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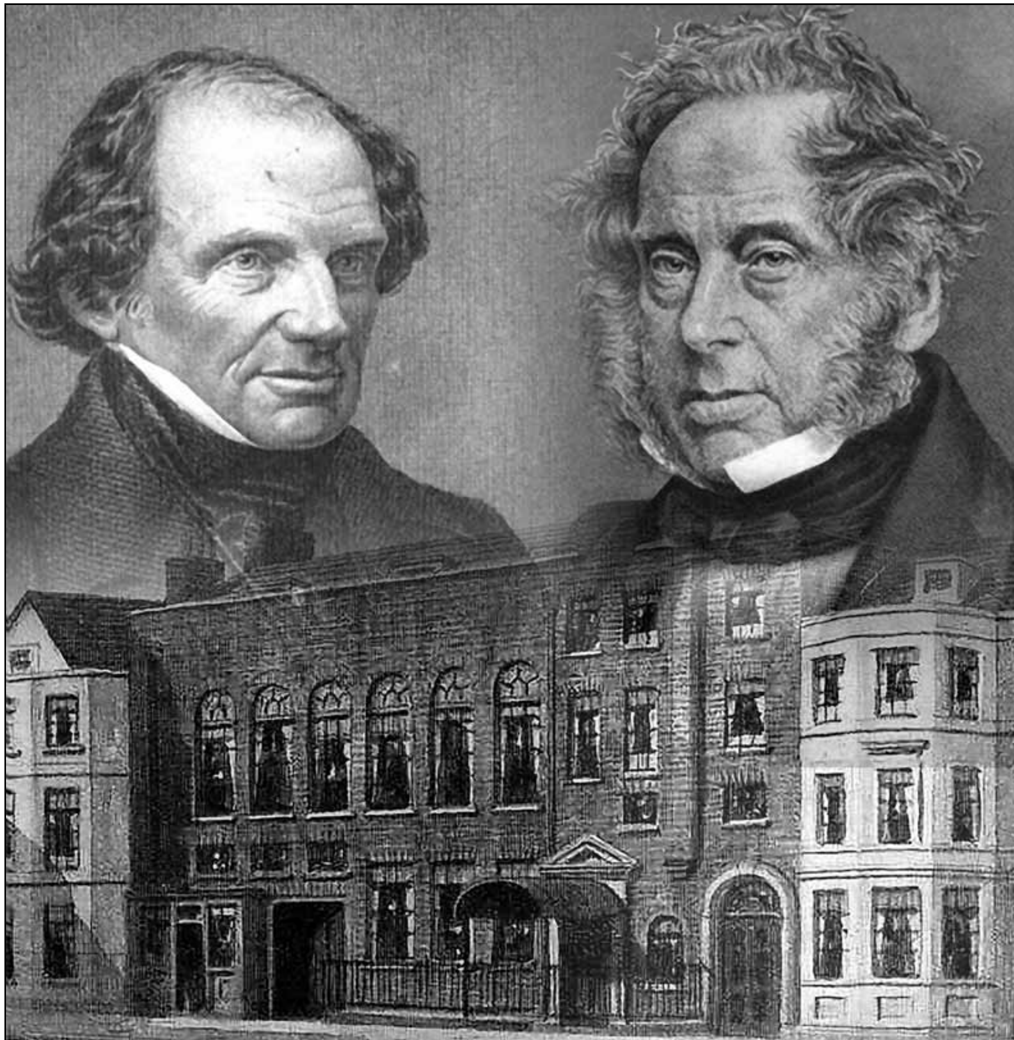

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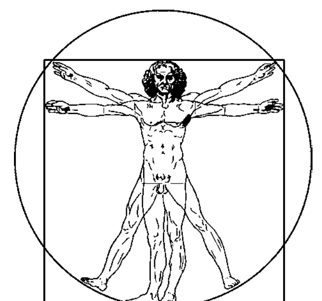

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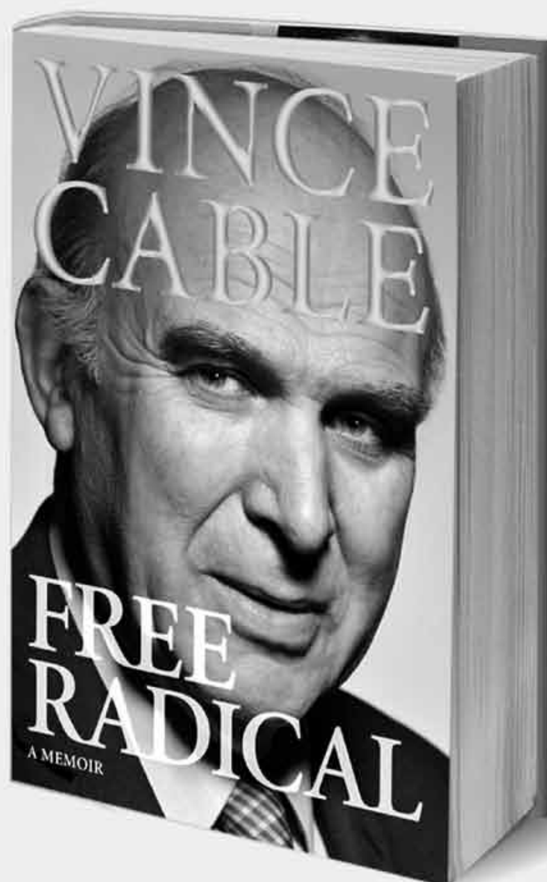

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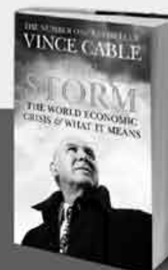

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Liberal Democrat History Group

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

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**.

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LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS WINTER 2009–10

Liberal History News is a new regular feature in the *Journal*, reporting news of meetings, conferences, commemorations, dinners or any other event, together with anything else of contemporary interest to our readers. Contributions are very welcome; please keep them reasonably concise, and accompany them, if possible, with photos. Email to the Editor on **journal@liberalhistory.org.uk**.

Unveiling of Bright's statue; from left: Cllr Martin Mullaney, Stephanie Hightower, Cllr Ernie Hendricks

John Bright remembered in Birmingham

On 23 October 2009, a statue to John Bright MP was unveiled inside Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. The statue, an exact replica of which stands in the Westminster Parliament, was first unveiled in Birmingham in 1888 but it was taken down about forty years ago for cleaning and never put back. Birmingham Liberal Democrat councillor Ernie Hendricks found out about the statue and worked with Museum and Art Gallery staff to ensure its restoration ready for the 200th anniversary of the birth of John Bright in 2011. It has been replaced in its original position at the top of the Museum's main stairs.

John Bright was a Quaker, a great Victorian moralist and orator. He is best remembered for his part in the campaign against the Corn Laws, leading up to their repeal in 1846. The Corn Laws artificially inflated the price of bread, which the poor could ill afford, and repeal immediately improved the standard of living for ordinary people.

Bright also campaigned to extend the vote to skilled working men at a time when only a limited number of men (and no women) had the vote; Bright wanted all men to have the vote because only in this way did he feel that government would be responsive to the needs and wishes of the people. The result was the Reform Act of 1867, passed by Disraeli's government, which gave the vote to skilled working men in the towns.

Bright was MP for Durham and Manchester before becoming Liberal MP for Birmingham from 1858 until his death in 1889. He fell out with Manchester following his attacks on Britain's involvement in the Crimean War. He was briefly a minister under Gladstone, the first ever Quaker to sit in the Cabinet, but he did not believe in Irish Home Rule and like that other great Birmingham Liberal, Joseph Chamberlain, he fought Gladstone in 1886 as a Liberal Unionist.

It was Bright's connections with the United States which were to feature most heavily in the speech delivered by Cllr Martin Mullaney, Birmingham's Liberal Democrat Cabinet member for Culture, at the statue unveiling. Bright was admired by President Abraham Lincoln, who described him as 'the friend of our country, and of freedom everywhere'. Bright was highly influential in preventing Britain from supporting the Confederacy in the American Civil War, even though Britain had strong commercial interests in breaking the Northern blockade of the South to obtain cotton supplies.

Bright's letters to US Senator Charles Sumner were regularly read to Lincoln throughout the war, and through this correspondence Bright has been identified as a key influence on Lincoln's decision to free the slaves. When Lincoln was assassinated, a newspaper article about the presidency written by Bright was found on his body. One of the two paintings in Lincoln's study was a portrait of Bright. Today, just inside the main entrance of the White House is a bust of John Bright, which was

found by Jackie Kennedy in the 1960s in the basement and put back on display.

Given this background, it was therefore only appropriate that Stephanie Hightower, the president of USA Track and Field, the national governing body for athletics in America, helped unveil Bright's statue in Birmingham. The US team for the 2012 Olympics has announced it will train in Birmingham ahead of the Games and Ms Hightower said she was pleased to be associated with Bright's connections to America.

John Stuart Mill conference, November 2009

As advertised in the last issue of the *Journal*, on 14 November 2009, the Liberal Democrat History Group, the London School of Economics and the British Liberal Political Studies Group co-hosted a one-day symposium to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the publication of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*.

An audience of about fifty heard and discussed a series of papers covering different aspects of Mill's life and significance, both to Liberal history and to politics more broadly. Participants were also able to visit the archive of papers left by Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor and held at the LSE.

We are currently planning to publish at least some of the papers from the symposium – suitably redrafted to reflect the discussions – in a future special issue of the *Journal*.

One hundred years of Pickering Liberal Club

In August 1909, crowds gathered to celebrate the opening of the Liberal Club in Pickering in the Thirsk & Malton constituency in North Yorkshire. In the absence of a Liberal MP for Pickering itself, the Club was opened by John Edward Ellis, the MP for the Nottinghamshire constituency of Rushcliffe. Ellis had Yorkshire connections: he had served his apprenticeship at a firm of Leeds engineers, his wife came from Scarborough and was a member of the Yorkshire Quaker Rowntree dynasty, and Ellis also owned a country estate at Wrea Head, Scalby.[1]

Over the following hundred years, Pickering Liberal Club managed to withstand the political and economic forces which saw the Liberal Party decline and hundreds of Liberal Clubs all over the country go out of business. In 1931, David Lloyd George visited the Club and addressed a huge crowd outside. But Pickering never boasted a Liberal MP until 1986, when Elizabeth Shields won the Ryedale by-election[2] and the Club was visited by the then Liberal leader David Steel as part of the by-election campaign.

The Club has been housed in the present imposing building, overlooking Smiddy Hill, since Victorian times and is still the headquarters of Ryedale Liberal Democrats. The original Club is described as having been located in Hall Garth but may have occupied the same site as the present Victorian building. It was built after a local benefactor, John Frank, gave two cottages to the Liberal Party for the creation of a headquarters and it was probably at the location in Pickering where the cattle market was held generations ago. The fact that Smiddy is a derivative of Smithy suggests it was also near the spot where farm horses were shod.

For many years, the Liberal Democrats used the building as a social club, but today it is the home of a weekly flea market and party offices, while the remainder has been converted into two flats. The centenary on Saturday 15 August 2009 was celebrated with champagne and strawberries. Guests of honour included Elizabeth Shields, Cllr Howard Keal (the present Lib Dem PPC for Thirsk & Malton) and Keith Snowden, great-grandson of Councillor John Snowden, who laid the foundation-stone of the club in 1908. A ceremonial silver key to the building, itself kept under lock and key off the premises, still forms part of the Club archive.[3]

Top: David Lloyd George speaks at Pickering. 1 May 1931.

Below: Thirsk & Malton Liberal Democrat celebrations, August 2009. From left: Cllr Jane De Wend Fenton, former MP Elizabeth Shields, Lib Dem PPC Cllr Howard Keal, Cllr Stephen Jenson. (Photo credit: The Press, York.)

Some of the organisers of the Mill symposium

1 Alan R Griffin, 'John Edward Ellis', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online, OUP 2004–09.

2 Elizabeth Shields, *A Year to Remember* (Liberal Democrat Publications, Dorchester, 1995).
3 *Gazette and Herald*, Malton, 12 August 2009.

Baron de Forest dinner, Southport

This year, 2010, sees the centenary anniversary of the 1910 general election and Southport Liberal Democrats are celebrating the event with the Baron de Forest dinner at the Royal Clifton Hotel.

As well as a splendid dinner, the local political historian and popular after-dinner speaker Michael Braham will be telling the story of the Southport Division election campaign in which the Liberal candidate was the Baron de Forest. It is a fascinating and entertaining tale of dirty tricks, anti-Semitism and more, in an age when the voters attended political rallies in their thousands.

Do come and join the dinner on 13th February. The Royal Clifton Hotel are offering a special discount on rooms for anyone attending the dinner. To find out more or to make a booking, please phone Rachel Howard on 01704 533 555 or Pat Sumner on 01704 576 660, or email rh@southportlibdems.com

Baron de Forest,Liberal candidate for Southport in the January 1910 election

Palmerston archives

Issue 64 of the *Journal of Liberal History* (autumn 2009) carried an article on the archives of third Viscount Palmerston at the University of Southampton Library. Lord Palmerston's papers, along with those of second Viscount Melbourne and the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury – all of which form part of the Broadlands Archives – have now been put up for sale by the Trustees of the Broadlands Archives. The collection has been offered to the University, with the expectation that if the negotiations fail the material may well be broken up and sold at auction.

Beyond the Palmerston material and its links to Liberalism, the archive contains a whole range of materials of the first rank – including, for example, the papers of Lord and Lady Mountbatten, effectively the foundation archive for the states of India and Pakistan. It is immensely important and the University has a determined campaign under way to make sure that it continues to remain available in its entirety to the public and researchers.

The net price is £2.85 million and the University is undertaking a major fund-raising campaign to assure the future of this immensely important collection. The University is publicising the sale and the fund-raising campaign as widely as possible and would very much appreciate any support readers of the Journal can give. Further information on the situation can be found at http://www.southampton.ac.uk/archives/Broadlands/index.html.

Gladstone lecture given at Liverpool

On 27 October 2009, David Alton (Lord Alton of Liverpool) delivered a Roscoe Lecture at Liverpool John Moores University on 'Gladstone – son of Liverpool, scourge of tyrants', marking the 200th anniversary of Gladstone's birth. The lecture series is named after William Roscoe (1753–1831), a historian, campaigner against slavery and native of Liverpool. A podcast of the lecture can be downloaded from http://www.ljmu.ac.uk/roscoe/97603.htm.

