration. Gladstone came under some arm-twisting to attend the meeting and vote against the Tories; Lady Herbert, his diary records, 'threatened me'. Despite this verbal lashing, Gladstone voted with the Tories, although, as a man of ambition, he immediately accepted the invitation to serve in Palmerston's Cabinet formed in July, so playing his part in the formation of the Liberal Party. Why Gladstone finally became a Liberal was partly a matter of his financial ambitions, but an important element also lay in foreign policy. A key background factor in 1859 lay in events in Italy, where Piedmont under Cavour was in alliance with France in struggling to free northern Italy from Austrian dominance. Both Palmerston and Russell had recently followed a strongly anti-Austrian line and this served as an important dividing line between the parties, identifying the Liberals with Italian unification. Gladstone himself had recently met Cavour on his journey back from Corfu, and no doubt some Italian Lord Blake has argued that Cavour, through his actions in 1859, was the unconscious founder of the British Liberal Party.

The second crucial, and perhaps more critical, change in 1859 was the readiness of the radical liberals of the 'Manchester School' to support a new Liberal administration. This was significant because the Manchester liberals had long been bitter enemies of 'arch-impostor' Palmerston, defeating his governments in both March 1857 and February 1858. John Bright, recently returned to parliament as MP for Birmingham (having been defeated by local Palmerstonians in Manchester in 1857), took a leading part in the discussions preceding the Willis's Room meeting at which he was to speak influentially in favour of a new Liberal government. Bright was now leading the provincial campaign for parliamentary reform, but in a vituperative, anti-aristocratic, quasi-republican fashion which for many put him beyond consideration for the Cabinet. It was absolutely crucial to the success of the June meeting that Bright and the thirty-five or so MPs who would vote with him supported a Liberal administration whether under Palmerston or Russell. Italy also mattered for the radicals, and Bright believed he had secured an agreement that Britain would pursue a policy of non-intervention in Italy and alliance with France. Although rarely trumpeted by his biographers, by reversing the course taken by the radicals towards Palmerston, Bright has good claims to be considered the creator of the Liberal Party.

It was primarily hostility to the continuance of the Tories in office rather than support for an agreed set of principles which brought together the MPs who accepted the summons to Willis's Rooms.

However, as in the case of Gladstone, for the radicals, too, the Willis's Room meeting was more significant for an absence than for those present, given that, for the radicals, John Bright was still Richard Cobden's lieutenant. Cobden, since leading the campaign against the Corn Laws in the 1840s, had been the pre-eminent independent radical, although such was his hatred of Palmerston that he was more disposed to accept Derby as prime minister. But on 6 June 1859 Cobden was in the United States. Waiting for him on his arrival at Liverpool was the offer of Cabinet office which had been denied to Bright, who wrote somewhat bitterly in his diary: 'They fear me, and some of their oligarch friends and families will consider my joining a Government as little less

than the beginning of a revolution Blind fools! They think Cobden more easy to manage and less dangerous than I am.' Cobden, as Bright expected, refused office, but Cabinet place was given to the radicals Milner Gibson and C. P. Villiers, and minor office to a number of non-aristocratic liberals, sufficient to meet radical claims for representation within the government. In 1859, men, as so often in politics, mattered more than measures.

Here was the fundamental significance of 1859. The Liberal Party had long existed in the country, constituting, in the words of John Vincent, a 'truly national community', but until 1859 there had not been a Liberal administration. Governments had at best been 'Whig' or 'Whig–Peelite' coalitions. Such governments were now ruled out – as Parkes had rightly predicted in May 1858: 'As to the Whig Party, that Class can never take office again without new blood and some honest & proper purpose'. The new factor was that the Whig leaders were prepared to accept an infusion of radical blood into office for the first time, while the radicals were prepared to enter government with no formal agreement on issues such as parliamentary reform, but with a promise of a non-interventionist and anti-Austrian foreign policy. Previously, many like Cobden had considered agreement on issues such as the ballot to be critical preconditions, but foreign policy now enabled radicals to reduce their reform demands. Cobden in declining office did so to be consistent, having long been Palmerston's leading critic, rather than on any particular principle. But, as *The Economist* proclaimed in June 1859, there was now *for the first time to be a liberal basis for a liberal government*, extending the social basis of Liberal governance and admitting men of ability outside the traditional echelons of the Whig Party, extending even to the publisher Charles Gilpin, the first Quaker given government office. This genuine broadening of the Liberal government ensured that 1859 was not, as Disraeli had predicted, simply 'a refacimento of the old Palmerston clique' but the embryo of the modern Liberal Party; without becoming too biological, perhaps it was the conception of the party, rather than its birth.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of the Liberal Democrat History Group, we now have the tradition of celebrating 6 June 1859 as the foundation of 'Liberal England'.

To conclude, Professor Howe revealed that there did not seem to be any tradition of the Willis's Room meeting being celebrated in Liberal circles, having searched in vain for references to the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the party in 1909, although no doubt Liberals in 1909 had more urgent concerns in defending Lloyd George's controversial budget. Likewise, in 1959, a much attenuated Liberal Party was more keenly anticipating *The Liberal Future* with Jo Grimond than commemorating the Liberal past; however, in 2009, with only the Norwich North by-election as a minor distraction, thanks to the enthusiasm of the Liberal Democrat History Group, we now have the tradition of celebrating 6 June 1859 as the foundation of 'Liberal England'.

David Steel started his contribution by referring to the wording of the programme for the evening in which he was invited 'to say a few words'. He had not had such an unsubtle hint since addressing a meeting on the Isle of Man; one of the invitation letters had included a hand-written postscript which requested that he speak for about twenty to thirty minutes, 'but for no longer, as we also have entertainment'. Thanking Professor Howe for his talk, David Steel acknowledged the point about previous uncertainties over the date of the formation of the party, recalling taking part in centenary celebrations in 1976. He praised the scholarship and wit of Professor Howe's presentation and in particular mentioned the nomination of several putative, albeit somewhat improbable, founders of the Liberal Party. Picking up on the competing claims of Palmerston and Russell, David Steel said he was reminded of the Blair–Brown rivalry of recent times. The fact that the parties of Lady Palmerston and Lady Russell were also in competition showed that the Liberal Party really did enjoy itself in those days.

Lord Steel began a brief survey of Liberal history by referring to Professor Howe's point that by 1859 most anti-Tory MPs regarded themselves as Liberals and recalled the famous, and, he said, his favourite, quotation from Gladstone, that: 'Liberalism is trust of the people, tempered by prudence, while Conservatism is distrust of the people, tempered by fear'. The legacy of Gladstone was not just the great oratory of the Midlothian campaign or his concerns for oppressed peoples in remote places. Gladstone legalised the trade unions. Under his governments Britain became the workshop of the world. It was the Liberal Party which laid the foundations for the success of Britain as an industrial society. Gladstone also foresaw, in his vision of the federalisation of the United Kingdom, a situation which exists today but which could have come about much sooner, and with considerably less pain and suffering, had his hopes for a free-standing Ireland not been frustrated. Lord Steel then alluded to the great reforming Liberal government of the early twentieth century that followed the landslide election victory of 1906, with special mention for Lloyd George's People's Budget and the struggle with the House of Lords for the supremacy of the elected chamber.

Lord Steel then recalled the period after the Second World War when the party came close to extinction. By 1951, the party

was down to a single MP who was challenged by both Labour and Conservative opponents. That MP was Jo Grimond, a hero of Steel's, who, in his view, restored the fortunes of the party. Even as recently as the general election of 1970, the party was on its heels. Of the six MPs returned, three (including Steel himself) had majorities in only three figures. The Liberal Party was again nearly wiped out. Since then there had been a new revival, and Lord Steel paid tribute to two guests at the event who had come to the Liberal Democrats through the Alliance with the SDP: Bob Maclennan and Charles Kennedy. The Alliance and the merged party had echoes of the coalition which came together in 1859 – an attempt to break the mould of established political structures. Under Charles Kennedy's leadership the Liberal Democrats had elected the largest number of MPs since 1929, an amazing story and a tremendous achievement.

In thanking David Steel, William Wallace mentioned the move, the following day, of the Law Lords to their new home as a Supreme Court in Parliament Square. This was another of Gladstone's ideas which had had to wait until the present day to be implemented. In 1873, a bill to remove the Law Lords from Parliament passed both Houses but was undone by Disraeli the following year.

In contrast to the historical themes of the other speakers, Ros Scott, the President of the Liberal Democrats, had a brief to talk about the future. But if you forget where you come from, how do you know where you are going? It was impossible not to dwell on history in the magnificent surroundings of the National Liberal Club and in the company of many people who had made their own contribution to the formation of the Liberal Democrats. But there had never been a time when liberals and liberalism had been needed more than the present day. Liberalism was under threat from three specific movements. The first was those who believe that the answer to the current economic crisis is to close our borders, to exclude people who are in fear of oppression and poverty in their home countries, and who think we can also close our borders to trade. The second danger was from those who think that protecting the environment is something we can only afford when times are good. The third danger was the growing disenchantment with the political process.

As politicians, as liberals, we should now be going back to our radical roots, getting back in touch with the people and their concerns – without pandering to illiberal viewpoints.

As politicians, as liberals, we should now be going back to our radical roots, getting back in touch with the people and their concerns – without pandering to illiberal viewpoints. This required the defence and strengthening of domestic and international institutions in a context which recognised economic, environmental and social concerns. A sense of community needed to be built from the smallest village to the international stage. This was a liberal message with echoes of liberal values and policies from our history, going back to 1859.