LETTERS

Liberals in Schism (1)

My active research does not stretch beyond 1921, and finished over thirty years ago. Nevertheless, as a Walthamstow resident, I have kept an eye on all references to Sir John Simon, our most eminent Liberal MP (he left us in 1918). Might I use Dr Baines' review of Dr Dutton's *Liberals in Schism* (*Journal* 64, autumn 2009) to comment on the events of 1931–32? Sir John Simon's summer 1931 resignation of the Liberal whip was a manoeuvre designed to replace MacDonald with Baldwin as Prime Minster, though MacDonald forming a National Government trumped that.

The dissolution of October 1931 occurred with Lloyd George in hospital, and Sir Herbert Samuel as Acting Leader / Deputy Leader. The quite astonishing number of the existing Liberal MPs who applied for the Simonite whip rather than the Samuelite one is in my view best explained by a desire to avoid Conservative opposition at the subsequent general election. The results bear this out: 35 Simonites elected on 3.7 per cent of the national vote, 33 Samuelites on 6.5 per cent.

I would therefore suggest that the positions taken in 1931 and an eye on the election after had as much to do with who went where in 1932 as the degree of tolerance of government intervention during an economic crisis.

Dr Peter Hatton

Liberals in Schism (2)

I much enjoyed Malcolm Baines' review of David Dutton's *Liberals in Schism* (*Journal* 64, autumn 2009) and would like to add a footnote from the perspective of the National Liberal Club.

The Club's name, of course, did little to clarify the situation, and both Liberals and Liberal Nationals remained active members for much of the period discussed by Professor Dutton. (The 'National' part of the Club's name derives from Gladstone's intention that it should be the home for Liberals throughout the country rather than a traditional London Club.)

However, by February 1948 the divorce between the Liberal Nationals and the Liberal Party was symbolised by Sir John Simon's resignation from the NLC after protests from some members following his appearance on a Conservative by-election platform three months earlier when he had spoken against the Liberal candidate. Although Simon's action was hardly new (and the Club's minute books reveal the unhappiness of members after the 1945 election), his position as a Vice-President and trustee of a Club whose object was 'to further the interests of the Liberal cause' were increasingly incongruous with his actions.

Viscount Runciman, that other first-generation Liberal National with impeccable Liberal roots had resigned from the Club two months earlier. Nevertheless, a portrait of Simon as Chancellor of the Exchequer still hangs in the NLC Smoking Room today.

Paul Hunt

Campbell-Bannerman

Thank you for including my article about the unveiling of the bust of Jeremy Thorpe at the House of Commons in *Journal* 64 (autumn 2009). Readers of the *Journal* might also like to know that the Thorpe event was preceded by the unveiling of three busts of former Prime Ministers, including one of Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Liberal Prime Minister from 1905 to 1908.

The sculpture of Campbell-Bannerman was commissioned from Martin Jenkins who worked from a number of sources including a statue by Paul Raphael Montfort outside Stirling Castle and an over-life-size bust in Westminster Abbey, again by Montfort, as well as from a selection of photographs. Help in researching the likenesses of Campbell-Bannerman was given by Colin Mair, Rector of the High School of Glasgow, where there is a plaque commemorating their illustrious former pupil, and by Liberal Democrat History Group member Dr Sandy Waugh, the author of the recent publication *A Scottish Liberal Perspective: A Centenary Commemoration for Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman*, who was invited to the unveiling but unfortunately could not be present.

Graham Lippiatt

The Mills and their world

It should perhaps be better known that James Mill (father of John Stuart Mill, subject of Michael Levin's article in *Journal* 64, autumn 2009) was born in 1773 at Northwaterbridge in Angus near to the estate of Fettercairn (or Middleton) in Kincardineshire which had been purchased by Sir John Stuart before serving as MP for Kincardineshire in 1797–1806. Sir John and his wife were early patrons of James Mill who was tutor to their daughter and heiress in 1790–94, both locally and in Edinburgh.

It is said that James and Williamina Stuart would have married but that they were not allowed to forget the social facts. However, the lady, who attracted many other suitors including (Sir) Walter Scott, eventually married Sir William Forbes of the banking family. Nevertheless, when James left for London in 1802 he did so in the company of Sir John and when James' son John was born in 1806 he was given the middle name of Stuart in recognition of such early patronage and support.

John Stuart Mill was 'Liberal' MP for Westminster from the 1865 general election until, having refused to attend to any constituency business, he was defeated at the 1868 general election by the future Tory Cabinet Minister, W.H. Smith (of stationery fame).

In early 1871 John had an exchange of words with Henry Campbell MP (later Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman) anent the Parliamentary grant to Princess Louise on her marriage to the future 9th Duke of Argyll (Liberal MP for Argyll 1868–78 and Liberal Unionist MP for Manchester South 1895–1900). In later years the Campbell-Bannermans were great friends of the Princess who sent a wreath for Sir Henry's funeral in April 1908.

In 1872 (the year before his death) John Stuart Mill was 'secular' godfather to Bertram Russell, grandson of Lord John Russell (1st Earl Russell) and father of Conrad Russell (5th Earl Russell) who was a Liberal/Liberal Democrat member of the House of Lords from 1987 until his death.

Dr Alexander (Sandy) Waugh

Richard Holme

It was no surprise to read David Steel's warm appreciation of Richard Holme in the summer edition of the *Journal*. Richard worked closely with successive leaders of the party and his advice was clearly influential on many occasions.

Indeed, Richard had that rare thing, a 'big idea': close cross-party working relationships leading to a large increase in the number of Liberals elected. I forget in what order his initiatives came but I recall the Lib-Lab Pact, the Radical Action Movement (RAM), the SDP-Liberal Alliance and the discussions between the Lib Dems and Blair around the 1997 election. There may be more, but it's quite a list.

As well as having in common cross-party working, unfortunately they also had in common something of a failure to deliver a satisfactory outcome, i.e. the desired increase in the number of Liberals elected. That has been achieved now, but more by using 'The Local Road to Liberalism' (the title of an early 1980s motion passed by the then Liberal Assembly).

All right, it's taken a long time, and it's been a very hard grind, but it, even in his lifetime, Richard failed to achieve the big leap forward he sought, it's surely even more foolish to believe, as some apparently do, that it's going to happen after his death. Richard was undoubtedly a very capable thinker and a persuasive mover and shaker; if he couldn't achieve it, what hope for others? We simple have to persevere with what works, and that is building local bases up and down the country through community campaigning. After all, we are the masters of it!

Trevor Jones

Correction

One set of dates was unfortunately omitted from Sandy Waugh's letter about 'Gladstone, St Deiniol's and the Church' in *Journal* 64 (autumn 2009). The second sentence of the third paragraph should have read (bold text omitted in original):

'Another of the Prime Minister's son's, the Rev. Stephen Gladstone (1844–1920), **who was Rector of Hawarden in 1872–1904**, 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.'

CELEBRAT

PARTY, PATRIOTISM A

The remarkable year 1859 saw the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help*. This *annus mirabilis* is rich ground for commemoration. It also saw the formal foundation of the parliamentary Liberal Party. On 6 June 1859, 280 Whig, Liberal, former Peelite and radical MPs met at Willis's Rooms in King Street, St. James's. They gathered to agree on a strategy to oust Lord Derby's Conservative government from office. **Angus Hawkins** analyses the significance of this key event in Liberal history.

Four days later, 323 opposition MPs voted for a motion of 'no confidence' in the Conservative ministry. Derby promptly resigned. On 12 June, Lord Palmerston became Prime Minister of a Liberal government. Lord John Russell was appointed Foreign Secretary, and the former Peelite, William Gladstone, became Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Conceived in 1859, the gestation of the parliamentary Liberal Party followed under the care of the elderly Palmerston. The death of Palmerston in October 1865,

TING 1859 AND LIBERAL VALUES

Russell's eight-month premiership and the dramatic Reform debates of 1866–67 were then followed by the birth of wide-ranging meritocratic Liberal reform under Gladstone's first ministry of 1868–74. The legislative achievement of Gladstone's government affirmed the Liberal Party's embodiment of a broad and varied community of progressive sentiment and moral aspiration. As a dominant force in British politics it carried hopes of greater social equality, more virtuous citizenship, enlightened government and stable progress, bringing liberty to British subjects and providing a moral beacon of freedom for other nations of the world.

The origins of Liberalism as a doctrine lay in the political economy of the 1820s, the Whig cry of civil and religious liberty, Nonconformist pressure for humanitarian reform, the radical demand for retrenchment in government expenditure, and the belief in efficient, disinterested administration serving the needs of society as a whole. During the 1830s and 1840s, this potent amalgam of values began to coalesce. In 1835, in meetings dubbed the 'Lichfield House Compact', Whigs, Reformers, radicals and Irish Repealers found a temporary unity over particular issues. Some spoke of this fragile alignment as constituting a Liberal party. But the tenuous alliance fractured in the immediate years which followed. After Corn Law repeal in 1846 and the establishment of free trade as economic orthodoxy, an increasing number of MPs, a third of the Commons in 1852, adopted the designation Liberal, earlier labels such as Whig and Reformer gradually dropping out of use. By 1859 Liberal was the common label adopted by the great majority of non-Conservative MPs. Liberalism as a political mentality became aligned with Liberal as a party designation. The shifting political association of Whigs, Liberals, Peelites and radicals of the 1850s gave way to a cohesive parliamentary alignment, heralding the adversarial contest between Liberals and Conservatives after 1868 in Westminster and the country, as personified by the figures of Gladstone and Disraeli. If the Conservative Party was the champion of the landed interest and the Established Church, with its electoral strength in English county constituencies, the Liberal Party proved itself a British movement drawing on manufacturing, commercial, Nonconformist and urban loyalty in English and Welsh constituencies, enjoying electoral dominance in Scotland and broad support in Ireland.

The progeny of 1859 is, indeed, remarkable. Its political significance can be appreciated at two levels: by examining the dynamics of party connection on the one hand, and delineating the nature of political doctrine on the other. What were the events leading up to the formation of the Liberal Party in Westminster? Here we see the failure of Russell to secure the Liberal leadership and the success of Palmerston in heading the Liberal ministry of 1859. Russell's hope of a triumphant apotheosis was ultimately dashed by Conservative moderation, radical reticence and Palmerston's patience. What was the nature of those Liberal beliefs which gave the parliamentary party that came together in 1859 its purposes and ideals? Liberal belief in the rule of law as the safeguard of liberties, low taxation, economic government and free trade, policies for the benefit of society as a whole, rather than

Left: Willis' Rooms, King Street, St. James's, London, in the mid-nineteenth century

special 'interests', and the encouragement of self-improvement, social reform and moral propriety together comprised a powerful vision of progressive aspiration. In 1859, tensions between elements of mid-Victorian Liberal belief found resolution in a patriotic affirmation of Britain's role as a champion of progress and reform in Europe.

Six months before the Willis's Rooms meeting, in January 1859, the MP Sidney Herbert complained that there was no prospect 'of the formation of an efficient party, let alone government, out of the chaos on the opposition benches'.[1] Whigs, Liberals and radicals appeared divided and scattered. This was the legacy of the politics of the 1850s. As Prime Minister between 1846 and 1852, Russell's standing had been seriously damaged by the tribulations of Whig policy. His substantial Liberal credentials and genuine progressive instincts were compromised by difficulties over the famine in Ireland, a banking crisis, fiscal policy, government expenditure, Chartist campaigning, and the 'Papal Aggression' episode. Russell's reclusive temperament, the alleged intrigues of his ambitious wife and her numerous relatives, his purported impulsiveness, and criticisms of the ministerial nepotism of the Whig cousinhood as 'a Venetian oligarchy' further damaged his reputation. An impression prevailed that 'if he were not conceited, ignorant of human nature, [and] a wee selfish, [Russell] had all the characteristics and experiences of a very superior man of his age'.[2]

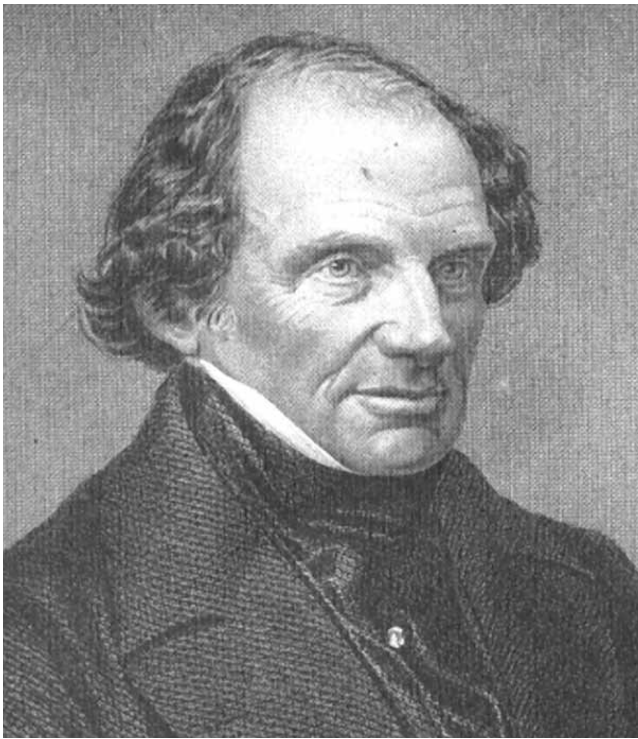
By 1852, Russell's authority faced serious challenges, notably from the tough and resourceful Palmerston, who had served as Foreign Secretary under Lords Grey, Melbourne and Russell. The rivalry between Russell and Palmerston disrupted Whig, Liberal and radical parliamentary relations throughout the 1850s. Palmerston's pre-eminence stood on his personification of patriotic sentiment – his robust foreign policy championing liberal interests abroad. A genial affability, diplomatic expertise, subtle cultivation of press support, and his celebration of Britain's liberal political values, giving the country a moral sway in the world, proved a potent message. It secured broad political support within Westminster and the acclaim of popular audiences in Manchester, Salford and Liverpool. The success of Lady Palmerston's glittering entertainments at Cambridge House further bolstered his influence, highlighting Russell's seclusion at Pembroke Lodge. While serving as Home Secretary in Lord Aberdeen's coalition of 1852–55, Palmerston had distanced himself from the premier's hesitant diplomacy, implying that his more forthright views would have avoided the dithering that had characterised Britain's slide into the Crimean War. In the midst of a mismanaged Crimean campaign, in February 1855, these perceptions delivered the premiership. The seventy-one-year-old Palmerston was the only politician, *The Times* declared, who could inject a purposeful vigour into the nation's affairs. This was a triumph of diligence, style, longevity and luck.

In reaction to Palmerston's putative conservatism on domestic reform, during the 1850s Russell burnished his Liberal credentials. He undertook a biography of his Whig hero Charles James Fox, presented as the lineal inspiration for his own progressive principles. Sharing Palmerston's belief in Britain's international role as a champion of liberal and humanitarian values, Russell took to himself the cause of progressive domestic reform, carrying forward the Foxite flame of liberty. As a member of Aberdeen's Cabinet in 1853, Russell pressed for a parliamentary Reform bill. In response, Palmerston declared his refusal 'to be dragged through the dirt by John Russell'.[3] This reflected the wariness of many Whigs and moderate Liberals towards an extensive broadening of the suffrage, placing power in the votes of an uneducated populace susceptible to demagogues, and a redistribution of parliamentary seats, depriving them of their control in smaller boroughs. Following the outbreak of the Crimean War, an emotional Russell was forced, in April 1854, to withdraw his Reform bill from the Commons. Upon the collapse of the Aberdeen coalition in early 1855 Russell's attempt to form a government proved stillborn. After accepting Cabinet office under Palmerston in February 1855, he was forced to resign five months later, finding himself caught in the political cross-currents of negotiating a Crimean peace settlement. Embittered and hostile, he nursed a lingering resentment against his former colleagues. When Palmerston gagged his education reform proposals in April 1856, Russell became, one Whig observed, 'a concentrated essence of lemon'.[4]

Six months before the Willis's Rooms meeting, in January 1859, Whigs, Liberals and radicals appeared divided and scattered. This was the legacy of the politics of the 1850s.

In 1857 Russell raised the banner of progressive Liberal reform at home as an alternative to Palmerston's patriotic rhetoric. In February, Russell led 165 Whig, Liberal, radical and Peelite MPs into the division lobby against Palmerston's Cabinet on a motion to equalise parliamentary suffrage in counties and boroughs. At a stroke he revived parliamentary Reform as a live party issue and demonstrated the force of Liberal rectitude as the solvent of Palmerstonian support. The following month he voted with the opposition majority denouncing Palmerston's policy in China, prompting the premier to call a general election. In his election speeches in the City of London, Russell called for further parliamentary Reform as necessary to the promotion of progress. Numerous successful Liberal candidates subsequently pledged themselves to reform. Palmerston saw this 'bit of treachery' as proof that some Liberals were looking to 'a radical parliament with John Russell as its head'.[5] A dangerous Russellite undercurrent lay just beneath the surface of Palmerston's seeming electoral success. There must eventually emerge, Russell predicted, two distinct parties, a party of Reform and a Conservative opposition. So would Palmerston's 'sham' Liberalism be unmasked and his own natural claim to the leadership of Liberal aspiration affirmed. Although events had 'staved [Reform] off for a while', the veteran Reformer Joseph Parkes noted, 'Lord John is a pointer dog – a setter at the game'.[6]

By February 1858, a host of difficulties had descended on Palmerston's government. The reform of Indian administration in the wake



Colleagues and rivals: Russell (left) and Palmerston (right).

of the Mutiny in the subcontinent, the scandal of Lord Clanricarde's appointment as Lord Privy Seal, the commitment to further parliamentary Reform, and a crisis in Anglo-French relations caused by the involvement of Italian political refugees residing in England in an attempted assassination of Napoleon III confronted the Cabinet, ministers succumbing to the terminal political contagion of chronic self-doubt. In response to French diplomatic pressure, Palmerston put before the Commons a conspiracy to murder bill, increasing the penalties for those proved guilty of planning political violence abroad. Amendment of British asylum laws in answer to what was portrayed as Gallic threats galvanised the opposition to Palmerston. British liberal values and liberty, opponents declared, were being sacrificed to the demands of a foreign regime, whose press had characterised Britain as a den of assassins. On a motion proposed by the radical Thomas Milner Gibson, on 19 February, Russell joined eighty-nine Whig, Liberal and radical MPs in the anti-government lobby, voting alongside the Conservative opposition. Milner Gibson's motion was carried by nineteen votes. The following day Palmerston's Cabinet resigned. On 21 February, Derby formed his second minority Conservative ministry.

Whigs and Liberals retreated to the opposition benches divided and demoralised. The Whig Lord Clarendon thought they were 'split into factions more bent on cutting each other's throats than disposed to unite against the Tories'.[7] The 'Whig leaders, after 20 years service', Russell privately complained, 'discarded me … I can never serve or act with them until I am returned to my proper position. There is *my* point of honour'.[8] While Palmerston, with his authority haemorrhaging, sat on the opposition frontbench across from Conservative ministers, Russell took a seat on the opposition benches below the gangway among the radicals and 'independent' Liberals. The Peelite Sir James Graham aligned himself with Russell, while Gladstone gave journalistic expression to his strong anti-Palmerstonian views, flirted with joining Derby's Cabinet, and felt a growing isolation. By 1857, a majority of Peelite MPs, sixty-nine in all, had rejoined the Conservative Party, leaving a rump of just thirty-five Peelite MPs inclining to the Liberals. In April, Russell eased the Conservative government's difficulties over their India bill, liaising with radicals and indirectly with members of Derby's Cabinet. In May, the spectacular collapse of an opposition Commons motion over the Conservatives' criticism of the Governor-General's policy in India gave renewed life to Derby's ministry and advertised the divisions ravaging Whig, Liberal and radical ranks. The Whigs, the diarist Charles Greville observed, 'are in the condition of a defeated army, who require to be completely reorganised and reformed before they can take the field again. The general resentment and mortification is extreme.'[9]

Derby's government were committed to bringing forward a parliamentary Reform bill in 1859, a pledge inherited from Palmerston's ministry. Anticipation of Reform provided the touchstone of political calculation. Russell prepared to step forward as the guardian of historic Whig principles, bringing Whigs, Liberals and radicals together behind the cry for genuine Reform. Ministerial legislation, he predicted, would prove inadequate and partisan. As the unnatural product of Conservative authorship, a government Reform bill would inevitably be flawed. Palmerston's political sway, meanwhile, continued to wane. The impossibility of Palmerston again becoming Prime Minister became a commonplace topic of opposition dinner table conversation. When he visited Napoleon III at Compiègne in November 1858, anti-French feeling in Britain was aroused and harsh

criticism expressed. Returning to London, Palmerston adopted a prudent passivity, declining to endorse a Russellite call for substantial Reform and choosing to await the details of a Conservative measure. Having declined a second invitation to join Derby's Cabinet in May 1858, a restless Gladstone accepted charge of a diplomatic mission in September to negotiate a constitutional settlement for the Ionian Islands. He did not return to London until March 1859. Peelite colleagues such as Graham and Cardwell saw Gladstone's agreement to head the mission as a preliminary to his joining the Conservatives. Russell thought it provided Gladstone with a convenient excuse for travelling abroad and absenting himself from awkward discussion of parliamentary Reform.

In late 1858 John Bright gave tangible form to radical hopes of Reform, speaking to large popular audiences at Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow. Having suffered a nervous breakdown in 1856, he returned to the platform a giant refreshed. Yet the division in radical ranks that had emerged over the Crimean War remained. This reflected that confluence of varied populist traditions which flowed into radical activism, Benthamite 'Philosophic Radicalism', Chartism, militant Nonconformity and the Cobdenite advocacy of free trade. Bright had denounced the Crimean conflict. But other 'patriotic' radicals, such as John Roebuck, supported the war in language which rejected the moral internationalism, based upon unrestricted trade and commerce, advocated by the Manchester School. Bright's mentor from the Anti-Corn Law League, Richard Cobden, remained in rural seclusion, living the life of a gentleman farmer in Sussex. During Bright's illness Milner Gibson had emerged as a rival leading parliamentary radical, spearheading the ejection of Palmerston from office in February 1858. As a consequence, radicals enjoyed no greater unanimity than Whigs and Liberals.

Between October and December 1858 Bright's central theme was the continued dominance of landed power in British politics, suppressing popular liberties. He attacked the House of Lords as an assembly of hereditary legislators unsuited to a free constitution. He portrayed the Commons as an organ of the great territorial interests of the country. The law of primogeniture ensured the preservation of vast estates in individual ownership through successive generations. British foreign policy was a gigantic system of outdoor relief for the aristocracy. Parliamentary Reform, he declared, was the necessary cure for a political system afflicted by stifling landed influence, smothering the freedoms of the people. As announced at Bradford in January 1859 Bright's recommendations, a borough franchise for all males who paid poor rates, a £10 lodger franchise, and a £10 rental franchise in the counties, protected by the ballot, fell short of a democratic suffrage, restricting the vote to those he deemed respectable male citizens. The redistribution of seats in relation to population he emphasised as key to genuine Reform. But his language aroused extensive fear of class warfare. Bright privately insisted that his proposals were moderate, that he was opposed to unnecessary change. But Whigs and moderate Liberals seized on Bright's rhetoric as revealing the true extent of radical intention, signalling the subversive dangers which responsible politicians must resist.

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That Bright broke ground over Reform in late 1858, expressing radical demands in language exciting fear of class conflict, encouraged Whigs such as Lord Grey, Lord Clarendon and Sir George Cornewall Lewis to believe that moderate Reform would satisfy the nation's wishes, as long as Russell was not lured into advocating an extreme measure. Derby's Conservative Cabinet also took comfort from the reaction to Bright's speeches. During the recess Derby chaired a Cabinet committee drawing up a government Reform bill. The main features of the measure drew on indications of what moderate Whigs and Liberals would accept. In June 1858 the great majority of the Commons opposition had supported a proposal to equalise the borough and county franchise at the £10 level. They had split over the introduction of the ballot. Russell's Reform bill of 1854, meanwhile, had hedged the lowering of the suffrage with 'merit franchises', giving the vote to professional groups and holders of university degrees, whose education and status might offset additional votes granted to working men. Derby's bill incorporated these principles in an attempt to ensure that Conservative Reform was seen as safe and substantial, eliciting moderate opposition support. It proposed a uniform £10 suffrage in boroughs and counties, and the vote for those with at least £60 in savings, graduates, ministers of religion, barristers, attorneys and registered medical men. It did not propose the introduction of the ballot. It did, however, attend to Derby's concern over urban freehold votes swamping rural county constituencies by restricting freehold votes to the boroughs. To reassure moderate opinion, redistribution was limited. It was proposed to transfer just fifteen seats. Two Cabinet ministers resigned over the bill drawn up by the government prior to the 1859 session: Joseph Henley and Spencer Walpole. The rest of the Cabinet consented to the measure as a substantial extension of voting privileges, refuting accusations of reactionary ministerial sentiment.

A developing crisis over the Italian states during the1858 recess saved politicians from an exclusive preoccupation with parliamentary Reform. But while the complexities of Reform exposed differences between Conservatives, Whigs, Liberals and radicals, the issue of Italy affirmed a consensus of view, notwithstanding the longstanding hostility of Liberals and radicals towards the autocratic empires of Austria and Russia. Within British political circles, there was broad support for liberal Italian nationalism, the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia being seen as the best hope for an acceptable form of unification. Italian nationalists wished to drive Austria out of Lombardy and Venetia, overthrowing the Vienna Settlement of 1815. But British politicians, while disliking Austrian repression, harboured a deeper loathing for the brutal corruption endemic in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and contempt for

the temporal power exercised by Pope Pius IX. Distrust of French ambitions in the Italian peninsula and anxiety that disruption of the status quo would forge a hostile Franco-Russian alliance exploiting Austrian weakness, moreover, tempered enthusiasm for Italian unification. Napoleonic aggrandisement, destabilising Austrian humiliation and the incitement of Piedmont to acts of aggression as a pawn of French ambition, leaving untouched the worst repression in the region existing in the Papal States and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, would, British politicians agreed, be too high a price to pay for Italian liberty. Derby's Foreign Secretary, Lord Malmesbury, shaped British policy to this domestic consensus, adopting a vigilant non-intervention. Palmerston agreed that, in the event of war, neutrality was Britain's only course. He had no wish to see Austria crippled as a European power. Suspicions grew during early 1859 that Napoleon III was cynically encouraging Piedmont-Sardinia to open hostilities against Austria, giving France an opportunity to push troops into the region under the pretext of rushing to Piedmont's aid. The Italian peninsula was in danger of becoming a second Mexico, Malmesbury feared, with Piedmont-Sardinia the tool of Napoleonic intrigue.

Russell looked to the 1859 parliamentary session as his opportunity to recover the leadership of progressive opinion in Westminster. The political agenda seemed ideal. Parliamentary Reform was the main item of business and hopes for liberal reform in the Italian peninsula a supplementary issue. He came close to success. The dramatic theme in the parliamentary politics of January to June 1859 is the frustration of Russell's ambitions. Conservative moderation, radical reticence, Peelite ambivalence and Palmerston's patience denied Russell the personal vindication he sought. The Reform bill introduced by the Conservative government in late February, as its authors intended, was not the sham measure Russell anticipated. *The Times* praised it for dealing with the question on honest and intelligible principles, it being as strong as any government could hope to carry, given the temper of the Commons and the public mind. The Conservatives also brought forward proposals for law reform and legislation presented as a reasonable settlement of the church rates question. When Palmerston, with Russell's support, challenged the government's Italian policy, suggesting Malmesbury was failing to prevent a threatened war, while appearing indifferent to reform in the Papal States, Disraeli dramatically announced on 25 February that Lord Cowley was being despatched on a diplomatic mission to negotiate a settlement securing peace and desirable reforms. Disraeli's declaration swiftly preempted Palmerston and Russell's hostile initiative and restored the parliamentary consensus over foreign affairs.

When, on 28 February, Russell and Bright criticised the Conservative Reform bill for not enfranchising a larger portion of the working classes, Palmerston remained silent. Whigs and moderate Liberals nervously noted that Russell was adopting the radical language of Bright. Russell was dissuaded during March from calling a general meeting of the Liberal opposition, which would prove 'a Tower of Babel'.[10] Instead, he decided to proceed against the government Reform bill by way of a resolution moved on the measure's second reading. Graham and Herbert persuaded Russell to temper the wording of his motion, reference to the 'industrial classes' being removed. What remained was an objection to the bill's failure to lower the borough franchise and the denial of the ancient right of urban forty-shilling freeholders to vote in county elections. *The Times* observed that the second reading of legislation was conventionally the opportunity to discuss the general principles of a measure. Russell's motion immediately focused debate on specific clauses more properly left to the committee stage. This was the tactical requirement of Russell's position in opposition to a bill that was more moderate than he had predicted. Concentrating debate on the particular inadequacies of the bill, forestalling a broader discussion of the measure's merits, offered the best prospect of unifying opposition feeling. Nonetheless, Lord Grey thought Russell's resolution objectionable. Clarendon deemed it factious. Palmerston indicated that the success of Russell's motion need not be fatal to the bill if it led to desirable amendments. This milked Russell's motion of its venom.