To close, a formal vote of thanks on behalf of the Liberal Democrat History Group was proposed to the chairman and speakers for their contributions and to the National Liberal Club for hosting the event.

Graham Lippiatt is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

Thorpe bust unveiled

Report of the unveiling of a portrait bust of the Rt Hon. Jeremy Thorpe at the House of Commons, 15 July 2009.

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

The Advisory Committee on Works of Art is appointed by the Speaker to make recommendations on matters relating to works of art in the House of Commons. Part of its remit is to ensure that leading and notable parliamentarians are represented in either portraits or sculptures in the Permanent Collection at the Commons.

Accordingly, on 15 July, at a reception in the House of Commons, a bust of Jeremy Thorpe, Liberal leader 1967–76, was unveiled.

Jeremy and Marion Thorpe were both present, unfortunately both now in wheelchairs but both as eager and willing to mix with the crowd and talk politics as ever. The bust unveiled was a copy of one in Jeremy's London home. The Advisory Committee on Works of Art apparently first saw the bust last year and tried hard to find out who sculpted it in advance of commissioning the present copy. Thanks to the efforts of Nick Harvey, Liberal Democrat MP for Jeremy Thorpe's old seat of North Devon, the identity of the original sculptor was discovered to be Avril Vellacott, who was present at the reception. Ms Vellacott was wearing a delightful straw hat and I was told by her friend that she had done this in salute to Jeremy Thorpe, as in his heyday he was always seen in a bowler or trilby hat. The cast of the original bust was made

for the committee by Pangolin Editions.

Nick Clegg, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, then made a speech about Jeremy Thorpe's political life. He illustrated some of Thorpe's main attributes through a series of anecdotes. He mentioned recently discussing Thorpe with Sir Cyril Smith in Rochdale and Smith's suggesting that no one invited to pick the most stimulating guest for a dinner party could fail to choose Jeremy Thorpe. It was one of Thorpe's greatest gifts to be clubbable and witty, at ease with the company of politicians, media and the public. This led Nick to recall meeting a Devon couple who were complaining of the sameness and ordinariness of today's politicians, all young, professionals, lacking depth, flair and imagination – quite unlike the days of Jeremy Thorpe when he regularly used to be observed disembarking from his hovercraft and charging up various beaches in trademark hat, rolled umbrella to the fore, to discourse on the inadequacies of Tory and Labour policies in colourful yet down-to-earth language.

Nick then referred to Thorpe's bravery and commitment over the question of Europe, a Liberal policy priority when the other parties were hedging and divided, and revealed that he had chosen a speech by Thorpe on the issue of British participation in the European Community as his contribution when asked to select a greatest speech for a recent selection. Nick concluded by reminding the audience that Jeremy Thorpe's contribution to Liberal history ought to be judged by the difference in the vote achieved by the Liberal Party at the general election of 1970, when just over two million votes were polled, and the general election of February 1974, when the tally went up to more than six million. That leap in support was a testament to Jeremy Thorpe's political talent and his leadership of the Liberal Party.

The unveiling of the bust, 15 July 2009 – Jeremy Thorpe (left), Speaker Bercow (second from right), Nick Clegg MP (right) (Photo courtesy of *Liberal Democrat News*)

Speaker Bercow then made a presentation praising Jeremy Thorpe's achievements. He reminded listeners that it was now forty-two years since Jeremy Thorpe was made a Privy Counsellor and that he had represented his North Devon constituency for twenty years. Jeremy Thorpe had a wit and eloquence that could charm even opponents; when he spoke in the House of Commons the chamber filled up. Speaker Bercow praised Thorpe for being a progressive in an age that was less progressive than it is today, and for being a whirlwind political campaigner – when Jeremy was on the stump, there was always excitement in the air. Moreover, Thorpe was a politician with a considerable intellectual hinterland. He was knowledgeable about many subjects, including music, and was something of an expert in Chinese ceramics. Thorpe was 'writ large' and could comfortably stand in the company of politicians who had achieved high office such as Harold Wilson and Margaret Thatcher. He was, said Mr Speaker, remembered with affection and respect. The portrait bust of Jeremy Thorpe which had been commissioned would be displayed in the Grimond Room.

Jeremy Thorpe then made a gracious and moving speech of appreciation for the honour of the unveiling. He made clear his enormous debt of gratitude to Marion for all her love, help and support over the years and to members of his family as well as to friends and colleagues in the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats. Thorpe's Parkinson's disease makes it hard for him to contribute with the spontaneity and humour that have been so central to his political appeal, but the dignity of his vote of thanks and his bearing in defiance of his illness will be remembered for a long while with admiration and esteem by those attending the unveiling. The applause was heavy and heart-felt.

Graham Lippiatt is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

The Gladstone Bicentenary Conference

Conference organised by the University of Chester, in association with St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, 5–8 July 2009

Report by **Tony Little**

The scale of Gladstone's achievements in government, the depth of his thinking on issues which still disturb our polity and the sheer longevity of his career make him one of the great Victorian figures, a man whose bicentenary deserved commemorating at a four-day conference at the University of Chester in July. More surprisingly, scholars had developed some forty papers to present at this colloquium, even though the centenary of Gladstone's death had been marked by an extensive conference less than a dozen years previously.[1]

When, in 2007, the Liberal Democrat History Group posed the question of 'Who was the greatest Liberal?', Gladstone lost out to John Stuart Mill, the publication of whose great work *On Liberty* we also celebrate this year. Was this because Gladstone is so much the archetypal Victorian that he has become impossible for modern minds to understand? Have we so absorbed the thinking of Victoria's rebels and radicals, from Darwin and Marx to Carlyle and Newman, that we can no longer empathise with Gladstone, a man so in tune with the nineteenth century that, in his own time, he enjoyed the popularity our era reserves for celebrities rather than politicians? Or are today's progressive statesmen still his heirs, successful only when they abandon utopias for Liberal values? These were the questions posed and debated, but left still undecided by the end of the conference.

The potential incomprehensibility of Gladstone is compounded not only by the growing gulf of time between his period and ours, and the impenetrability of some of the topics to which he devoted his time, but also by the wealth of evidence. Gladstone left a great deal of documentation to be explored, while further clues to his thoughts and achievement can be gleaned from the growing inventiveness of those using his diaries in combination with his library preserved at St Deiniol's. A visit to the library and to Gladstone's study formed part of the conference, while a paper was presented on the GladCAT database project which is digitising Gladstone's marginalia in his books.

This wealth of material gives a false impression that we could know him in a way that would be impossible for most historical characters – an impression frustrated by the elusiveness of many of the diary entries and the famously Jesuitical complexity of Gladstone's prose. The part played by Gladstone's obstructive subtlety was amply demonstrated to those of us not expert in the field by Jonathan Conlin's paper on the controversy between Gladstone and Huxley ('Darwin's bulldog'), which spread over 500 pages of the journal *Nineteenth Century*. As with most things Gladstonian, there are modern echoes, in this case of the debate between Dawkins and Biblical scholars. Gladstone versus Huxley was in part an argument about evolution, the scientific truth of the Bible and the role of its creation myths, and in part a continuation of the argument Gladstone had had with Newman forty years earlier over the probability of evidence – a way of thinking Gladstone derived from Bishop Butler. Gladstone even found time during the arguments over Home Rule and the 'Hawarden kite', in early 1886, to suggest that the book of Genesis should be valued as a sermon, not damned as a scientific lecture. As in his politics, Gladstone's liberalism in science and religion was broader and more tolerant than his opponents.

The scale of Gladstone's achievements in government, the depth of his thinking on issues which still disturb our polity and the sheer longevity of his career make him one of the great Victorian figures.

The problems in understanding Gladstone were posited by Frank Turner as deriving not only from his religious perspective but also from his classical education, the typically Victorian Empire sources of his family wealth, and his approaches to public finance. More importantly, Turner argued that the lack of resonance between Gladstone and our contemporaries reflects our approach to politics. The Grand Old Man was not a believer in the perfection of worldly government, whereas the twentieth century can most easily be presented as a striving for alternative utopias, whether socialist in Russia or nationalist in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Gladstone's Peelite alternative derived from his study of Homer and, when his idealist vision of church and state had failed, he relied on trust, toleration, transparency in state finances, the diversity of local government rather than the uniformity of the centralised state, and the incorporation into the state of newcomers as they qualified themselves for citizenship. Part of the elusiveness of Gladstone's liberalism lies in his focus on reform rather than transformation. He wished to channel the forces of his day through existing mechanisms rather than to rebuild the state. For Gladstone, there were not the absolutes on which his radical, Tory, Catholic and socialist critics rely.

As might be expected, the conference reflected academic

trends, and papers were presented on images of Gladstone and his self-representation, outlining the degree of conscious control that he exerted over how he was represented not only in terms of the traditional portrait, incorporating contrasting aspects of masculinity, statesmanship and studiousness, but also through the new high-tech medium of the photograph. Towards the end of his career, camera technology had progressed sufficiently as to allow unofficial and informal pictures to be snatched. The battle for control over the image of the politician had begun to be lost.

Ample space was given for more conventional political history, though presented through an original filter. Lord (Paul) Bew presented Gladstonian views on Ireland from an Ulster Protestant, but sympathetic and Burkean, perspective. Bew praised Gladstone's efforts in the Fenian crisis, the way that he recognised the constitutional politician in Parnell, despite his pre-Kilmainham association with the 'men of violence', and Gladstone's openness on the special circumstances of Ulster. However, Gladstone progressively alienated Irish Whigs and Liberals. Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland may have been successful in reuniting English Liberals, but it distanced the Irish and his first government compounded the problem with its proposed Irish university reforms, which did not even have the benefit of satisfying the Catholic hierarchy, and so paved the way for the Home Rule Party's ascendancy. Gladstone's land reforms may have defused a pre-revolutionary Land League but again made enemies of previous allies such as Lecky, while his assault on the Vatican Decrees irritated both Catholics and Liberal Presbyterians who relied on Catholic support to hold their seats.

Running counter to the usual focus on Gladstone as a Midlothian peacemaker, Roland Quinault spoke on Gladstone and war, showing that despite his career-long aversion to militarism and its cost, Gladstone did not flinch from supporting wars that he believed to be justified in Butlerian terms. Complexity arises from an analysis that would tend to show that the wars he opposed were those occurring while he was out of office, such as the 1857 Chinese Opium War and the 1879 Afghan War, while those he supported occurred while he was in office, such as the Crimean War. Further intricacy is encountered when trying to justify Gladstone's views on funding war and on intervention. Theoretically, Gladstone believed that war should be financed from taxation as a restraint on the jingoistic and imperialist enthusiasms of the electorate. In practice, however, he also funded government war efforts from loans. Gladstone sought a multilateral approach to international crises – the Concert of Europe – but no practical mechanism existed for its employment, no Gladstonian United Nations, and in reality Gladstone was as prepared to intervene unilaterally, for example in Egypt, as he was to urge but not to strike, as in Bulgaria and Armenia.

Frank Turner argued that Gladstonian liberalism was a path not taken beyond his own day, despite the Gladstonian echoes in US presidents Woodrow Wilson, Roosevelt and Carter. But, in the final paper of the conference, Eugenio Biagini argued strongly for an alternative view. He traced a series of heirs to Gladstone at home, in all parties, and abroad and argued that perhaps the decline of the Liberal Party after 1918 enhanced the continuation of Gladstonian policies by the Tories and that the influx of Liberals into the Labour Party influenced that party's internationalism and reliance on traditional management of the Exchequer. Biagini went on to argue that, when Blair modernised the Labour Party, he did so through the incorporation of Gladstonian ideas. Is it not to Gladstone that he owed his militant humanitarianism, his ethical foreign policy, his mission to pacify Ireland, his constitutional reforms of the Lords, and devolution, whilst holding down taxes and restraining government spending? The parallels between Blair's intervention in Iraq and Gladstone's in Egypt inevitably attracted discussion, and Biagini argued that Gladstone was willing to intervene in another country on humanitarian grounds where he considered that the government had failed, but that he considered interference to be undesirable if there was stable government even if that regime was bad. These criteria justified intervention in Egypt but not in Afghanistan, nor against the Zulus.

In the space available I cannot do justice to the range of papers delivered in Chester, but the impression I took away was that Gladstone the statesman remains a tough benchmark against which to judge his successors. The big issues of government that he tackled still have practical relevance to the

Gladstone bicentenary events

Bicentenary dinner
Wednesday 21 October, 7.00 for 7.30 p.m
National Liberal Club, London SW1
Speaker: Lord Ashdown.
£40 per head, to include reception and wine during dinner.
Black tie.
Boookings may be made with Louisa Pooley on 020 7930 9871.

Evensong
Tuesday 12 January 2010, 5.00pm
Westminster Abbey
The centenary year will conclude with a special evensong at Westminster Abbey, followed by a wreath-laying ceremony at the Gladstone Memorial. Sir Alan Beith MP will speak before the laying of the wreath.

modern day, and his approach to government can be embraced by reformers with confidence in its soundness. Investigations into Gladstone the man still have scope for discovery and amplification. Despite the strong foundations laid by those like David Bebbington, much remains to be done to integrate the various components of his personality. Gladstone the Homeric scholar was also Gladstone the tree-feller, and Gladstone the firm defender of Bradlaugh was also the champion of the Anglican faith just as much as Gladstone the Home Ruler was Gladstone the Unionist.

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

1 The main papers were published as D. Bebbington and R. Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays* (Liverpool University Press, 2000) and the subsidiary papers as P. Francis (ed.), *The Gladstone Umbrella* (Monad Press, 2001).

Investigations into Gladstone the man still have scope for discovery and amplification.

LETTERS

How long was Lloyd George an MP? (continued)

Kenneth O. Morgan's letter (*Journal* 63, summer 2009) states that David Lloyd George ceased to be a Member of Parliament on 1 January 1945, when his peerage was conferred. But Erskine May has this: 'If a Member be created a Peer, his seat is not vacated until the letters patent conferring the dignity have passed the great seal.' According to *Burke's Peerage*, the earldom of Lloyd George of Dwyfor was created on 12 February 1945, which presumably was the date of the letters patent. The writ for the by-election to fill the vacancy, which took place on 26 April 1945, could not have been issued until after that date.

The rules for payment of salaries to Members of Parliament (which of course were not in force in 1890, although they were in 1945) allow for payment from and including the day following that on which the poll is held. The salary of a Member who is created a peer is payable up to and including the day on which his letters patent are granted.

The custom for establishing who is Father of the House of Commons (as Lloyd George was from 1929) uses the test of the date on which a Member first took the oath.

Patrick Mitchell

Gladstone, St Deiniol's and the Church

Having spent a week at St. Deiniol's Residential Library at Hawarden in Flintshire when researching for my PhD (Church History) I have to suggest the basic reason for William E. Gladstone selecting the site in 1889 was not any of the reasons suggested by the Rev. Peter Francis, Warden of St. Deiniol's (Journal of Liberal History 63, summer 2009).

The Hawarden (Castle) Estate, previously owned by W.E. Gladstone's wife's family, was inherited by the Prime Minister's eldest son, William (Willy) in 1874 with, on his death in 1891, ownership passing to his son, William G.C. Gladstone (born 1885) who was the last Gladstone to serve in the House of Commons, as Liberal MP for Kilmarnock Burghs (Kilmarnock, Dumbarton, Port Glasgow, Renfrew and Rutherglen) from 1911 until his death in action in 1916.

Accordingly, with W.E. Gladstone being effectively 'Squire' of Hawarden for the last twenty-four years of his life, and thus with a site at Hawarden being freely available, there was never any question of the Library being located elsewhere. Another of the Prime Minister's sons, the Rev. Stephen Gladstone (1844–1920) was Rector of Hawarden when he inherited the Hawarden Estate in 1916 and his descendants also inherited the Gladstone Baronetcy and Fasque House and Estate in Kincardineshire in 1945 after the deaths of all the Prime Minister's elder brothers and their sons.

Further, although a High Church Anglican from the mid-1830s, William E. Gladstone was born as a Presbyterian in association with the Church of Scotland. Indeed, his father, John Gladstone (a Baronet from 1846) contributed to the cost of building the first Scots Kirk in Liverpool, which opened in Oldham Street in 1793. It was only later that John Gladstone and his family adhered to the Church of England – not, I would suggest, for any ecclesiastical reason but because of the then political and educational restraints on nonconformists in England.

However, the Gladstones' 'interest' in the Church of Scotland continued for some time thereafter. After the purchase of Fasque in 1829 the family supported the local (Fettercairn) Parish Church until the opening of an Episcopal Chapel in the grounds of Fasque in 1847. Further, in 1838–39, contrary to the expectation that new urban congregations would elect their

own ministers, John Gladstone agreed to finance the building and endowment of a new Church of Scotland Church (St. Thomas') in his native Leith on condition that its patronage (the right to present ministers) was vested in himself with reversion to his son, William. (The Congregation of St. Thomas' united with another Leith Congregation in 1975 with the former St. Thomas' building being reopened as a Sikh temple in 1976!)

Then, when the last political attempt to avert the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 was made by Fox Maule (then an opposition Whig MP and later, as 2nd Lord Panmure, Secretary of State for War in Palmerston's Whig/Radical/Peelite Cabinet of 1855–58), W.E. Gladstone (then Vice-President of the Board of Trade in Peel's Tory administration) voted with the majority (211–76) in the House of Commons on 8 March (1843) against Fox Maule's motion, although it was supported by a majority (25–12) of Scottish MPs present and voting. The Disruption of the Church of Scotland (with the departure of 480 ministers to form the original Free Church) was then inevitable and followed some ten weeks later on 18 May (1843).

W.E. Gladstone published his own views on the Disruption in 1844, stating that as all Presbyterians had rejected the prelatic 'apostolic succession' – the only true basis of ecclesiastical authority – none of them were capable of resisting the Erastian doctrine that authority over their churches' spiritual functions lay ultimately with civil authority. The future Prime Minister had clearly not understood the assertion that the Presbyterian form of church government is agreeable to the Word of God or that in the New Testament the words bishop, presbyter and elder are used to refer to exactly the same office in the Church.

Although in later life, and then depending on the votes of nonconformists in England and Presbyterians in Scotland, W.E. Gladstone came to modify his views on Church–State relations, it really is somewhat perplexing to know how he ever came to secure such support.