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In the Commons during March Palmerston declared his support for Russell's resolution on the understanding that it would prompt changes to the Reform bill in committee. Bright dubbed the proposed merit franchises contained in the measure 'fancy franchises'. Roebuck urged the government to accept amendments to their bill so that the opportunity to settle the question should not be lost. Gladstone's convoluted statement that he intended to vote against Russell's motion, but did not want this to be interpreted as support for the government, was received with puzzled amusement. Early in the morning of 1 April Russell's motion was passed by 330 to 291 votes. Ambiguity about the intended effect of the vote, whether or not it should be regarded as a wholesale rejection of the bill, secured an opposition majority. It was a victory of sorts for Russell – but not the unqualified personal endorsement for which he hoped. The Queen commented with irritation that the motion showed that Russell was 'ever ready to *make* mischief and do his country harm'.[11] Faced with a choice between amending their measure, deferring further consideration of Reform, resigning or dissolving parliament, Derby's Cabinet decided to call an election. The Conservative electoral text was the scuttling of their moderate Reform bill by a factious and motley opposition preferring party interest to the interest of the country.

Reform proved the main subject of candidates' hustings speeches over the following weeks. In London, on 15 April, Russell dismissed the Conservative measure as a sham, devoid of any honest intent to secure genuine Reform. But dramatic international events between 19 and 21 April allowed some, notably Russell, to take up the cry

of Italian liberty. Contrary to expectation Austria, provoked by Piedmont's refusal to disarm prior to participating in a Congress, issued an ultimatum demanding Piedmont's disarmament or else hostilities would ensue. Advised by France to give a defiant reply, Piedmont portrayed the ultimatum as an insult. Preparations for war promptly followed. The ultimatum, a disastrous miscalculation, immediately cast Austria as the aggressor and dramatically wrong-footed Derby's policy. The diplomatic tables appeared abruptly turned. France, suspected of preparing for war without a pretext, assumed the role of an injured innocent. This gave free rein to Liberal dislike of Austrian autocracy. In election speeches on 23 and 25 April, Russell gave scant attention to Reform, but elaborated on the falseness of Derby's policy of 'armed neutrality', based upon misplaced suspicions of France and concealing an illiberal pro-Austrian bias. In a hastily revised election address at Tiverton, Palmerston denounced the government's foreign policy as proof of the ministry's inadequacies. The outbreak of war, triggered by Austria's ultimatum, transformed the Italian question into an issue of party controversy.

The general election returned 306 Conservative MPs and 349 MPs identified as members of the opposition. Despite gaining thirty-one seats, the Conservative ministry remained in a Commons minority. The critical question became the possibility of the opposition majority, made up of various Liberal groupings, approximately fifty radicals and a handful of prominent former Peelites, finding a common purpose. Palmerston rejected an overture from Disraeli inviting him to join the Conservative Cabinet; the preferable alternative, Disraeli suggested, to Palmerston finding himself a minister in a Russell government. Palmerston now looked to resuming power on his own terms. Having failed to assert his authority over the Reform question in March, Russell's plight brought the engaging subplot of Palmerston's intentions back into centre stage. Moreover, the longer Russell's difficulties persisted the better Palmerston's prospects became. During late May intense consultation among the opposition ensued. Russell entered discussion insistent upon two points: first, that a prospective Liberal Cabinet must include Peelites and radicals – it could not be a restoration of Palmerston's former frontbench; and second, that there must be agreement on a Reform bill. These conditions he saw as the protection of his position. Palmerston responded that any motion brought against the government could not contain a commitment to introducing a Reform bill or a condemnation of Conservative foreign policy. He would only support a general motion of 'no confidence'. Radical prevarication further weakened Russell's position. Bright held back from pressing for Russell's return to the Liberal leadership, and other radicals, such as Roebuck and Milner Gibson, indicated that a substantial measure of Reform might yet be secured from the Conservative ministry. In late May Gladstone made it known that Palmerston's electoral statements about Italy would justify his joining a Palmerston Cabinet. On 30 May Palmerston was advised that, in the event of Derby resigning, there was now far less chance of Russell being sent for by the Queen. Palmerston immediately wrote to Russell offering to serve under him, if Russell would do the same by him. Two days later Palmerston and leading Whigs determined to call a general meeting of the opposition, which Palmerston would invite Russell to attend. On 2 June, Palmerston and Russell agreed jointly to address a party meeting declaring their readiness to serve under the other, although nothing was said about the future arrangement of ministerial places.

So it was that, on Monday 6 June 1859, Whig, Liberal, radical and a handful of prominent former Peelite MPs (though not Gladstone) met at Willis's Rooms to affirm their support for a motion of 'no confidence' in Derby's government. Held on neutral ground, rather than in the residence of a leading politician, the gathering was publicly advertised in *The Times* two days before. When Palmerston ascended the platform at the beginning of proceedings he noticed the step was too high for the diminutive Russell. To roars of droll laughter around the room Palmerston assisted Russell on to the stage. The act held a poignant symbolism. Palmerston spoke of his readiness to cooperate with Russell in moving a general motion against the government and was received with great cheering. Russell followed, expressing his willingness to serve under Palmerston if asked to form a ministry. Palmerston whispered to Russell. Russell then added that Palmerston agreed to the same if Russell was sent for by the Queen. Bright promised cooperation and Herbert preached union. Just a few of those present expressed hesitation. The meeting appeared a success. Palmerston judged the outcome as 'highly satisfactory'[12] A united Liberal opposition had been formed. It was noted that it would be difficult for Russell not to concur in any arrangement after what he had said.

On Tuesday 7 June the opposition Commons motion of 'no confidence' was moved by the young Whig Lord Hartington. Disraeli attempted to catch the opposition unawares by calling for an immediate division, but after frantic scouring of the Commons tea rooms the Liberal whips managed to keep the debate open and eventually secured an adjournment. The defeat of Austria by French and Piedmontese forces at the battle of Magenta on 4 June brought opposition accusations of Conservative incompetence in foreign policy to the fore of debate. Palmerston charged the government with alarming ignorance as to the real state of European affairs. The moderate Liberal MP Edward Horsman censured the Conservatives for a lack of foresight, capacity and impartiality in their diplomacy. Bright described the government's protestations of neutrality as a pretence disguising a pro-Austrian bias. Milner Gibson also accused the Conservatives of harbouring Austrian sympathies. Russell, while condemning the Conservative Reform bill, declared the ministry incapable of maintaining neutrality in continental affairs and guilty of diminishing

The meeting appeared a success. Palmerston judged the outcome as 'highly satisfactory'. A united Liberal opposition had been formed.

Britain's influence in the councils of Europe.

On Friday 10 June Hartington's 'no confidence' motion was passed by 323 to 310 votes. The following day Derby's Cabinet resigned. The Queen sent for Lord Granville, but Russell indicated difficulties in serving under him. Victoria complained of the prickliness of 'selfish, peevish Johnny'.[13] On 12 June the Queen asked Palmerston to form a government. A fortnight of intense ministerial negotiation followed. Russell insisted on the Foreign Office, Italy being the issue on which Whigs, Liberals, Peelites and radicals were most closely agreed. He 'might not at another time have wished for it', he told Palmerston who was pressing Clarendon's claims to being Foreign Secretary, 'but that taking such interest in foreign affairs at present he wished for that place'.[14] The former Peelite Gladstone (despite having voted against Hartington's motion) accepted the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, the Duke of Newcastle took the Colonial Office, and Herbert the War Office. The radicals Milner Gibson and Charles Villiers were appointed to the Board of Trade and the Poor Law Board. Whigs were appointed to just eight out of sixteen Cabinet posts.

The events leading up to the conception of the Liberal Party in 1859, revealing those antipathies which found resolution at Willis's Rooms, explain how Palmerston, rather than Russell, emerged as Liberal leader. The broader context of Liberal belief, framing the complex dynamics of political manoeuvre, points to the basis upon which party unity was achieved. By the late 1850s a set of shared assumptions defined Liberal values. Effective and fair government must rest upon liberties protected by the rule of law – government being in the interest of the nation as a whole, rather than a particular section of society. Free trade, government economy and low taxation should encourage individual liberty, self-improvement and moral responsibility. These beliefs affirmed Britain's standing as a nation of lawful tolerance and moral decency, a bulwark against intolerance and dogmatism. The historic constitution, civil liberty, fiscal accountability, free trade and Christian humanitarianism grounded the Liberal commitment to stable and ordered progress. This was a moral political creed supporting a patriotic belief in Britain's status as a civilised and enlightened polity, superior to corrupt and repressive regimes abroad.

Russell's near-success in 1859, however, ensured that the Liberal government was not a narrow restoration of Palmerston's former Cabinet.

Palmerston played to patriotic faith in Liberal values as a celebration of Britain's moral pre-eminence in the world. Russell looked to personify enlightened reform as the key to Britain's political stability and material prosperity, safeguarding the nation's progress. Their rivalry during the 1850s turned on this difference of emphasis in the nature of Liberal belief. Significantly, it was the cry of Italian liberty that provided Liberals with common cause in 1859. Italian unification brought Liberals together.

Foreign affairs occasioned major domestic political crises throughout the 1850s. It was a mismanaged Crimean campaign that propelled Palmerston to the premiership in 1855. It was accusations of toadying to French intimidation that ejected Palmerston from office in 1858. In 1859 the patriotic perception of Britain as the champion of liberal progress in Europe gave Liberals a unity of purpose over Italy denied by their differences on domestic issues, particularly parliamentary Reform. Palmerston's return to the premiership affirmed the power of Liberal patriotism as the basis of party unity. In 1861, following the failure of his Reform bill in 1860 and the dénouement of the Italian crisis, Russell retreated to the House of Lords with a peerage.

Russell's near-success in 1859, however, ensured that the Liberal government was not a narrow restoration of Palmerston's former Cabinet. As Palmerston acknowledged, he was forced 'to reconstruct the government upon a different principle and … out of a larger range of political parties'; what Gladstone referred to as 'our strangely constructed Cabinet'.[15] When, in late March 1859, Palmerston drew up a list of possible Cabinet appointments it contained no radicals or advanced Reformers. The Cabinet he was actually required to form in June was far broader. This was Russell's achievement. Palmerston's ministry was a rich blend of those parliamentary ingredients comprising Victorian Liberalism: Whig legislative reform and disinterested governance, Peelite morality and administrative expertise, and radical notions of economic and efficient government.

Palmerston offered Cabinet office to Cobden, but he refused. Prior to 1859, Whigs had shared a hostile disparagement of radicalism, radicals had found common purpose in decrying the oligarchic assumptions of Whiggism, and Peelites had assumed a self-adulatory sense of superiority enshrined in the cult of their dead leader. After 1859, as Whigs, former Peelites and radicals shared office, such antipathies were displaced by a Liberal vision of administrative efficiency, free trade, national prestige abroad and civil and religious liberty at home. Cobden's role in negotiating a free trade Anglo-French commercial treaty in 1860 symbolised the ascendancy of these Liberal values. During the 1860s, the Liberal government drew to itself the popular forces of militant Nonconformity, organised labour and an expanding press, fulfilling the Russellite vision of a progressive alliance. This prepared the way for Gladstone's transformation from Peelite to 'the People's William' as he reaped the harvest of Russell's near-success.

During the 1850s, Gladstone had been an isolated, restless and tormented figure, many assuming his future lay with the Conservative Party. In 1859 he voted against Russell's motion on the Conservative Reform bill and against Hartington's 'no confidence' motion. Yet he hungered for executive employment and feared languishing in barren political exile. The issue of Italy offered him a bridge to Palmerston's Cabinet over which he crossed in June. After 1859 he metamorphosed into a Liberal tribune, his religious conviction and his praise for diligent self-reliant working men striking deep chords of popular moral affinity. His speeches conveyed a powerful sense of consecration to which his popular audiences responded with adulation. As Chancellor of the

Exchequer his lowering of taxation sought to liberate 'the people' economically, encouraging diligence and self-reliance, raising civic maturity and stimulating political responsibility.

In 1868 Gladstone aligned his charismatic Liberal leadership with the transcendent cry of Irish Church disestablishment. This united popular Liberalism with a parliamentary party articulating the aspirations of those dynamic forces transforming mid-Victorian society. It gathered a broad community of progressive moral sentiment around the party shibboleths of 'civil and religious liberty', 'peace, retrenchment and reform', free trade, economy and improvement. Between 1868 and 1874 Gladstone's government disestablished the Irish Church, passed an Irish Land Act, introduced competitive examinations for entry to most areas of the civil service, abolished the purchase of military commissions, reformed education for children, abolished religious tests for Oxford and Cambridge universities, reformed local government, and introduced the ballot for parliamentary elections. The ties between the state and the established Church were loosened, the patronage system reformed, and greater efficiency and professionalism established within the framework of economic government.

The circumstances in which the parliamentary Liberal Party was conceived in 1859 reveal the strengths and stresses within mid-Victorian Liberalism. The force of Liberal patriotic faith in Britain as a moral champion of enlightened values in Europe secured for Palmerston both the party leadership and the premiership. The belief that Liberal government must embrace a broad alliance of progressive sentiment within the country was testimony to Russell's near-success. Gladstone's subsequent emergence as a popular tribune affirmed the Liberal Party's identification with the emotive moral vision of a meritocratic society fostering self-discipline, individual reliance and free association. Reason enough, apart from commemoration of Darwin, Mill and Smiles, to mark the remarkable year 1859.

The circumstances in which the parliamentary Liberal Party was conceived in 1859 reveal the strengths and stresses within mid-Victorian Liberalism.

Dr Angus Hawkins is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and a member of the History Faculty at the University of Oxford. He has written extensively on Victorian politics. His most recent publication is a two-volume biography of the 14th Earl of Derby entitled The Forgotten Prime Minister.

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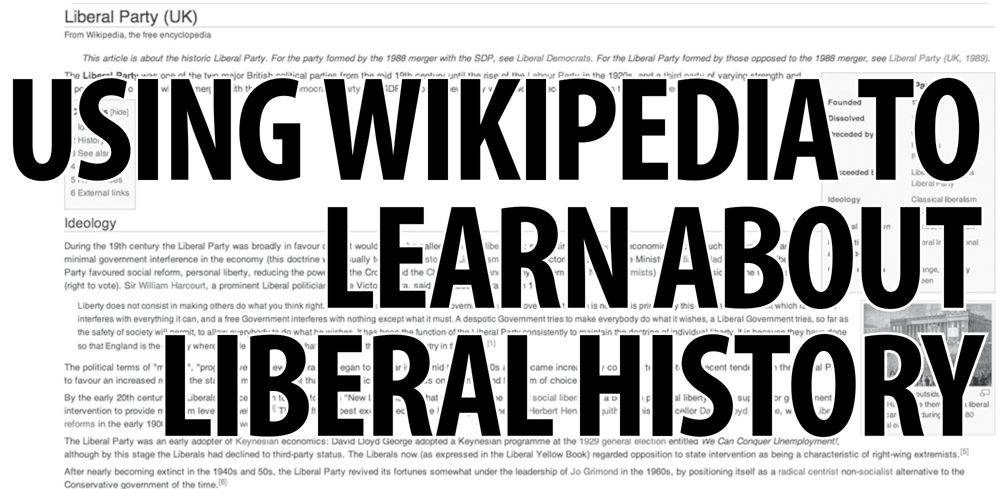
Liberal Democrat History Group plaque appeal successful

As Dr Hawkins recounts in this article, the meeting of 6 June 1859 at Willis's Rooms in King Street, St James, London, marks the foundation of the Liberal Party.