Dr. Alexander (Sandy) S. Waugh

REVIEWS

An extraordinary life

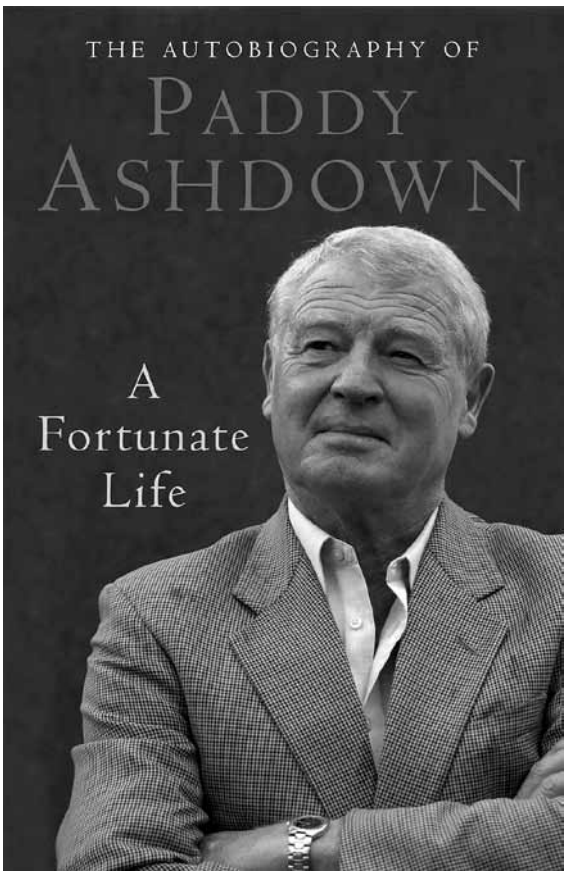
Paddy Ashdown: *A Fortunate Life: The Autobiography of Paddy Ashdown* (Aurum Press, 2009)

Reviewed by **Duncan Brack**

The huge degree of energy and commitment this demanded shine out from this highly engaging autobiography.

The only real problem with this book is that its readers are likely to end up feeling a little inadequate. By the time he was my age, Paddy Ashdown was on to his fourth main career, having spent thirteen years in the Royal Marines and Special Boat Service, four years as a diplomat and spy, another seven years in a variety of jobs (or unemployed) while trying to win Yeovil, and a further seven years as an MP, including almost two years as the first leader of the Liberal Democrats. After standing down as leader in 1999 (the only Liberal Democrat leader to date to resign entirely of his own volition), he had another two years as an MP before becoming, effectively, governor of Bosnia & Herzegovina for four years – and he is still carrying out a variety of jobs and roles while being a member of the party's team in the House of Lords.

The huge degree of energy and commitment this demanded shine out from this highly engaging autobiography. In fact only five chapters (out of sixteen) cover Ashdown's political career, from 1976 to 2001, and much of the material in the three chapters dealing with his leadership will be familiar to anyone who has read his *Diaries* (reviewed in *Journal of Liberal History* 30 and 41). Nevertheless, the earlier chapters are of course relevant to the story of Ashdown the politician, in helping to explain why he became the MP and leader he was. His father, for example (ex-Indian Army, argumentative, politically radical and never afraid to hold a minority opinion) was clearly a key figure in his life; indeed, he claims that 'if there has been a single driver during what I suppose has been a pretty driven life, it has been to do things which would have earned the approval of my father' (p. 28). His upbringing in Northern Ireland left him with a dislike of sectarianism (reinforced by a period of soldiering in the province in 1970–71), and his years at boarding school in Bedford gave him self-confidence and self-discipline, together with an enquiring mind and a drive to



learn and to compete; also self-sufficiency and a dislike of clubbishness. His years in the army, and the social structure behind its officer class, reinforced his progressive beliefs. All these characteristics were still strongly evident to those who worked with him in the party thirty years later.

In general Ashdown is frank and open (and self-deprecating) in his opinions of himself, but there are a few odd omissions; for example, no reflection is offered on his years in the Marines and the Special Boat Service (including combat in Borneo and Northern Ireland) upon leaving them in 1972. Rather more explicable is his lack of comment on his activities as a spy from 1972 to 1976 (or perhaps later, who knows?) – as he says, he 'undertook a lifetime obligation never to reveal in public either the name of the organisation for which I worked or anything beyond the barest outline of what I did' (p. 151). Instead, this chapter focuses on his public activities for the Foreign Office, mainly at the UK mission to the United Nations in Geneva.

Ashdown only joined the Liberal Party by a lucky chance. In January 1974, while digging in the garden of his cottage in Yeovil, he was interrupted by a Liberal canvasser, who 'wore an orange anorak, looked rather unprepossessing and had a squeaky voice to match' (p. 156). Despite his scepticism, he invited him in, and 'two hours later, having discussed liberalism at length in our front room, I discovered that this was what I had really always been. That Liberalism was an old coat that had been hanging in my cupboard, overlooked all these years, just waiting to be taken down and put on' (p. 156). The party has much to thank for the fact that the unnamed visitor (Ashdown tried to locate him later, but never could) was not one of its modern canvassers, trained only to identify existing or probable supporters and to move on, not to waste time discussing politics with them …

The most fascinating chapter, for me, was 'The Winning of Yeovil', the story of Ashdown's seven years' work to take what seemed like a hopelessly unwinnable seat – which did not feature, of course, in the leadership *Diaries*. When Ashdown was selected in November 1976, the Tories had held Yeovil since 1911, the Liberals had generally come third in general elections and had only one councillor in the constituency. The sheer hard bloody slog of the following seven years ought to be compulsory reading for everyone who thinks MPs are in it for their own personal gain; having given up a promising civil service career (a decision he describes as 'naïve to the point of irresponsibility. It just happens also to be the best decision I have made in my life.' (p. 162)), Ashdown had to find a succession of jobs, and spent a year unemployed. He ran down the family savings to the point (in August 1982) where he was virtually bankrupt; only a completely unexpected cheque from the Rowntree Trust saved him from returning, in desperation, to the Foreign Office (another of the might-have-been moments of Lib Dem politics).

Ashdown's strategy for winning Yeovil assumed it would take three elections, including beating Labour into second place in the first one, and concentrating on local elections, delivering leaflets, using the local press and developing and using local, not national, messages. All this is standard orthodoxy now, of course, but was much less common in the mid-1970s (though not unknown; Ashdown acknowledges his debt to Liberals in neighbouring constituencies). The implementation of the strategy included establishing weekly surgeries – to which Ashdown's wife Jane's free coffee and biscuits provided an important enticement – setting up a printing press and running auctions and discos. It also required targeting the Labour-voting areas of the seat – the reverse of the normal Liberal strategy – and recruiting working-class activists. The strain of all this effort on Ashdown and his family is clear. But it worked – he took second place from Labour in 1979, achieving the highest Liberal vote since the war, and the party won all ten council seats it contested on the same day. And in 1983 – at the second try, not the third – he won the seat (a result which was misheard by someone at party HQ, which then issued press releases claiming the Liberals had won 'The Oval').

Several of Ashdown's characteristic features become clear in this chapter. First, his self-belief and love of a challenge, perhaps fuelled by not thinking about it too clearly ahead of time – exemplified by deciding to fight Yeovil in the first place; as he says, quoting David

Penhaligon, he won because 'he was too naïve to know it was impossible (p. 166). Second, his penchant for plans – as in his three-election strategy for the constituency. Third, his political courage; he cites a couple of instances where he took principled positions (over the siting of a care home, and over sales of Westland helicopters to Pinochet's Chile – Westland was the largest local employer) which were unpopular locally. Although his comments caused some local difficulty, they did not appear to damage his prospects in the long term; 'Many voters want their MP to do what is right and often respect those who do, even while disagreeing with them. The scope for a bit of courage in politics is far greater than we think it is.' (p. 199). And finally, his love for the party and his respect for its activists – not a universal characteristic of leaders:

> … all my life I had, I thought, gained satisfaction from working among the elites – from mixing with those who were the best of the best of their profession. The Liberal Party and its members, then and now, do not pretend to be the elite. They are, for the most part, the very ordinary in the best sense of that word. And yet, somewhat to my surprise, I have felt a greater sense of privilege working with them, and been more humbled and inspired by what they were able to achieve through dedication, sacrifice and a refusal to accept the odds, than I ever felt amongst the elites of my previous careers. (p. 170)

One other characteristic of these early days was a reluctance to appear on the national stage; Ashdown was, he admits, 'far too frightened' to speak at his first Liberal Assembly, in 1976. This one didn't last, of course, although he deliberately avoided getting too involved in national party politics, preferring to concentrate on Yeovil. Nevertheless, he opened the – successful – debate on a motion against cruise missiles in 1981 (which led to one of the party's peers asking 'Who is this bloody by scout, Paddy Ashdown?' (p. 200)), which gave him an unwarranted (as he warned the party radicals at the time) reputation as a unilateralist.

The next chapter, about Ashdown's experiences as an MP from 1983 to 1987, is rather sketchier, though it reveals one more characteristic – his tendency to sound self-righteous, and sometimes rather shrill, when speaking in the Commons, which stemmed, he believed, from his dislike – and perhaps fear – of the parliamentary style. It also describes his early planning, which started in late 1986, for the leadership election which was expected to follow the general election.

The three chapters dealing with the leadership, from 1988 to 1999, will be much more familiar to *Journal* readers: the struggle for survival post-merger, as membership, finances and support all crashed disastrously; after that was successfully overcome, beginning to establish distinctive positions for the party, initially over Hong Kong and the Gulf War (which Ashdown reckons was the key event crystallising his own public image), later over education, the environment, Maastricht and Bosnia; the careful attempts to edge the Liberal Democrats and Labour closer together in the wake of Labour's third election defeat in 1992; 'the project' with Blair, and its ultimate failure in the light of New Labour's electoral landslide in 1997 and Blair's inability or unwillingness to deliver anything much of substance.

Along the way Ashdown freely admits his mistakes, including most notably the decision to back the short name 'Democrats' for the merged party in 1988 – 'being a relative outsider compared to the older MPs … I had, in my rush to create the new party, failed to understand that a political party is about more than plans and priorities and policies and chromium-plated organisation. It also has a heart and a history and a soul …' (p. 246). It is also clear how much he relied on his predecessor, David Steel, to help him manage the parliamentary party in the early days.

'The Liberal Party and its members, then and now, do not pretend to be the elite. They are, for the most part, the very ordinary in the best sense of that word.'

He does not discuss whether 'the project' may itself have been an error, though this has been a case argued by many, including, for instance, Tony Greaves ('The "what if" question must be how much more could have been achieved if all that time at the top and personal energy had been spent on something other than "The Project".'[1]) The sheer number of times that Tony Blair claimed he needed more time, after his election in 1997, to deliver major constitutional reform and a closer relationship with the Lib Dems, with Ashdown effectively powerless to press him to move faster, must lead the reader to question whether Blair was ever serious about the relationship. In retrospect, Ashdown reckons he should have pushed for a coalition immediately after the 1997 election:

> It is my experience that far more mistakes are made in life by being too careful than by being too bold … I have come to deeply regret the decisions both of us took that morning, and I suspect that Blair has too. For what we lost in the very early hours of 2 May [1997] was, I think, a unique opportunity to do something really historic: to enter into a partnership government at the optimum moment – not because we have been forced to do so … but on the high ground of principle and in the aftermath of a great victory. This could, in my view, have led to a complete realignment

> of the Centre Left in British politics … and a partnership with the Lib Dems might, I also allow myself to believe, have prevented some of the worst aspects of the Blair government … (p. 303).

In the end, Ashdown thinks that Blair was sincere, but did not care about it enough – so that John Prescott or Gordon Brown were able to talk him out of the coalition strategy. The result was that the two leaders spent much of the following three years 'trying to blow as much heat as we could into the dying embers of a partnership that had lost its fundamental purpose: to "change politics and heal the schism", as Blair himself had put it' (p. 304). Ashdown now recognises that the best chance for a coalition had gone by October 1997, but in the event it took another twelve months for it to disappear entirely: it was Labour's response to the report of the Jenkins Commission on electoral reform in October 1998, which failed to set any timetable for a referendum, and Jack Straw's rubbishing of the proposals in public, which led Ashdown to conclude that 'the project' had failed and that his time as leader should end. (He had already decided, before the 1997 election, that he would stand down at some point in the next parliament.) All of this is explained in more detail in the *Diaries*, of course, but they were in many cases so detailed that readers will gain a better overall picture from reading this book. There is also a little extra material, most notably a comment by Robin Cook (kept out of the *Diaries* because he was still alive at the time of publication) after the Cabinet debate on the Jenkins report that 'he was really worried about Blair's lack of leadership and inability to make decisions sometimes' (p. 322).

The rest of the book is mainly taken up with Bosnia, where Ashdown served as High Representative and EU Special Representative from 2002 to 2006. I could have done with more detail here – Ashdown paints a broad, and often personal and moving, picture, but without explaining at much length the actions he took – but perhaps that's waiting for another book.

Paddy Ashdown is the most significant Liberal leader since Jo Grimond. It is probable that the party would have collapsed entirely without his leadership – instead, it recovered from a standing in the opinion polls within the statistical margin of error of zero to win a higher number of Commons seats than at any time since 1929. Although his ultimate aim – to change the system of government in Britain – failed, it was worth the attempt (and some aspects of Labour's constitutional reforms would probably not have been implemented without the pre-election agreement with the Liberal Democrats).

This book is of substantial importance to the history of the Liberal Democrats and to the study of Liberal leadership. And more than that, it is a highly engaging and readable record not just of a remarkable political career but of an entire life lived at a furious pace – as Ashdown himself says in conclusion, quoting Lao Tse, 'with the speed of a galloping horse'.

Duncan Brack is the Editor of the Journal of Liberal History*, and the author of 'Liberal Democrat Leadership: The Cases of Ashdown and Kennedy',* Political Quarterly *78:1, 2007.*

1 Tony Greaves, 'Audacious – but fundamentally flawed', review of *The Ashdown Diaries – Volume 1: 1988–1997, Journal of Liberal History* 30 (spring 2001).

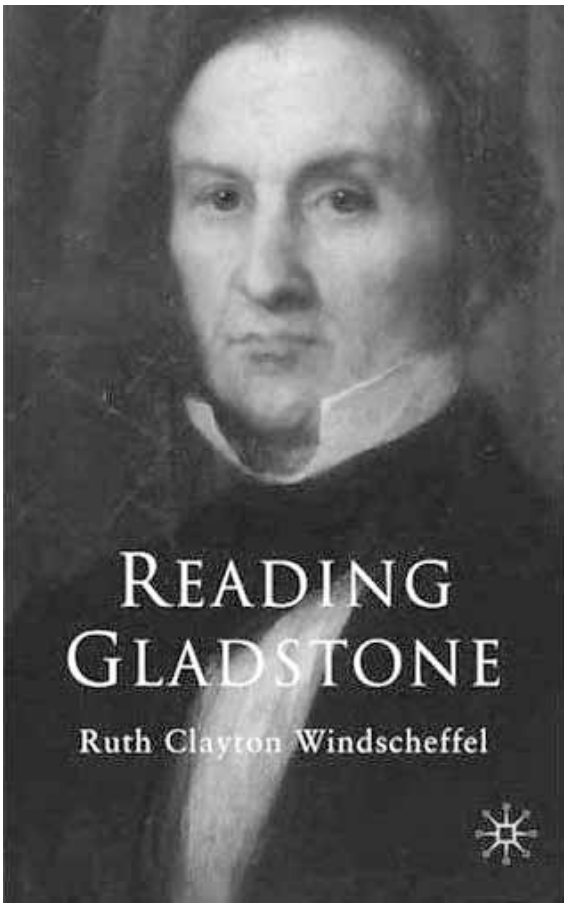
Reading the man through his books

Ruth Clayton Windscheffel, *Reading Gladstone* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

Reviewed by **Eugenio F. Biagini**

The Grand Old Man (GOM) has inspired so many biographies and monographs that writing something new about him is – one would be justified in believing – pretty hard. Yet, Dr Windscheffel deserves to be congratulated on producing one of the most original and thought-provoking books to have appeared on this subject since Colin Matthew's 1998 masterly biography. Her strategy is simple: 'read' the man through the books he read. Such method would not necessarily work with politicians who were less intellectual than 'Mr G.' – although the reading habits of, let us say, Thatcher or Major might yield enough materials for interesting *short* articles. By contrast, in Gladstone's case there is an embarrassment of riches, and even this substantial monograph does not fully exhaust the subject (indeed, Windscheffel herself has recently produced a further important paper on a related topic, which she delivered at the Chester Bicentenary Conference in July 2009).

According to the entries in his diary, by the time he died in 1898, Gladstone had read about 20,000 volumes, written by over 4,500 different authors. His personal library included 30,000 titles, many containing his annotations and comments (which were often refreshingly frank, such as 'A "rollicking"[,] impudent, mendacious book' in William Cobbett's *Protestant Reformation*). The questions on which *Reading Gladstone* focuses are partly biographical ('What led him to the books he bought and read? What was it about him – his personality, aspirations, anxieties – that made him read?' (p. 3)), and partly historical, such as the author's systematic and usually successful attempt to decipher the way specific books influenced Gladstone's attitude to political and social problems, such as the Pope's claims to infallibility or Irish Nationalist demands for Home Rule. Her analysis of the GOM's annotations and diaries is revealing even when applied to apparently unpromising works: for example, his collection of travel guides discloses that 'Gladstone was an inquisitive, independent-minded, and interactive traveller. His reading and use of tourist guides and maps … reveals both his desire to be informed about the foreign environments in which he found himself, and also his determination not to be passively reliant on such information' (p. 75).



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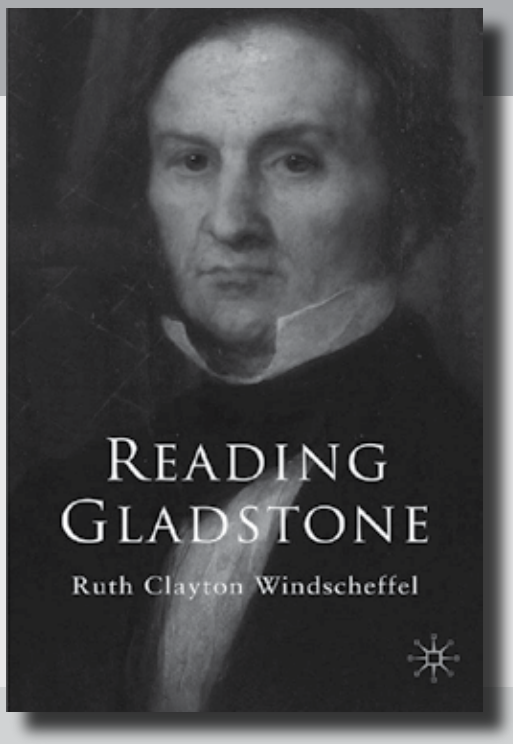

Reading Gladstone

by Ruth Clayton Windscheffel

October 2008

Hardback | ~~£55.00~~ £27.50 | 978-0-230-00765-9

'Reading Gladstone is a sophisticated study, written in a remarkably mature and accessible style...Windscheffel is not only good at reading Gladstone: she also has much to tell us about the Victorian Age and its Church.'
- Professor Wheeler, *The Church Times*

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Windscheffel covers the whole span of Gladstone's career as a bibliophile, from his earliest steps in book-buying as a child to his endowing and building of St Deiniol's Library at Hawarden (in North Wales) at the end of his life. St Deiniol's became a centre for theological and historical studies, Anglican in spirit but open to all. It was perhaps the first 'residential library' in the country and became a model for other similar establishments which were founded in the twentieth century, such as the Ancient India and Iran Trust at Cambridge.