To mark the 150th anniversary of this event, over the last three months, the Liberal Democrat History Group has run a campaign to raise funds to pay for the erection of a Westminster Council 'heritage plaque' on the current-day site, Almack House in King Street, to commemorate the Willis' Rooms meeting permanently

We are pleased to be able to report that thanks to the generosity of many History Group members and supporters, sufficient funds have now been raised to meet the cost of the plaque and its installation (about £1,000).

We are now just waiting for the council to confirm a suitable date for the unveiling of the plaque; we will let all History Group members know the arrangements via our email mailing list and website.



USING WIKIPEDIA TO LEARN ABOUT LIBERAL HISTORY

The internet is an amazing tool for gathering information and provides a wealth of helpful sites for learning about the people and events that have made Liberal history – not least the website of the Liberal Democrat History Group itself (www.liberalhistory.org.uk).

One great advantage of the Internet as a research tool is the speed at which information can be traced and accessed and the ease with which links can be made to similar sites in order to build up a complete picture of the chosen topic. There are so many websites relating to subjects such as Liberal history and politics that to list them would prove to be an endless task. This article is therefore confined to the consideration of one specific, albeit huge, website – Wikipedia. **Graham Lippiatt** explores its possibilities – and limitations..

Wikipedia is a multilingual, web-based encyclopaedia which uses links as cross-references to guide the reader from the initial article to related pages or to external websites. Articles also include guides to further reading and contributors tend to cite their sources carefully (though not always!). Its most innovative aspect is that Wikipedia articles are written by the public: anyone can log on and create new pages or edit existing material. Volunteers do not need specialised qualifications to contribute, since their primary role is to write articles that cover their existing knowledge. However, in practice, most entries are written by people who know their subject well or are experts or professionals in their sphere. Of course, there are standards to be maintained: the website is subject to editorial administration, oversight and management. Published editing policies exist, which contributors are requested to follow, and articles are subject to peer review in order to avoid plagiarism and libel and to ensure that articles are correctly sourced with citations and references.

Is Wikipedia a reliable source for Liberal history?

Wikipedia users do need to be wary. Even the founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales, has commented that Wikipedia may not be suitable for academic uses, saying, 'It is pretty good, but you have to be careful with it. It's good enough knowledge, depending on what your purpose is.' For example, not all facts can be verified straight away by reviewers but those articles that are subject to query will usually contain an alert at the head of the page indicating that the reader should be cautious. Reasons vary, from insufficient referencing and internal links to articles that appear to contradict themselves. Generally speaking, Wikipedia facilitates the reader's research immensely via its multiple internal and external links (just click on the highlighted words) and its – usually comprehensive – further reading and source lists.

For the general reader or amateur historian, it seems safest to agree with those academics and teachers who advise that while Wikipedia cannot be accepted or cited as an authoritative source, it remains a useful starting point from which to gain contextual information about your subject matter and can point the way to more reliable and fuller source material.

In order to search for an article you need only to enter the text into the search box and press 'enter'. But be warned, Wikipedia can be very case- and punctuation-sensitive – so be sure to follow the exact wording and punctuation of the articles suggested here to access the right pages.

Having arrived at the Wikipedia main page (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page), where to start? Below is a list of pages organised around the theme of Liberal history: political parties, people, liberal philosophy, thought and thinkers, parliamentary reform

and legislation, parliamentary elections, parliamentary constituencies and local elections.

The names of the relevant pages in Wikipedia are shown here in italics. All page names were correct at the time of going to print.

Wikipedia users do need to be wary. Even the founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales, has commented that Wikipedia may not be suitable for academic uses.

Political parties

• *Liberal Democrats* – This is about the present-day party, its structure and policies and history from the 1988 merger to date.

• *Liberal Party (UK)* – This article discusses the ideology, origins and history of the Liberal Party from the Whigs until 1988 when it merged with the Social Democratic Party.

• *Social Democratic Party (UK)* – Information about the origins and history of the SDP from 1981–88.

• *National Liberal Party (UK)* – There were two distinct groups bearing the name National Liberal. The first comprised the supporters of the Lloyd George coalition in 1922–23. The second included those Liberals supporting the National Government from 1931 onwards. From October 1931 they styled themselves as Liberal Nationals and were entirely separate from the official Liberals, who returned to the opposition benches in 1933. These MPs and their supporters in the constituencies gradually moved closer to the Conservatives. After 1948, the party was renamed the National Liberal Party and was so closely aligned with the Conservatives that the two eventually merged in 1968.

• *British Whig Party* – A page about the Whigs, one of the groups from which the Liberal Party was formed, from their origins around the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to the formation of the Liberal Party in 1859.

• *Peelites* – Information about the breakaway faction of the Conservatives from 1846 who became part of the Liberal Party in 1859.

• *Liberal Unionist Party* – This was the party, led by Lord Hartington and Joseph Chamberlain, which split from Gladstone over Irish Home Rule in 1886 and formally merged with the Conservatives in 1912.

• *Alliance Party of Northern Ireland* – Pages about the Liberal Democrats' sister party in Northern Ireland. The section about its origins connects to a short page about the now-defunct Ulster Liberal Party and biographies of its two MPs, Albert McElroy and Sheelagh Murnaghan.

• *Liberal-Labour (UK)* – The Liberal-Labour movement refers to the practice of local Liberal associations in the late nineteenth century accepting and supporting candidates who were financially maintained by trade unions. These candidates stood for Parliament with the aim of representing the working classes, while remaining supportive of the Liberal Party in general. The page has a link to the article *Category:Liberal-Labour politicians (UK)*, which gives biographies of Lib-Lab MPs.

• *Lib-Lab Pact* – This page not only describes the Parliamentary arrangement of 1977–78 between Liberal leader David Steel and Prime Minister Jim Callaghan, but also looks at earlier attempts at cooperation between the Liberal and Labour parties and some more recent ones in the devolved administrations since 1999.

People

Who interests you? You can start by going to the pages of any of the great Liberals who have made history: Gladstone, Lloyd George, Jo Grimond, Roy Jenkins, or you might prefer to start with key thinkers like Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill or William Beveridge. However, if you prefer a more systematic approach, the best place to begin is:

• *List of United Kingdom Liberal Party leaders* – this page lists leaders of the party, leaders in the Commons and the Lords from 1859–1988. A page entitled *List of United Kingdom Liberal Democrat leaders*, which takes the story from the merger of 1988 to the present day, follows it. The three leaders of the SDP are included in the *Social Democratic Party (UK)* page. For the period before the formation of the Liberal Party see *List of United Kingdom Whig and allied party leaders 1801–1859*.

For details of Members of Parliament there are a number of pages:

• *List of Liberal Party (UK) MPs* – This lists all Liberal MPs from 1924–88 and their constituencies and takes you to constituency profiles and biographies of the MPs where these exist. There are similar pages for the following relevant political parties:

• *List of Social Democratic Party (UK) MPs*

• *List of National Liberal Party (UK) MPs*

• *List of Liberal Democrat MPs*

• *Members of the House of Lords* – This gives profiles of most of the current peers and lists their party affiliation and type of peerage.

• *List of Life Peerages* – This page lists everyone who has been created a Life Peer from the introduction of the Life Peerages Act of 1958 until the present day. Unfortunately it does not show their political party, so you have to know who you are looking for, but most entries have biographical profiles. From this page you can link to lists of all the hereditary peerages and baronies but again, no political party affiliations are indicated.

• *List of British Members of Parliament who crossed the floor (from 1945 to 2008)* – This is an interesting and useful page for information on SDP members.

• *Category:Liberal MPs (UK)* – Here you will find listed alphabetically all Liberal MPs elected at any time where their biographies feature in Wikipedia.

Philosophies, thought and thinkers

• *Liberalism* – This page offers a good starting point for learning

about the ideology of liberalism. It is part of a series of pages about liberalism in its varied and distinct forms. It has sections on the development of liberalism, the history of liberal thought and contributions to liberal theory. It provides information on the various schools of liberalism – for example, social liberalism, classical liberalism, American liberalism, libertarianism etc. – as well as links to pages concerning thinkers and ideas (e.g. laissez-faire, freedom, rights etc.)

• *Radicalism* – This article deals with the Radical movement in Britain in the nineteenth century, its relationship with overseas variants and how it overlaps with elements of liberalism.

• *Progressivism* – An analysis of some different understandings of progressive politics and how they connect to liberalism.

• *List of liberal theorists* – This is an incomplete list of individual contributors to liberal political theory on a worldwide scale, which also includes links to biographies of many liberal thinkers and philosophers from Locke and Mill to figures such as Keynes or Kymlicka.

• *Liberal reforms* – This is a review of the social reforms of the Liberal government from 1906–14, which are considered as having laid the foundations for what became the welfare state.

• *Oxford Manifesto* – This is worth visiting because the Oxford Manifesto, written in 1947, is the document which inspired the creation of Liberal International, the worldwide group that brings together Liberal parties from all nations and promotes liberalism as an international philosophy. The page includes a link to the article about Liberal International, which in turn provides links to member parties from around the world, the umbrella groups for European liberal parties, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party, as well as other international Liberal organisations, think-tanks and foundations.

Parliamentary reform and legislation

Parliamentary reform is a key area of Liberal thought and policy from the eighteenth century to the present day; aspects of constitutional, parliamentary and franchise reform can be followed through the *Representation of the People Act* pages, which begin with the background to the Great Reform Bill of 1832 and trace the history, politics and some of the personalities involved as far as the last Representation of the People Act in 2000.

For legislation, go to *List of Acts of Parliament in the United Kingdom*. Here, you can research the Acts of Parliament passed under any Liberal government by scrolling through the years during which the Liberals were in power. Regrettably, there are very few links to pages with detailed information on those Acts.

Parliamentary elections

• *United Kingdom general elections* – Here you will find details of all general elections since 1802, with dates, Prime Ministers, parties and majorities in the House of Commons. This page has internal links to detailed articles on each general election from 1802 to 2005 with information on seats, gains, losses, overall votes, etc.

• For UK by-elections, there is a series of pages listing all parliamentary by-elections since 1885 with dates and names of winners. Many of these include details on results and candidates. Start at the page entitled *List of United Kingdom by-elections (1885–1900)* and follow the series through to the present day. There is also a series of Category pages, which contain links to articles on selected by-elections in specific areas, such as Welsh constituencies, or jurisdictions such as the Scottish Parliament. Go to the 'categories' index page and type in *by-elections* in the display box to show the list.

• *United Kingdom by-election records* – this page contains information about notable records at by-elections, such as the biggest swings, lowest or highest shares of the vote, smallest majorities and many other obscure yet interesting topics.

For the general reader or amateur historian, it seems safest to agree with those academics and teachers who advise that while Wikipedia cannot be accepted or cited as an authoritative source, it remains a useful starting point from which to gain contextual information about your subject matter and can point the way to more reliable and fuller source material.

• *MPs elected in the United Kingdom general election, 1874* – This series of pages contains information to complement the lists of Liberal MPs available in other articles. It lists every constituency contested, the MP elected and his/her party and provides links to constituency and MP profiles, where they exist. The first page in the series is on the 1874 general election. You can then, starting from this article, follow the elections through to 2005 and after – the series currently ends with the next general election, to be held before June 2010.

Parliamentary constituencies

• *List of United Kingdom Parliament constituencies* – These pages list current seats in Parliament with descriptions of the geographical area that each covers, as well as the MPs (specifying political party) who have represented the seat since it was created. Some (too few, unfortunately) have recent election results in full and a handful give full results going back to the early twentieth century.

• *List of former United Kingdom Parliamentary constituencies* – Details of now defunct Parliamentary seats going back as far as the thirteenth century, again with descriptions of the geographical area covered and lists of MPs and their parties.

• *List of multi-member constituencies in the United Kingdom and predecessor Parliaments* – Multi-member constituencies, with more than one MP elected by first-past-the post, were common in Britain until they were abolished in 1918. This often meant that a constituency was represented by MPs of different parties, creating a crude form of proportionality, thus enabling the Liberal Party to make arrangements with Labour in certain industrial seats to ensure one member from each party would be elected. These pages list the seats as far back as 1295 and some, but unfortunately not all, give full election results with names of all candidates, parties and numbers of votes.

Local elections

The information available on local elections, election results and Liberal councillors is not yet well developed on Wikipedia. However, a good starting point is *United Kingdom local elections, 1998.* This page is the first in a series, which can be followed through to 2007, which shows the overall outcome for the parties in all local authority elections that took place each year (including mayoral contests where appropriate). Unfortunately, it does not provide details on individual ward results with information on candidates and votes.

• *London County Council* – One of the more useful pages about historical local authorities and elections, this article recites the history of the London County Council (LCC) from its foundation in 1889 until its replacement in 1965 by the Greater London Council (GLC). It lists the leaders of the LCC, the first four of whom were Progressives (the name by which Liberal supporters were known) on the council in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The pages entitled *Greater London Council* and *Greater London Authority* also contain information in elections or provide links to related pages. Alternatively you can go to *Category:Elections in London* for information about GLC, GLA and Mayoral elections in the capital from 1964 onwards.

You will tend to find that simply accessing a single article or biography opens up dozens of other potential links to internal Wikipedia or external internet sites. But if the article or biography or other information you want is not in any of the pages recommended in this article or the links from them to other sites, just enter what you are looking for in the Wikipedia search box and see what comes up. If it cannot find an exact match it will give near misses or suggestions for similar pages. And, if whilst browsing through Wikipedia you find a gap in the Liberal history knowledge base about which you are an expert, why not log on and create some pages yourself?

Graham Lippiatt is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group

THE PAPERS OF HERBERT SAMUEL AT THE PARLIAMENTARY ARCHIVES

Herbert Louis Samuel (1870–1963), 1st Viscount Samuel, was born on 6 November 1870 in Liverpool. He was educated at University College School, London, 1884–88, and Balliol College, Oxford, 1889–93. He married Beatrice Miriam Franklin on 17 November 1897. He was Liberal MP for the Cleveland Division of Yorkshire 1902–18, and for the Darwen Division of Lancashire 1929–35.