St Deiniol's replicated some of the features, and certainly the spirit, of Gladstone's own 'Temple of Peace', his study at Hawarden Castle. The latter was designed and conceived as a space of intense academic and intellectual engagement, and in this respect contrasted sharply with the spirit and function of the conventional 'gentleman's library', where books would not necessarily be used, but rather displayed 'as a matter of form' (as Gladstone lamented (p. 148)). His being so much out of step with convention was at first a political disadvantage: at the time 'gentlemen', and especially politicians, were expected to be faintly anti-intellectual and actively 'practical' in their approach to the public sphere, and Gladstone's scholarly relationship with his library seemed more appropriate to a 'monk' than a statesman. In fact, it attracted embarrassing comments on his masculinity. In a fascinating section of her book, Windscheffel studies how Gladstone responded to such characterisations, especially in the aftermath of the 1846 Conservative Party split over the Repeal of the Corn Laws, when cartoonists contrasted his 'intellectual' and 'feminine' attitude to the crisis with the pragmatic and 'masculine' motives displayed by his colleagues. Over the 1850s and 1860s he managed to recast his own public image and, indirectly, the standards by which statesmen should be judged. First, he asserted himself as the 'scholar-politician', the Chancellor of the Exchequer characterised by an undisputed mastery of Treasury facts and figures. In order to cultivate such an image he encouraged the portrayal, in photographs and watercolours, of himself at work surrounded by books, whether in Downing Street or at Hawarden. Thus '[h]is library was represented as a place of useful work rather than as a symbol of privilege or a scholar's ivory tower. The "Grand Old Bookman" was continuing the work of popular liberalism albeit from inside a Castle library' (p. 234). This strategy of turning his alleged clerical shortcomings to his political advantage was further developed in later years; by the late 1870s 'the People's William' emerged as the semi-revivalist statesman. He confused the critics of his monk-like habits by developing what John Vincent described as a 'semi-Episcopal' approach to leadership, and asserted his moral entitlement to the 'pastoral' care of his flock, including a 'magisterial' approach to their instruction for the purpose of leading them along a narrow path, through fiscal responsibility and political liberalism, to a fuller sense of citizenship and humanity.

She has produced a perceptive, sympathetic and brilliant reconstruction of an intimately and yet publicly important dimension of the personality and career of one of the greatest Liberal leaders of all times.

Windscheffel's central argument is that '[r]eading was for Gladstone not merely a matter of hermeneutics – the interior art of interpretation – it was significantly also the springboard for his exegesis – or expository discourse – to others' (p. 236). In this superbly researched book she has fully established her case. In the process she has produced a perceptive, sympathetic and brilliant reconstruction of an intimately and yet publicly important dimension of the personality and career of one of the greatest Liberal leaders of all times.

Eugenio Biagini is an alumnus of the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa, and has taught at Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Princeton, NJ, before joining the Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge, where he teaches British and Irish history.

A neglected party

David Dutton, *Liberals in Schism – A History of the National Liberal Party* (Tauris Academic Studies, 2008).

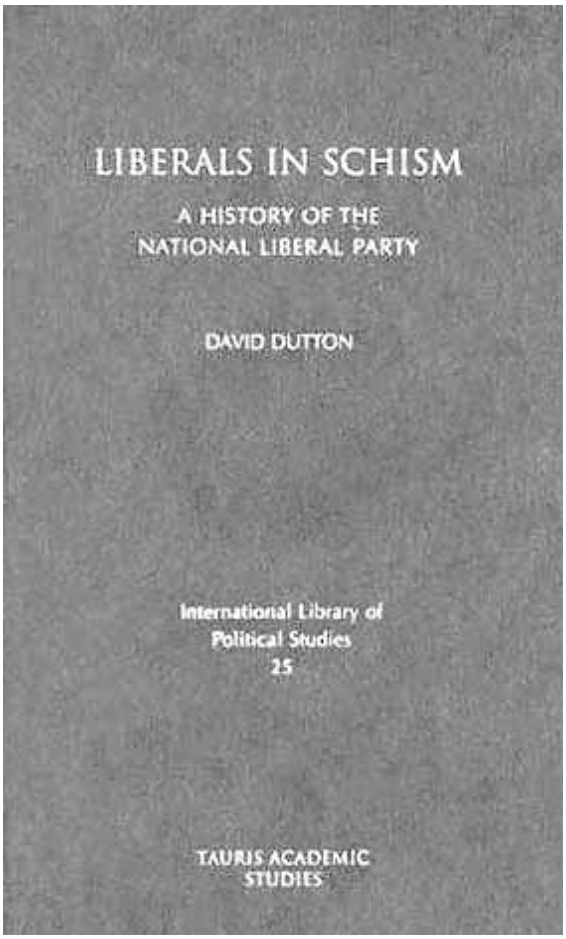
Reviewed by **Malcolm Baines**

Following the publication of *A History of the Liberal Party* in 2004, Professor David Dutton of Liverpool University has now turned his attention in this new publication to the party's neglected ugly sister. In doing this, he has shed a perceptive and sympathetic light on the Liberal Nationals (after 1945, the National Liberals) who broke away from the Liberal Party in 1931 over the extent to which the National Government could abandon the traditional Liberal support for international free trade to deal with the economic and fiscal crisis that marked the onset of the Great Depression.

The Liberal Nationals have been written out of the history of liberalism in the twentieth century. Indeed, many Liberals

have argued that they were not liberals at all, being in effect crypto-Conservatives from the moment that they failed to follow the Liberal Cabinet ministers, Samuel and Sinclair, in resigning in September 1932 over the creation of a formal system of imperial preference. In part, this is because history is invariably written by the winners, and in this instance neither the present-day Liberal Party nor the Conservative Party have had much reason to remember them. It is, however, not often realised that Clement Davies, leader of the Liberal Party between 1945 and 1956, was a Liberal National MP throughout the 1930s, nor that well-known former Cabinet ministers such as Michael Heseltine and John Nott began their political careers as candidates of joint Conservative and National Liberal associations.

David Dutton has written the first balanced account of the history of the National Liberals in this well-researched and well-written book covering the whole of the party's history. It starts with its genesis as a group of Liberal Party MPs in the 1929–31 Parliament who thought Lloyd George too sympathetic to Ramsay MacDonald's Labour government, and ends in 1968 when the party formally wound itself up, some twenty years after the merging of the constituency organisations through the Woolton-Teviot pact with the Tories had led most outside observers to conclude that it had lost what little independence it had left.



Dr Dutton astutely picks up the different themes that characterised the Liberal Nationals during the period, starting with the extent to which they could be contrasted with those Liberals who supported Sir Herbert Samuel's decision to leave the National Government. On policy grounds the Liberal Nationals stood for a willingness to abandon the Liberal shibboleth of free trade in favour of supporting greater government intervention in the economy in response to the Great Depression of the 1930s. More importantly, the Liberal Nationals were characterised by a conviction that Liberal MPs could do more good inside a National Government than outside it. Dutton powerfully argues the case that the Liberal National leaders – including such relatively well-known figures as Sir John Simon, Walter Runciman and Leslie Hore-Belisha – not only held a disproportionate number of ministerial posts but also enabled Baldwin, the Conservative leader (and prime minister from 1935 to 1937) to exclude the Tory right from both power and office in the 1930s. Moreover, it was not until the failure of the Liberal–Liberal National merger negotiations during the Second World War that the permanency of the split was acknowledged by the two groups. Until that point, for most local Liberal associations their loyalty was to the local MP and not to the official Liberal Party nationally. Indeed the Liberal Year Book continued to include pictures of MPs from both camps well into the 1930s.

The Second World War changed the political landscape dramatically by bringing Labour to power in 1945. At one stroke this removed the Liberal Nationals' role as leaven to a National Government whilst at the same time making a Liberal–Conservative rapprochement more important to the Tories if they were to create a united anti-socialist front. Simultaneously, Conservatives in the areas of former Liberal National strength were becoming increasingly restive at having to defer electorally to a junior partner whose organisation, never robust to begin with (as Dutton explored in the *Journal* last year in relation to Wrexham), was ceasing to exist. The Woolton-Teviot pact of 1948 marked the formalisation of the merger between the local party organisations of the Conservatives and the National Liberals, although the parliamentary group continued to meet separately.

Dutton then looks at the role of the National Liberals once the Conservatives returned to office in 1951. He struggles to find much evidence that it had one, other than as a quaint relic of previous political history. Much reduced in size and influence and including some members with a Conservative rather than a Liberal background, Dutton sees the party acting as something of a pressure group against Butskellism and the willingness of the Tories not to challenge the consensus put in place by the Attlee government rather than as an independent political party. He goes on, however, to highlight in an interesting way both the extent to which the National

Liberals could be regarded as proto-Thatcherite and the connections they had with figures such as John Poulson, who later became better known for reasons other than his support for the National Liberals.

The party finally came to an end after Labour's electoral victory in 1966, unloved by both its erstwhile partner, the Conservative Party, and the Liberals who, under the leadership of Jo Grimond, had begun their move from being a right-of-centre, pro-small-business, free-trade party to a left-of-centre, socially radical party concerned with constitutional reform and local government.

This is a good, readable yet scholarly history of the National Liberal Party throughout its short but eventful life. To anyone fascinated by the reasons for the Liberal Party's survival in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, it provides an experiment in what might have happened to British liberalism were it not for Samuel, Sinclair and their followers. The book deals with an area that had been largely neglected by Liberal historians, who have tended to follow leading politicians from all parties in writing off the Liberal Nationals as ineffectual and self-serving. Dutton's study therefore makes interesting reading for Liberals as to what might have been: after all, the debate about whether Liberals have more influence through membership of a wider 'sympathetic' political grouping or through a pristine independence is one that has continued to the present.

After reading history at Selwyn College, Cambridge and the University of Lancaster, Malcolm Baines completed a D.Phil. at Exeter College, Oxford, entitled 'The survival of the British Liberal Party 1932–1959' in 1990. He now works in taxation for a hotel, property and retail group.

How the Liberal Party fared 1939–45

Andrew Thorpe, *Parties at War: Political Organisation in Second World War Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2009)
Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

The fine reputation of Andrew Thorpe, Professor of History at the University of Exeter, as a top-ranking political historian was made by such seminal works as *The British General Election of 1931* (1991) and, more recently, *A History of the British Labour Party* (2008). The present, even more impressive work, based on meticulous research throughout, examines the internal organisation of the three major political parties in Britain between 1939 and 1945. It arose from the author's self-confessed 'double curiosity' (p. vii) – a desire to research the many surviving local records of the political parties, scattered in numerous record offices and libraries throughout the realm, and a deep-rooted wish to re-evaluate the development of these parties during the Second World War.

Dr Thorpe's intensive research unveiled no fewer than 106 groups of records deriving from the Labour Party, 96 for the Conservatives, and just 26 emanating from the Liberal Party. For regional party archives, the survival rate was much more equal (p. 9). It was gratifying for the present reviewer to find such heavy use made of the extensive Cardiganshire Liberal Association Records in the custody of the National Library of Wales. Strangely, those of the Montgomeryshire Liberal Association, equally extensive, have been quarried far less frequently. As far as the personal archives of Liberal politicians are concerned, especially effective use has been made of the Lloyd George Papers and the Sir Percy Harris Papers at the Parliamentary Archive, the House of Lords, and those of Sir William Beveridge at BLPES (the British Library of Political and Economic Science). All these sources have clearly yielded much significant and fresh material.

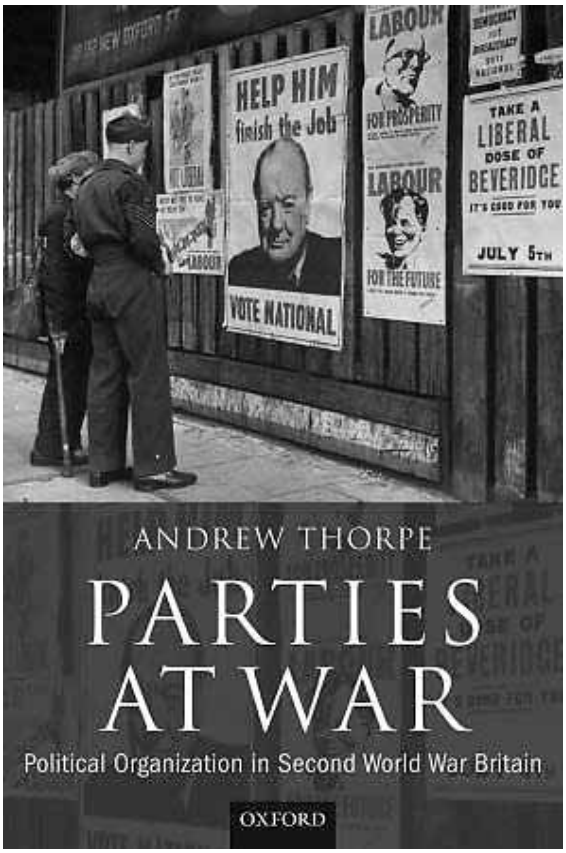
The debate about whether Liberals have more influence through membership of a wider 'sympathetic' political grouping or through a pristine independence is one that has continued to the present.

Thorpe's text is divided into eight discrete chapters which examine in turn the management of the political parties nationally (particularly their leaders and headquarters), those who stood as parliamentary candidates and became MPs, those who served as regional and local agents and organisers (especially their numbers and changing roles), the membership of the parties, and the events and activities (or sometimes conspicuous lack of activity) which took place in the constituencies. Social as well as political activities are considered here in three fine chapters. A short discussion of the parties' funding and finances precedes a brief concluding section.

The author presents some interesting material on the role of Liberal politicians in helping to bring about the fall of Neville Chamberlain and his succession by Churchill in May 1940 and the extent to which some of them were then rewarded with ministerial positions. He tends to be critical of the leadership of Sir Archibald Sinclair, who remained at the helm from 1935 until 1945, and was anxious to continue the coalition government even after the end of the

war in Europe in 1945. This reflected both a fundamental 'hunger for power' and a belief that such a post-war administration would be 'essentially liberal' (p. 51). Much space is given to the role of the National Liberals during the war years and their relationship with the mainstream party. There is also a fresh reconsideration of the Liberal campaign in the July 1945 general election, their humiliation at the polls and the party's generally positive, upbeat (possibly ostrich-like) response to electoral defeat.

George Grey, the MP for Berwick, was the only Liberal MP to be killed on active service during the war years. It was his death which led to the election of Sir William Beveridge to the House of Commons, a much-needed boost to the flagging morale and fortunes of the Liberal Party. Even so, both Sinclair and Major Gwilym Lloyd-George apparently had their doubts about the course of events (p. 54). Megan Lloyd George, the Liberal MP for Anglesey since 1929, who broadcast to the nation no fewer than fourteen times between October 1942 and October 1943, was also increasingly in the public eye. Yet all too often the party failed to act in unison in the lobbies of the Commons, conspicuously failing to render consistent support to the government and exasperating Churchill, who even formally complained to Sinclair about his unruly followers and threatened to reduce the number of Liberal MPs who held ministerial office. In Dr Thorpe's words, 'But little changed, and the continuing inability of the LPP [Liberal Parliamentary Party] to act as a unit did little to improve the party's image or profile' (p. 71).



Thorpe has also undertaken some fascinating research work on the role of women within the organisation of the Liberal Party during the war years. He concludes that, although there had emerged 'some prominent women' within the party by this time, it was generally woefully tardy to select women parliamentary candidates. Twenty Liberal women were eventually nominated in 1945.

Turning to the role of the full-time salaried agent within the Liberal Party, the author finds that the number of such agents had declined markedly during the 1930s, and a scheme launched by the *Manchester Guardian* whereby party agents could earn commission by enrolling new subscribers to the newspaper tended to flounder. During the war years there was no improvement, and many agents joined the armed forces. There was no new drive until after 1945. Dr Thorpe's meticulous researches into party membership found that the experience of each of the major political parties was broadly similar: generally the period of three years from May 1940 was one of sustained decline. Thereafter a renewed political polarisation in the wake of the impact of the famous Beveridge Report, escalating calls for post-war reconstruction and the real impact of the dynamic Radical Action group saw the launch of a renewed recruitment drive which achieved some, if patchy, success. There was certainly an inflow of new Liberal Party members in 1944–45, some of whom were destined to play a key role during the 1950s.

More space is devoted to constituency associations and activities than to any other theme; a whole chapter is given to each of the parties. Many Liberal associations had floundered during the 1930s, and only a partial success was achieved during the war years in the attempt to revive them. The relatively paltry total of 306 Liberal candidates in July 1945 was partly a reflection of this failure. Thorpe's detailed research found evidence of local disagreements, financial difficulties and a deep-rooted political malaise. The Meston reforms of 1936 had not been a great success. But lively Liberal campaigns did surface on the rising cost of living in 1938 and old age pensions the following year. Grassroots activity was generally unimpressive, but at least continued to exist in most areas, laying the foundation for revival in the 1950s and thereafter. In north Wales, predictably, the influence of Lloyd George (the MP for the Caernarvon Boroughs ever since 1890) remained potent. When he proposed a negotiated peace with Germany in October 1939, uproar erupted in the proceedings of the North Wales Liberal Federation. Just a week earlier old LG had felt compelled severely to water down a speech in his constituency as a result of repeated warnings about the strong pro-war views of his audience (p. 223).

The final chapter examines pecuniary matters. The author probably exaggerates the extent to which the Liberal Party had

been dependent on the sale of honours and the infamous Lloyd George Fund during the inter-war period (p. 268). After all, there were times and general elections when the 'Welsh Wizard' had been most reluctant to share it. Although by 1945 the Liberal Party was not as impoverished as is often suggested and indeed spent a considerable sum on the general election campaign, for the first time in that year its candidates were outspent by those of the Labour Party. The total of only 307 Liberal candidates was partly the result of financial pressures.