Positions Samuel held include: Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department 1905–09; Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1909–10; Postmaster-General 1910–14; President of the Local Government Board 1914–15; again Postmaster-General and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster 1915–16; Home Secretary 1916, and again 1931–32; High Commissioner for Palestine 1920–25 and also Commander-in-Chief there 1922–25. For the Liberal Party he was Chairman of the Liberal Party Organisation 1927–29; Chairman of the Liberal Parliamentary Party 1931–35; and Liberal Leader in the House of Lords 1944–55. On 8 June 1937, he was created Viscount Samuel of Mount Carmel and of Toxteth in the City of Liverpool. He died on 5 February 1963.

In 1963 the second Viscount Samuel, on behalf of his father's executors, deposited in the Parliamentary Archives the papers which now form series SAM/A–F. The Samuel papers cover his life and career from his childhood until the year of his death. Lord Samuel took care, so far as possible, to preserve intact both the personal and political letters, and also the papers which he received. In addition he kept drafts and copies of his own letters and made a practice of writing notes concerning any important events in which he had participated at the time when they occurred. The principal gaps in the collection are Departmental Papers (few of which Lord Samuel retained) and Cabinet Papers which, with a few exceptions, he returned to the Cabinet Office.

The largest series is SAM/A – Herbert Samuel's papers relating to political matters, 1880–1962 (163 files). SAM/A consists of subject files and general political files including a great deal of material relating to the internal affairs of the Liberal Party, and correspondence with such prominent Liberals as Asquith, Herbert Gladstone, Lloyd George, Runciman, Reading, Crewe, Lothian, Lady Oxford, Archibald Sinclair and (overseas) W. L. Mackenzie King. There is also correspondence with Fabians and Labour leaders such as the Webbs, George Bernard Shaw, Graham Wallas, Ramsay Macdonald, Snowden and Charles Trevelyan. Particularly notable are the files relating to the Marconi Contract (SAM/A/38–9), Irish Affairs 1911–16 (SAM/A/41), the formation of the Coalition Government,

1915 (SAM/A/48), the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry and the General Strike (SAM/A/66), the Lloyd George Fund (SAM/A/71), the formation of the National Government (SAM/A/78), the National Government and the general election, 1931 (SAM/A/81–2), the 'Agreement to Differ' on tariffs (SAM/A/96), the Abdication Crisis (SAM/A/101), the Munich Crisis (SAM/A/110) and the proposal for the Joint Select Committee on Colonial Affairs, 1942–45 (SAM/A/121).

The other series are as follows:
SAM/B – Personal papers, including material relating to Samuel's childhood, family, acquaintances, social activities and awards,1871–1962 (22 files).
SAM/C – Photographs and sketches, 1870–1961 (96 files).
SAM/D – Press cuttings,1888–1961 (5 boxes).
SAM/E – Literary, philosophical and scientific papers, 1885–1962 (83 files).
SAM/F – Grants of office and ceremonial records, 1906–59 (54 files).

Since 1963, additional material has been received and catalogued in further series as SAM/G–SAM/L. This includes leaflets and pamphlets, additional personal and political correspondence, and further literary, philosophical and scientific papers. There are also photocopies of material concerning Israel and Jewish matters (SAM/H); the original papers are deposited in the Israeli State Archives.

The Samuel Papers are all fully catalogued to file level, and can be searched for onlineat: http://www.portcullis.parliament.uk. Enter SAM in the RefNo field to restrict a search to the Samuel Papers.

The Samuel Papers are open for consultation Monday – Friday, 9.30–5.00, at the Parliamentary Archives, Houses of Parliament, London SW1A 0PW. Please phone 020 7219 3074 or email archives@parliament.uk to make an appointment and order up the material you require. Practical information on visiting can be found at http://www.parliament.uk/archives.

LIBERAL HISTORY QUIZ 2009

This year's Liberal history quiz attracted a fair amount of attention at the History Group's exhibition stand at the Liberal Democrat conference in Bournemouth in September. The winner was Michael Mullaney, with a highly impressive 20 marks out of 20. Below we reprint the questions – the answers are on page 41.

1. Sir Archibald Sinclair was leader of the Liberal Party from 1935–45. Which constituency did he represent throughout his Parliamentary career?
2. In the general election of 1922, what description did those Liberals who supported outgoing Prime Minister David Lloyd George take to distinguish themselves from the official Liberals of H. H. Asquith?
3. Which Liberal Prime Minister was a former pupil of the High School of Glasgow?
4. Name all five candidates who contested the 1999 election to succeed Paddy Ashdown as leader of the Liberal Democrats.
5. In 1951, Clement Davies was offered a cabinet post by Winston Churchill. He turned it down, probably saving the Liberal Party from extinction. What post was he offered?
6. Who did Nick Clegg succeed as MP for Sheffield Hallam in 2005?
7. What diplomatic post was held by Sir Herbert Samuel in 1920–25?
8. Before becoming MP for Orkney & Shetland in 1950, Jo Grimond worked as the secretary of which conservation charity for the protection and promotion of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage?
9. Which former Liberal MP was described by Mr Justice Cantley as 'a crook, an accomplished liar … a fraud' at the Jeremy Thorpe conspiracy to murder trial in 1979?
10 H. H. Asquith (1st Earl of Oxford and Asquith) died in 1928. Where is he buried?
11. What is the name of David Lloyd George's boyhood home, now part of the Lloyd George Museum in Llanystumdwy, which has been recreated to appear as it was in the nineteenth century?
12. A monument to which Liberal Prime Minister stands outside the west front of St Clement Danes Church in The Strand in London?
13. Who was the 'spectacled, sallow, sombre' Birmingham draper who was the first secretary of the newly formed National Liberal Federation after 1877?
14. To the statue of which Liberal did the suffragist Millicent Garret Fawcett lead a delegation of women, and lay a wreath in memory, after women had achieved the same voting rights as men, in 1928?
15. Who was the Liberal candidate at the Brierley Hill by-election of 27 April 1967?
16. Which great Radical politician and campaigner was Liberal MP for Birmingham 1857–85?
17. How many women served as Liberal MPs between 1918 and 1988?
18. Who was the only Liberal to be elected to the Northern Ireland House of Commons in the whole of its history from 1921 to 1973?
19 Which Gladstonian Liberal, MP for Newcastle was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland in February 1886, only to lose the job when the Liberal government fell over the question of Irish Home Rule five months later, in July 1886?
20. What was described by the National Liberal Party magazine in 1942 as 'absolutely contrary and opposed to Liberalism and which, if adopted, would be Hitler's last triumph, for Britain would then become a completely totalitarian state'?

A LIBERAL WIT
THE LATER CAREER OF

In the simplistic and sometimes pernicious categorisations which have so often been applied to the political personalities of the 1930s – appeasers and anti-appeasers, a majority of dupes and a minority of the far-sighted, the decade's Guilty Men and its isolated voices in the wilderness – Leslie Hore-Belisha has strong claims to be listed among the virtuous. **David Dutton** tells the story of Hore-Belisha – a Liberal without a home.

'HOUT A HOME
LESLIE HORE-BELISHA

True, he was a member of the National Government for most of its existence and a Cabinet minister from October 1936 until January 1940. But he was also a vigorous Minister of War, who implemented a succession of much-needed reforms; he became disillusioned before most of his colleagues with what Chamberlain did at Munich; he pushed – albeit belatedly – for a 'continental commitment' against the prevailing assumptions of 'limited liability'; he took part in the Cabinet revolt of 2 September 1939 which forced Chamberlain to issue an ultimatum to Germany without further delay; he enjoyed the distinction of being sacked from the government in January 1940, 'the last positive achievement of the appeasers' in the words of one influential account of these times;[1] he lined up with those brave dissidents who defied their whip and voted against Chamberlain at the end of the celebrated Norwegian debate on 8 May 1940, the necessary preliminary to Churchill's elevation to the premiership; and his name is absent from the cast-list of Cato's *Guilty Men*, the extraordinarily influential polemic which fixed popular perceptions of the 1930s for decades to come.[2] In short, Belisha ticked most of the right boxes.

The events of January 1940 represented the abrupt termination of an apparently inexorable political ascent. Isaac Leslie Hore-Belisha was born in 1893, the son of Jacob Isaac Belisha, a businessman of Sephardic Jewish origins. His father died when Leslie was only nine months old and he only assumed his hyphenated name when his widowed mother married Sir Adair Hore in 1912. Educated at Clifton, the Sorbonne and St John's, Oxford, Hore-Belisha served in the First World War before returning to complete his degree. The first post-war President of the Oxford Union, he moved naturally into a career in politics and was elected to parliament in 1923. Less than a decade later his ministerial career began. He was appointed Parliamentary Secretary at the Board of Trade in November 1931, Financial Secretary to the Treasury in September 1932 and Minister of Transport in June 1934, with a seat in the Cabinet from October 1936. Here, Belisha transformed what was normally a ministerial backwater into a high-profile public office. He introduced driving tests, revised the Highway Code, reduced road traffic accidents and installed the 'beacon' pedestrian crossings which still bear his name. Promoted to be Secretary of State for War when Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister in May 1937, Belisha set about reforming the entrenched upper echelons of the army and War Office. During nearly three years in this key post, he enhanced his standing with the public but inevitably trod on many significant and sensitive toes.

He was also a vigorous Minister of War, who implemented a succession of much-needed reforms; he became disillusioned before most of his colleagues with what Chamberlain did at Munich.

Nevertheless, at the time of his removal from the government in January 1940 no less a figure than Churchill, giving Belisha credit for the introduction of peacetime conscription, wrote to express his regret at the course of events. 'I hope that it will not be long', concluded the future Prime Minister, 'before we are colleagues again, and that the temporary setback will prove no serious obstacle to your opportunities of serving the country.'[3] Most of the press, which worked the War Minister's resignation 'into a big story', was of a similar mind, confident that Belisha would soon be restored to office.[4] As the diarist Harold Nicolson recorded: 'It seems that the country regard him as a second Haldane and a moderniser of the Army. The line is that he has been ousted by an intrigue of the Army Chiefs, and there is a general uproar about being ruled by dictators in brass hats.'[5]

Yet there was no place for Belisha when Churchill formed his own administration just four months later, and he remained on the backbenches for the duration of hostilities, until recalled briefly to the post of Minister of National Insurance in the short-lived caretaker government between May and July 1945. Losing his parliamentary seat of Plymouth Devonport in the Labour landslide later that year, Belisha's ministerial career was now over. He stood unsuccessfully for parliament in Coventry South in the general election of February 1950, before accepting a peerage in the New Year's Honours List of 1954. Aged just sixty-three, he died suddenly in February 1957 while delivering a speech in Rheims as head of a parliamentary delegation on Anglo-French commercial relations. As Keith Robbins has written, the fates had contrived to ensure that Belisha would 'shine brightly', but also 'shine briefly'.[6]

Many of Belisha's private papers, bequeathed to his devoted secretary Hilde Sloan, appear to have been destroyed. Much of what survived, dealing largely with his years in office, was published nearly half a century ago.[7] A serviceable, if uninspiring, biography appeared in 2006.[8] There have also been useful studies of his period as Secretary of State for War (1937–40), while his removal from office in May 1940 has been thoroughly explored.[9] But no detailed examination exists of Belisha's later career and therefore of the failure of a man who, in the early months of the Second World War, was widely regarded, after Churchill, as the most dynamic member of the War Cabinet, to return to high office. The present article seeks to fill this gap in the existing historiography.

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By any objective criteria Belisha had a bad war. His greatest mistake was to fail to attach himself to the winning horse, Winston Churchill. Yet, for a brief period after his resignation in January 1940, it appeared possible that the former War Minister could engineer a major crisis and even bring down Chamberlain's government. It was, suggested the *Daily Mirror*, 'the biggest political sensation since hostilities began'. The government had 'dealt itself a staggering blow. It had relapsed with a thud lower into the morass of its own mediocrity.'[10] Writing in the *Sunday Pictorial*, Hugh Cudlipp argued that Chamberlain had meekly surrendered to an intrigue 'of brass-hats and aristocrats'. But the British public would not stand for it. 'You haven't', predicted Cudlipp, 'heard the last of Hore-Belisha or of his miserable mean dismissal.'[11] According to the Tory MP, Victor Cazalet, Chamberlain had succeeded in making him a 'national hero'.[12] Briefly, Belisha himself seemed to sense his opportunity to seize the highest office of government. He was, he confided to Cudlipp, 'in a wonderful position heading straight for the Premiership'.[13]

Chamberlain himself was sufficiently concerned, and aware of the ability of his media-conscious ex-minister to stir up trouble in the press, that he took the trouble to record his own thirteen-page account of the events surrounding Belisha's resignation.[14] This was to counter a version of those events presented by the former War Minister to Lord Camrose of the *Daily Telegraph*. This, Chamberlain noted, contained 'only a few statements which are directly at variance with the truth, but by suppression, by alteration of the setting and by direction of emphasis, the whole picture is completely distorted and gives an entirely false impression'.[15] In the meantime there appeared in successive issues of the journal *Truth*, certainly with Chamberlain's knowledge and possibly also his connivance, a vitriolic attack on Belisha's integrity. These blatantly anti-Semitic articles, widely distributed within the Westminster village, accused the former minister of financial irregularities in relation to a number of companies 'with which he was connected before he became Financial Secretary, all of which speedily came to grief with the loss of shareholders' money'.[16] They amounted, in the words of a post-war enquiry, to 'a deliberate attempt to kill Belisha once and for all as a political force'.[17]

By any objective criteria Belisha had a bad war. His greatest mistake was to fail to attach himself to the winning horse, Winston Churchill.