Overall this most impressive tome has given us a fuller picture than ever available before of the story of the major political parties between 1939 and 1945. Professor Thorpe has made use of a very wide range of disparate source materials to illuminate with impeccable scholarship the role and organisation of the political parties throughout these crucial years. The regional aspect of his work is also striking, with regional trends and differences always in the foreground of the analysis. Although the timespan of the analysis is relatively short, there are constant references to the backdrop of the inter-war years and to the development of the political parties during the long 1950s too.

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

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ARCHIVES

Palmerston's papers at the Hartley Library, University of Southampton

by **Karen Robson**

Henry John Temple, third Viscount Palmerston, born in 1784 at Broadlands, Hampshire, was the elder son of Henry Temple, second Viscount Palmerston, and his second wife, Mary Mee. Palmerston was educated at Harrow and then sent to study with Dugald Stewart in Edinburgh before finally proceeding to St John's College, Cambridge in 1803. In the previous year, at the age of seventeen, Palmerston had succeeded to the title.

Palmerston secured a seat in Parliament in 1806, through the offices of his guardian, Lord Malmesbury, and remained an MP until his death in office fifty-eight years later in 1865. In 1809 he accepted the post of Secretary at War, declining that of Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was to remain in the War Office for nearly twenty years. Palmerston was a long-serving Foreign Secretary, filling the post on three occasions: 1830–34, 1835–41 and 1846–51. He subsequently served as Home Secretary (1852–55) before being becoming Prime Minister, 1855–58 and 1858–65.

Palmerston's papers form part of MS 62. The archive is predominately composed of correspondence relating to Palmerston's political career. This semi-official correspondence, which covers the whole of his ministerial career from 1809 until 1865, accounts for most of the 40,000 items in the archive.

The semi-official papers are divided into a number of sequences. The royal (RC) and general (GC) correspondence are the most significant in terms of both content and size. The royal section includes correspondence with William IV, 1830–37, Queen Victoria, 1837–65, and Prince Albert, 1840–61, as well as their private secretaries, Victoria, Duchess of Kent, Edward, Prince of Wales and the Dukes of Cambridge, Edinburgh and Sussex. By far the largest sequence is that of general correspondence (GC), which is arranged alphabetically by correspondent. Although it covers the period 1809–65, the general correspondence is concentrated in particular periods. This material is supported by a number of smaller sequences, which for the most part have a more subject-based arrangement.

Palmerston gained especial renown in the field of foreign affairs. The widely held contemporary image of him was of the staunch defender of Britain, who would 'uphold old England's glorious fame' and would use any means to achieve this. It is perhaps fitting, therefore, that of the collection as a whole, about three-quarters consists of Palmerston's papers as Foreign Secretary. A substantial quantity of this material, to be found in the GC series, is composed of his private correspondence with British diplomats, although there are also five hundred letters to Lord John Russell, the Prime Minister, for the period 1846–51. The breadth of this correspondence provides a testament to the range of British global interests and to the volatility of the international scene. Subjects range from the formation of Belgium and Italy, the 1848 revolutions in Europe,

British interests in and diplomatic relations with India, Afghanistan and China, and relations with Canada and the United States of America, as well as piracy in north Africa, the Eastern Question and British attempts to reform the Turkish navy and military.

The communications from William IV, within the RC series, are to Palmerston as Foreign Secretary. They relate to Belgium and the Eastern Question, civil wars in Spain and Portugal and liberalism in Germany and Italy. Early letters from Queen Victoria to Palmerston seek his advice on matters of diplomatic protocol. By the 1840s, however, the correspondence engages more fully with foreign affairs and the Queen concerns herself particularly with European sovereigns.

A number of small series of papers on foreign affairs, and mainly for Palmerston as Foreign Secretary, supplement this royal and general correspondence. These comprise of: (BD) despatches, 1822–51, and (MM) memoranda, 1801–65, arranged alphabetically by country; (SLT) papers and letters relating to the slave trade and slavery; and (FO) letters and papers on foreign affairs, arranged by subject. Amongst the MM series are: a Foreign Office memorandum on communications with the United States of America relating to Cuba; a memorandum by Palmerston on 'certain circumstances connected to the *Coup d'État* December 1851' in France; notes by Palmerston on diplomatic proceedings in 1830 relating to Algiers; a memorandum on the political state of Persia, 1835; one advocating military action in Afghanistan rather than Persia, 1838; and notes on the defence of Mexico. While the miscellaneous and patronage correspondence (MPC) covers a much broader time period, the majority of the letters fall within the five years 1836–41 and concern applications for posts in Palmerston's gift as Foreign Secretary.

Some of the official minutes and working papers in the collection are similar to those surviving in the Foreign Office records (TNA FO 96/17–22, FO 800/382) and the drafts of despatches relate to a series of entry books and precis books in the British Library (Add MSS 48439–577, 49963–9) which were once in the collections at Broadlands. An important sequence of Palmerston's correspondence with Sir George Villiers has been published in the HMC Prime Minister's Papers series, *Palmerston I: Private correspondence with Sir George Villiers (afterwards fourth Earl of Clarendon) as minister to Spain 1833–1837,* ed. R. Bullen and F. Strong (London, 1985).

The papers from Palmerston's long service as Secretary at War (1809–28) are few in comparison and the correspondence generally is meagre prior to 1830. The deficiency is partly made up by the survival of political journals for 1806–07 and 1828–29 (D1–D2), by other diaries and journals (D3–D24), and by the autobiographical sketch that he wrote for Lady Cowper shortly before their marriage (D26).

For Palmerston's years as Home Secretary and Prime Minister there is royal correspondence, correspondence with Cabinet colleagues – in particular 450 letters between 1859 and 1865 with his Foreign Secretary, Lord John Russell – material relating to Cabinet matters and to domestic and foreign business. These last include papers and minutes circulated to cabinet (CAB), papers relating to national defence, including coastal fortification, the army, navy, militia and Ordnance (ND), and subject files relating to home affairs (HA). The papers are more fragmentary than those for the years as Foreign Secretary, with a notable absence of general correspondence. The most probable reason for this is that Palmerston's death in office involved a hasty sorting of the papers and considerable destruction.

The main Palmerston archive is supplemented by family correspondence of Viscount Palmerston and of his wife, Emily, formerly Lady Cowper, 1791–1869 (MS 62 BR 22–30), a volume of correspondence between Palmerston and John Wilson Croker, 1810–56 (MS 273), and letters from Constantine Henry Phipps, first Marquis of Normanby, British ambassador to Paris, to Palmerston, July–August 1848 (MS 376). The last, written at a time of unrest and revolution in Europe, concerns the French proposition for joint mediation in Italy.

The Palmerston Papers Database, an online catalogue of the collection, is available at www.southampton.ac.uk/archives. Summary descriptions of the semi-official correspondence, together with that of the family correspondence of Lord and Lady Palmerston, form the first section of the database. The detailed catalogue descriptions are a work in progress, at present concentrating on two series of correspondence, the first of British diplomats stationed overseas, the second of British government ministers. The diplomatic correspondence, which covers the period from 1830 until 1864, includes material on Belgium, Turkey and Greece, Prussian foreign policy, Sardinia and Austria. The focus of the ministerial correspondence is predominately on home affairs.

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History Group website: help needed

The Liberal Democrat History Group is looking for volunteers to help with work on the group's website, **www.liberalhistory.org.uk.**

Originally established to carry news about our activities, the website has since grown substantially through the ongoing *Liberal History Online* project. Nothing anywhere else on the web makes available such a wide range of pages, links and electronic documents covering major topics and personalities in British Liberal history.

We need volunteers to help us develop *Liberal History Online* by reviewing and editing the existing material, and working with us to identify and fill gaps and additional material required.

A background in modern British history would be helpful, but even better would be experience in editing and proof-reading internet publications. No special technical knowledge is necessary other than basic familiarity with computers and the web.

Please send your contact details to **Duncan Brack** at **journal@liberalhistory.org.uk**.

Mark Oaten hit the headlines in January 2006 when, shortly after announcing he was withdrawing from the race to succeed Charles Kennedy as leader of the Lib Dems, he was caught up in the biggest political scandal of the year, when the *News of the World* told the country he had been seeing a male escort. His world collapsed. Until the story broke Mark had been the Lib Dems' home affairs spokesman.

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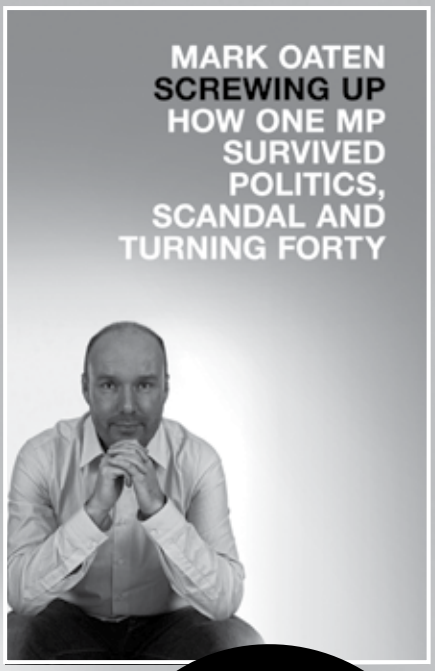

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A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

A DELICATE BALANCE

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