Belisha was quick to do the rounds of the leading proprietors and editors of the London press, many of whom were only too ready to vent the frustration to which the inactivity of the Phoney War had naturally given rise. The issue dominated the headlines for several days and reporters besieged Belisha's Wimbledon home during the weekend following his resignation. His opportunity would arise in the Commons resignation speech traditionally accorded to departing ministers. Not for the last time, however, Belisha discovered that opposition during wartime is a hazardous undertaking. Criticism that was too pointed and vocal inevitably ran the risk of being seen as disloyal and unpatriotic. Furthermore, he certainly desired to return to government at the earliest opportunity and would no doubt have recognised that the dominant Conservative Party remained firmly under Chamberlain's control. Recalling recent departures from the National Government, Lieutenant-General Henry Pownall, Director of Military Operations at the War Office, noted that Anthony Eden and Samuel Hoare had got back into office by '"going gracefully" when they had to go. H-B may think it best to follow their example.'[18] None the less, strengthened by the support of the popular press (though Harold Nicolson sensed less of a 'pro-Belisha than an anti-Chamberlain outburst'),[19] Belisha still seemed keen to make the most of his chance when discussing the details of his resignation speech with Hugh Cudlipp as late as 13 January.[20]

In the event, however, he drew back from a frontal attack on Chamberlain and his government. As he later reflected, 'one must not do that sort of thing in time of war'.[21] By the Monday before his Commons speech, Belisha was 'less sure about the wisdom of fighting' and, when the crunch came, in front of a packed House which was 'in a combative mood', he 'climbed meekly down'.[22] Pownall, one of his severest War Office critics, felt that he had made a speech 'full of innuendoes to those few who could discern them', but the general feeling was one of disappointment that an opportunity had been missed.[23] It was 'an innocuous speech about

nothing'.[24] Belisha's supporters, 'while admiring the dignified manner of his speech … regretted that he was impelled, no doubt by the circumstances of the time, to mystify his friends and add fuel to the fire of his enemies'.[25] Cecil King, the proprietor of the *Daily Mirror*, took up Pownall's comparison with Duff Cooper and Anthony Eden. Like them, Belisha would not fight, but expected to be recalled to the Cabinet for being good and causing no trouble.[26] Relieved that the threat to his own position had been lifted, Chamberlain concluded that the whole affair had been a flop, much to the disappointment of those MPs who had flocked to the House in the hope of witnessing a sensation.[27]

The question now was what line Belisha would take on the backbenches. Though the Chamberlain premiership had only four months to run, there were in reality few signs in the winter of 1940 that the Prime Minister's days were numbered. A poll taken in the third week of January showed that 56 per cent of respondents still approved of his leadership. As late as April the figure had not fallen. Only 30 per cent of those questioned in December 1939 had said that they would prefer to see Churchill in 10 Downing Street. None the less, Belisha, still in receipt of the government whip, soon emerged as one of the administration's leading critics. Writing in the *News of the World* in mid-February, he asked whether the allies should aid the Finns in their forlorn struggle against the Soviet Union and, a month later, criticised the government in the House of Commons for its inaction and called for military intervention in Scandinavia. By this stage he was clearly counting on a change of regime, without which his criticisms would inevitably thwart his own ambitions for a political renaissance. No opponent of the Government , he told W. P. Crozier, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, 'will get anything in the way of reward from the Whips.'[28]

Even so, by the time that Churchill succeeded Chamberlain in May, Belisha had good reason to doubt whether he would be among the favoured in the resulting ministerial reshuffle. Cecil King recorded a change in Churchill's attitude towards the fallen minister:

> When I saw [Churchill] in May or June [1939], he spoke of Belisha without affection, but said he was one of the best men Chamberlain had. But on this occasion his whole attitude was quite different … He thought the work of the War Office would go forward more smoothly and expeditiously under Stanley [Belisha's successor].[29]

Belisha himself had come to share the view of his former military adviser, Basil Liddell-Hart, that Churchill had never forgiven him for his role in the so-called Sandys affair in the summer of 1938.[30]

At all events, as the crisis of May 1940 gathered momentum, Belisha seemed ready to attach himself to the cause of the veteran Conservative backbencher Leo Amery, rather than to that of Winston Churchill. Amery's Commons speech on 7 May in which he roundly criticised Chamberlain, quoting the famous words of Oliver Cromwell – 'In the name of God, go!' – had badly, perhaps fatally, damaged the Prime Minister, but he was scarcely in line for the succession himself. None the less, on 9 May Belisha approached Amery and said that he and Max Beaverbrook were agreed that what was now needed was a clean sweep of the Conservative old guard and that Amery should be Prime Minister 'as the man who had turned out the Government and also as best qualified all round'.[31] But Amery was too shrewd not to see through Belisha's motives. 'The trouble is that he no doubt started it in the hope that it might bring him back again as a reward for helping. And', Amery concluded, 'I don't think he is wanted back, at any rate yet.'[32] By the following day Belisha was even speculating that his prospects would be better if Lloyd George emerged as the new Prime Minister, but he was 'not so confident of his chances if Churchill has the job'.[33] A Lloyd George premiership was, however, even less likely than an Amery one. When, therefore, it was Churchill who was invited to form a new government, it was hardly surprising that there was no place for Belisha within it.

Churchill's appointment as Prime Minister occupies a seminal position in Britain's history. In the threatening summer and autumn of 1940 the new premier came to epitomise the national will to survive and, ultimately, to prevail over the Nazi menace. As a result, it is easily forgotten that his position at the head of the administration was never fully secure until he was able to take some credit for a change in Britain's military fortunes. Granted the nation's precarious survival through 1940 and the further setbacks which resulted from the entry of Japan into the war at the end of 1941 and the subsequent rapid collapse of Britain's Far-Eastern position, Churchill had to wait for Montgomery's victory at El Alamein in the autumn of 1942 before he could feel total confidence in his domestic political position. During the first two years of his premiership, therefore, there were repeated, if sometimes subterranean, grumblings about his performance as war leader and speculation about his possible replacement as Prime Minister. In this embryonic opposition grouping Belisha, through speeches in parliament and a weekly column in the *News of the World*, came to occupy a significant position.

For most of 1940, however, his attitude towards the new administration was broadly supportive. Understandably, he was rather bitter to be 'doing nothing' when 'one feels that one really could help'. Moreover, the Cabinet was, he claimed, a 'one man affair', no doubt a reflection of his own desire to be part of it.[34] But he generally held back from criticising the Prime Minister himself, disappointing Lord Winterton by his failure to oppose the holding of secret sessions of the House of Commons.[35] According to Beaverbrook, Belisha was in a dilemma. 'He cannot make up his mind whether to smash his way into the Government by attacking it or whether to wheedle his way in by praising it.'[36] Belisha probably still hoped that Churchill would recall him when a suitable opportunity arose. The final

According to Beaverbrook, Belisha was in a dilemma. 'He cannot make up his mind whether to smash his way into the Government by attacking it or whether to wheedle his way in by praising it.'

resignation of Neville Chamberlain in the autumn of 1940 might, he speculated, be such an occasion. But when cancer forced Chamberlain's withdrawal, Belisha was not among the beneficiaries of the resulting reshuffle. His speech in parliament in early September in support of the destroyers-for-bases deal therefore turned out to be one of his last unequivocally pro-Churchill declarations. By mid-October he was complaining bitterly, albeit in private, about the government's inability to win the war and of Churchill's foolishness in accepting the leadership of the Conservative Party in succession to Chamberlain. 'I have a feeling', noted the journalist and former diplomat Robert Bruce Lockhart, 'all he wants is a job in government'.[37] By early November the Tory MP, Beverley Baxter, was reporting a dinner at the Savoy hosted by Belisha whose purpose was 'to inflame opposition against the Prime Minister', while a week later another Conservative MP sensed that Belisha and other displaced malcontents were now 'gathering courage and sniping at their successors'.[38]

The year 1941 offered plenty of opportunities to criticise the government and to suggest that the British war effort lacked sufficient energy. Belisha found himself involved with a motley group of parliamentary dissidents which included the future Liberal leader, Clement Davies, and the socialists Aneurin Bevan and Emanuel Shinwell. Much of Belisha's criticism was directed at Churchill himself. He regarded 'the PM as a danger. He says he has no judgement and visualises a position when some calamity will arise as the result of his change of stategy.'[39] The British people had been impressed by their leader's oratory, but 'the country would soon wake up and realise that speeches were not victories, and that we were drugged with Winston's oratory'.[40] There is even a suggestion that Belisha, together with the Labour MP Richard Stokes, made a trip to Templemore in Ireland to investigate the details of Brendan Bracken's birth in the hope of confirming the widely circulating rumour that Churchill was his father. 'Anything they picked up in Templemore would be taken down and used in evidence for the unmasking of both rascals.'[41]

Much of Belisha's criticism was directed at Churchill himself. He regarded 'the PM as a danger. He says he has no judgement and visualises a position when some calamity will arise as the result of his change of stategy.'

Right: Hore-Belisha at different points in his career; bottom, with a 'Belisha beacon'

Churchill's attitude towards his critics was somewhat equivocal. On the one hand he viewed such figures with private contempt. 'An Opposition is being formed out of the left-outs', he told his son Randolph. 'LG, Hore-Belisha, Shinwell, Winterton, and some small fry, mostly National Liberals. They do their best to abuse us whenever the news gives them an opportunity, but there is not the slightest sign that the House as a whole, nor still less the country will swerve from their purpose.'[42] When, in May, in a debate on assistance to Greece, Belisha called for the creation of a single Ministry of Defence and said that the British army was in need of 'more mobility and more armour', the Prime Minister retorted by reminding Belisha that some of the responsibility for present deficiencies must logically rest with his own tenure of the War Office between 1937 and 1940.[43] But, at the same time, at least while any question marks remained over his own position, Churchill appears to have considered the possibility of silencing Belisha's criticisms by bringing him into the government. 'Winston is inclined to defeat opposition by means of favour rather than by fear.'[44] For his part, Belisha 'gladly pulls his punches if he thinks there is any chance of getting back, even to the Ministry of Pensions'.[45]

The fall of Crete in June gave Belisha further scope for criticism, but again Churchill tried to turn the tables on his opponent by suggesting that Belisha had left the War Office in 'a lamentable condition'. At the end of the parliamentary debate the Prime Minister took his critic into the Commons smoking room and delivered a headmasterly rebuke. 'If you fight me I shall fight you back. And remember this. You are using a 4.5 inch howitzer, and I am using a 12 inch gun.'[46] Though Churchill survived these parliamentary encounters without damage, Belisha still argued that the government's position was 'visibly weakening' and that events would soon bring about a 'complete reconstruction' in which he might well emerge as Churchill's successor.[47] 'Drunk with power', the Prime Minister was becoming a dictator and leading the country to disaster.[48]

Grotesquely inaccurate though Belisha's assessment may now appear, the entry of Japan into the war in December and the subsequent series of military disasters in the Far East gave some contemporary credence to his predictions. At the same time, however, with the Soviet Union and the United States now allies, the tide of Britain's war effort was bound to turn. A military combination now existed against which Hitler could not hope to prevail. Meanwhile, Churchill skilfully removed one potential threat by taking Sir Stafford Cripps, widely seen as the only realistic alternative premier, into his government. Still Belisha argued that 'if things are not changed, we are going the right way as far as we can to lose the war'.[49] The fall of Tobruk in June 1942 led to a censure debate during which Belisha made a 'brilliant, eloquent and damning attack on the Government'.[50] But John Wardlaw-Milne, who moved the censure motion, destroyed its effect by suggesting that the Duke of Gloucester should be made Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, a proposition that reduced the Commons to laughter. Even so, Belisha was among twenty-five MPs who went into the opposition lobby at the end of the debate.

Belisha believed that, without a change in personnel, further disasters lay ahead, probably the fall of Egypt.[51] In fact, of course, Egypt did not fall. On 23 October Montgomery launched his decisive offensive at El Alamein. By early November Rommel's army was in full retreat. Within days Churchill allowed the church bells to be rung for the first time since the beginning of hostilities. 'This is not the end,' he pronounced. 'It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps the end of the beginning.'[52] The Prime Minister might have added that it was the end for Leslie Hore-Belisha. Perceptive observers recognised this, even if Belisha himself did not. 'The critics of the "Higher direction of the war"', noted Hugh Dalton, 'the Shinwells and the Belishas and the rest – will all

have sunk well out of sight and mind today.'[53]

With the Prime Minister's position unassailable, Belisha's aim now reverted to securing a recall to the existing government. 'He had not made any considerable speech of any kind' for nine months, noted the editor of the *Manchester Guardian* in March 1943. 'He didn't intend to make any attacking speech for the time being unless there was some event … so that he was morally compelled to take up a position and criticise the Government.' Astonishingly, Belisha 'didn't know what influences were keeping him out' of the administration.[54] Ready now to distance himself from the likes of Davies, Shinwell and Bevan, he determined to follow the path of ingratiation. A speech in support of the government in October 1944 prompted the Communist Willie Gallacher to offer ironic congratulations 'on the assiduous way in which the Rt Hon. Member is working his passage home.'[55] Speaking on the Town and Country Planning Bill he had, according to the young Tory MP, Peter Thorneycroft, 'out Conservatived the Conservatives' in his efforts to please the party.[56] Churchill, of course, professed the virtues of magnanimity in victory. This, or perhaps more probably the need to show that the caretaker government, which he formed in May 1945 on the departure of Labour and the Liberals from the wartime coalition, was not purely Conservative in composition, prompted him to offer Belisha the post of Minister of National Insurance. His known skills as a publicist might convince the electorate of the Conservatives' commitment to schemes of social insurance.[57] But, with only two months in office and a general election to fight, there was no time for Belisha to build upon this partial restoration to front-line politics.

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Hore-Belisha's career also illustrates the importance of party in modern British politics and the difficulties lying in the path of any individual politician, however talented, who fails to enlist its support. Nor was Belisha simply one of the many Liberals of the inter-war years whose prospects were thwarted by the decline of the political organisation which represented and championed their beliefs. He was among that band of Liberals who seized their opportunity in the extraordinary circumstances of 1931 and renewed their prospects of ministerial advancement by joining the Liberal National group headed by Sir John Simon. But even among this band of Liberal schismatics, Belisha's place was never orthodox, comfortable or secure.

First elected to parliament in 1923 for the Devonport division of Plymouth, Belisha established a reputation as a radical, interventionist Liberal with a keen interest in social policy. Despite the party's rapid decline in urban Britain over the following decade, Liberalism held on in Devonport, championing causes such as better houses for working-class families and deriving benefit in this port constituency from the party's continuing commitment to free trade.[58] Motives varied, but the majority of those who defected in 1931 were from the party's right wing – former adherents of Asquith in the long-running intra-party feud which had poisoned Liberal politics ever since 1916.[59] Belisha, on the other hand, was regarded as a follower of Lloyd George; but he lost faith in the latter's apparent readiness to sustain the minority Labour government of 1929–31 in office. More particularly, Belisha's defection in 1931 was motivated, at least in part, by that government's decision to reduce the size of the Royal Navy. He had built his majority up to more than 4,000 votes at the general election of 1929, but it still made sense to keep an eye firmly on the interests of the electorate in a constituency where the naval dockyard was a major employer.[60] Even so, Belisha was a reluctant and cautious defector, initially refusing to follow Simon when the latter resigned the Liberal whip in June 1931. The two men viewed one another with scarcely concealed distrust and their relationship was one of ongoing tension within the new Liberal National party. Indeed, one of the group's MPs blamed Belisha for much of the press campaign directed

against Simon, conducted 'with a view to his own advancement to Cabinet'.[61]

In all probability Belisha felt no compelling loyalty to party nor indeed to Liberalism itself. He saw politics as a way of getting things done while furthering his own interests and ambitions. Reviewing his career many years later, the one-time Liberal chief whip, Percy Harris, recorded:

> His handicap as a politician is that he has no fixed political creed. He started as an ardent Radical, then became a leading figure in the Liberal National group, practically its founder, left them and became an independent and is now a Conservative.[62]

Shortly before his migration to the Liberal National camp, Belisha seems to have contemplated joining the so-called New Party, the ideologically confused grouping which helped transport Oswald Mosley from mainstream politics to overt fascism.[63] By early 1932, he was already discussing with Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain the possible fusion of the Liberal National group with the Conservative Party.[64] While, in his public pronouncements, he insisted that the Liberal Nationals represented a viable and important new force in British politics, in private he expressed doubts as to whether the party had any future.[65] He even seems to have approached the chairman of the Kingston Conservative Association some time after the Munich Agreement with a view to his adoption as Tory candidate at the next election. The chairman,

> consulted the big shots of his committee and found that they were rigidly opposed to Belisha's candidature. The fact that Belisha was willing to abandon his present party label did not surprise or please them. They looked upon Belisha as a person willing to give up any principles for much less than 30 pieces of silver![66]

None the less, it was as a Liberal National that his ministerial career had prospered. Though grossly outnumbered by Conservatives in the House of Commons, it was the Liberal Nationals who gave the governments of Ramsay MacDonald, Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain some credible claim to their 'National' identity. As a result, Belisha enjoyed preferment which might not otherwise have come his way, rising steadily up the ministerial ladder, before becoming Secretary of State for War in May 1937. But, particularly after his appointment to junior office at the Treasury, where Neville Chamberlain was Chancellor, Belisha was regarded as a Chamberlain man. Thereafter his career prospered only so long as he continued to enjoy the latter's favour. As Minister of War he was able to survive a succession of crises, occasioned by his controversial changes in the senior personnel at the War Office at the end of 1937, the Sandys affair in June 1938, and a concerted attempt by a group of junior ministers to remove him from office that December, largely because of the by then Prime Minister Chamberlain's backing.[67] Once that support was removed, however, as was clearly the case in January 1940, Belisha's position was always going to be vulnerable, especially granted his somewhat detached position within the Liberal National party.

The former War Minister confided that it was now his intention to devise a policy to appeal to all Liberals. 'He believed that the prevailing sentiment of the country was liberal and he could appeal to it. He hoped to advocate an advanced social policy.'[68] But the Liberal National party continued to back the National Government, a fact that made Belisha's ongoing criticisms of Chamberlain's administration increasingly problematic. In this situation Simon sought and secured Belisha's removal as chairman of the Liberal National parliamentary group in March 1940. Some Liberal National MPs were unhappy at this treatment of one of the few political heavyweights in their ranks, but they had 'no time to prepare or rally his defence'.[69] According to Henry Morris-Jones, MP for Denbigh, Belisha,

> is a big man politically, a reformer full of zeal and character and like many a reformer has antagonised powerful interests. His chief weakness is the lack of a party to back him. But the 33 Lib Nat MPs, if united and determined, could reinstate him before long in high office … Had we a strong leader we could do much but Simon is a clever piece of jelly and has no backbone.[70]

As Minister of War he was able to survive a succession of crises … largely because of the by then Prime Minister Chamberlain's backing. Once that support was removed, however, as was clearly the case in January 1940, Belisha's position was always going to be vulnerable.

Over the next two years the Liberal National group itself threatened to splinter into opposing factions, with a number of its MPs clearly believing that the time had come to reassert its influence within the government and end what was thought to be the too quiescent attitude adopted under Simon's leadership. When, following the no-confidence vote of January 1942, two MPs – Morris-Jones and Edgar Granville, the Member for Eye in Suffolk – decided to sever their remaining links with the Liberal National group, they found themselves, somewhat to their surprise, joined by Belisha himself.[71] In later years, the three men went their separate ways. Morris-Jones soon regretted his actions and sought and secured readmission into the Liberal National fold. Granville rejoined the mainstream Liberal Party in April 1945 and narrowly retained his parliamentary seat in both the 1945 and 1950 general elections. Defeated in 1951, he quickly joined the Labour Party early the following year. By contrast, this was the end of Belisha's association with any branch of the Liberal movement.

'The nation had everything to gain at this moment by patriotic out-spokenness', Belisha insisted to his constituents.[72] Nonetheless, it was difficult to see how, as an independent MP, his career could now prosper. For a while there were rumours of moves to create a new centre party, supporting the socialist Stafford Cripps for the premiership.[73] But the threat to Churchill's position had passed by the end of 1942 and Belisha was left to consider more realistic options. Brendan Bracken had already advised him that he would ultimately have to decide which of the two main parties to join. 'He thought the Tory party

would be more congenial to me as one could be more independent in that party than in the Socialist.'[74] Henry 'Chips' Channon, convinced that 'Leslie's talents are too great to be thrown away as a free lance in Opposition', also urged the Tory option, a course which Belisha claimed, somewhat disingenuously, never to have considered.[75] But the real problem, was whether the Conservatives as a whole would welcome him into their midst, especially granted his recent record of parliamentary opposition. Belisha knew only too well how ruthless the Conservative machine could be. It was:

> even stronger than the Nazi party machine. It may have a different aim, but it is similarly callous and ruthless. It suppressed anyone who did not toe the line. He realised that they did not regard him as 'one of them'.[76]

By the end of 1944 Cecil King sensed that Belisha was finally 'moving into the Tory fold', but still had 'no sense of direction'.[77] He hoped that the Conservative and Liberal National parties in Devonport would combine and that he would be able to stand at the forthcoming general election as a 'National Conservative' candidate.[78] In the event, moves to amalgamate the Conservative and Liberal National parties at constituency level were delayed until 1947 and it was as a 'National' (albeit unopposed by Conservatives and Liberal Nationals alike) that Belisha fought and lost his seat. Michael Foot, his Labour opponent, sensing the shift in the public mood against the Conservatives, announced that he would contest the election 'on the assumption that Mr Hore-Belisha is a Tory', a proposition which was not easy to deny, granted that Belisha appeared on several Conservative platforms in neighbouring constituencies during the election campaign.[79]

Only after the election was over did Belisha actually join the Conservatives, insisting now that the modern party was fully 'liberalised' and had become a proper vehicle for the aspirations of those who had once placed their faith in the Liberal Party.[80] But whereas Tory headquarters made strenuous efforts to secure the early return, via by-elections, of several former ministers defeated at the general election, Belisha could expect few comparable favours. A guest at the wedding of Churchill's daughter Mary in February 1947, Belisha recorded Churchill's disappointment at his failure to return to parliament. 'It is a great nuisance', said the old man, 'that the right people did not die to make suitable by-election vacancies.'[81] But Churchill's well-oiled small talk at this family occasion may not have reflected his true feelings. As late as October 1950, by which time Belisha had made his one, unsuccessful, bid to secure re-election to the Commons as a Conservative, Anthony Eden expressed his distaste for this 'nasty fellow'. 'We don't want him back in politics. He doesn't know what it is to go straight.'[82] As a result, the limit of Belisha's electoral reincarnation as a Conservative was to be returned, unopposed, for the Pall Mall ward of the Westminster Council in March 1947, a position he retained until his death.

By the end of 1944 Cecil King sensed that Belisha was finally 'moving into the Tory fold', but still had 'no sense of direction'.

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Eden's words bring into focus the final element of explanation for Belisha's political extinction after January 1940 – his inability to cultivate a significant body of political support. Indeed, it was the combination of political rootlessness and personal unpopularity which ultimately proved fatal to Belisha's career. The hostility of most of his contemporaries more than outweighed the transient support he enjoyed in public opinion and the press. When, in a Commons speech in 1943, he referred casually to 'his Honourable friend', one Labour backbencher interjected, 'You have not got an Honourable friend in this House'.[83] For this, latent anti-Semitism, more common, particularly in Tory circles, in those pre-Holocaust days than it is now comfortable to acknowledge, was at least in part responsible. This was the case even among those who admitted such prejudice with reluctance. 'He has a way of antagonising people', noted John Colville, 'very often just when he is trying to be at his best and most efficient. In him one sees very clearly those characteristics which inevitably, but inexplicably, make Jews unpopular.'[84]

It is now generally agreed that a breakdown of personal relations was at the heart of the process that led to his removal from the War Office. For some time before January 1940 he was scarcely on speaking terms with Lord Gort, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. 'You couldn't expect two such utterly different people' to get on, reflected Pownall. But Pownall's own sympathies were unequivocal. The contrast was between Gort, 'a great gentleman', and Belisha, 'an obscure, shallow-brained charlatan, political Jewboy'.[85] Belisha had grown 'bumptious and cocky with office, and became just an impossible person with whom to work'.[86] There was something in the War Minister's character that alienated the top brass of the army. His informal style and personal self-indulgence did not appeal to battle-hardened generals, while his impatience with red tape and tradition was bound to irritate those with a vested interest in the status quo. According to one observer, he arrived at the front in November 1939 'arrayed like a Bond Street bum-boy, even wearing spats'.[87]

But his personal failings had been apparent throughout his career. On his appointment as Financial Secretary to the Treasury in 1932, the journalist Collin Brooks noted that he was 'able and energetic', but also 'greatly disliked in the City as a pushing Jew'.[88] Neville Chamberlain accepted him as a junior minister 'with reluctance' and it was some time before 'I could get over the rather unpleasant impression I had of his personality'.[89] Anthony Eden later admitted that he was 'never at … ease with him', while his former Cabinet colleague, Lord Hailsham, found him 'a vulgar unreliable man with a passion for self-advertisment'.[90] His friend and adviser, Liddell Hart, heard that as War Minister Belisha was 'hated in the cabinet'.[91] Another 'friend' found him 'amusing, scintillating and even inspiring, but I did not like him and I did not trust him, though I felt sorry for

him'.[92] Chamberlain's assessment at the time of Belisha's resignation was both balanced and perceptive. Hostility to him arose:

> partly from his impatience and eagerness, partly from a self-centeredness which makes him careless of other people's feelings and partly from the impression he creates that he is more concerned with publicity and his own personal ambitions than he is with the public interest. I believe this to be fundamentally unjust. He has much more idealism and loyalty in him than he is credited with but that doesn't alter the fact that his ways, his assertiveness, his want of consideration for the other man's point of view, create a bad impression and make him a 'mauvais coucheur'.[93]

Two character traits merit particular emphasis. The first was his remarkably modern appreciation of the value of publicity – the good story for the press, the 'photo-opportunity', even the 'soundbite' – and the unfortunate effect this had in his own day in creating the conviction that his only real interest was his self-advancement. 'Not since Horatio Bottomley had anyone been quite so transparently on the make.'[94] Contemporaries noted with distaste the fact that he took his own photographer with him when visiting army barracks. Similarly, he would get out of his official car at Horse Guards and proceed to Downing Street on foot only when confident that the press would capture his arrival. 'Too childish for words', concluded Gort.[95] Those he befriended often concluded that they were being used, giving him what Liddell Hart called 'his reputation for sucking other people's brains and then leaving them high and dry'.[96] It was the same tendency sensed by Henry Morris-Jones when he resigned from the Liberal National Party:

> Leslie with his clever Jewish mind yesterday did some rapid calculations. Knew we were resigning at a good time on a good issue; decided to immediately jump on to our wagon and to become the conductor of it![97]

Belisha lacked both the self-knowledge and the ability to sense and react to the mood of others which might have made him a more successful politician.

Equally damaging was Belisha's almost total inability to appreciate the effect which his character and manner had on others – and his surprise and distress when he realised he was disliked.[98] In part this was a function of 'his desire to believe what he wishes to believe'.[99] 'I had the feeling', noted Chamberlain shortly before the crisis of January 1940, 'that he did not and could not see where he had gone wrong.'[100] It was evident, confirmed Liddell Hart, that he did not realise how General Ironside, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, had turned against him and was siding with his enemies.[101] Belisha lacked both the self-knowledge and the ability to sense and react to the mood of others which might have made him a more successful politician.

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'My position is good, I have my public, and if trouble comes and there is a use for me, I shall be there. I shall be stronger, I think, than I was before.'[102] So judged Hore-Belisha six weeks after his resignation from the War Office. The remark was characteristic of the miscalculations and misjudgements which marked his later career. Trouble did come, but Churchill survived it, and, having set himself up as one of the war premier's leading critics, Belisha was never likely to recover his earlier prominence. Even had an unforeseen military catastrophe forced Churchill from power, Belisha was not well placed to profit from such a situation. His lack of both a solid party base and a strong personal following would always have told against him. So Leslie Hore-Belisha joined the long list of 'future Prime Ministers' who never made the grade. The man who aspired to be a second Disraeli and who kept a bust of the Victorian statesman prominently displayed in his library to remind him of his ambition is consigned to the footnotes of history. He is remembered, if at all, by a now ageing generation who learnt their highway code with the help of the eponymous flashing orange beacons to which this supremely publicity-conscious politician at least succeeded in permanently attaching his name.

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REPORTS

Fighting Labour: the struggle for radical supremacy in Scotland 1885–1929

Liberal Democrat History Group meeting, 13 March 2009 at the Scottish Liberal Democrat Conference, with Professor Richard Finlay, Dr Catriona Macdonald and Jim Wallace.
Chair: Robert Brown MSP
Report by **Robert Brown**

During much of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Liberal Party was the dominant political force in Scotland, not least in urban Scotland. In 1906, the Liberal Party won fifty-eight Scottish seats (out of seventy-two), the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists twelve, and Labour two. In 1910, the Liberal Party again held fifty-eight seats at both elections. In January 1910, they claimed 54.2 per cent of the vote, ten times as much as the Labour Party on 5.1 per cent.

This dominance vanished, however, after the First World War. But even before the party's renewal from the 1960s and 1970s onwards, the Liberal tradition was occasionally capable of revival in its former heartlands. Asquith's by-election victory in Paisley in 1920 is a well-known Indian summer event in the decline of the party and, even as late as 1961, the late John Bannerman came only 1,658 votes short of regaining the Paisley seat.

The Liberal Democrat History Group's first meeting at a Scottish Liberal Democrat conference looked at the Liberal Party's contribution to radical, progressive politics in Scotland and its struggle with Labour in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in the years following Asquith's by-election win in Paisley in 1920. The story of Liberal dominance and decline in Scotland has many strands and, at a time when the Labour vote has shrunk to levels not seen in a century, and when Liberal Democrats lead the administration in two out of four of Scotland's great cities, there may be parallels today. Perhaps consequently, the meeting attracted a packed gathering in the library of the Royal George Hotel in Perth – indeed, in a phrase I have always wanted to use about a Liberal meeting, people had to be turned away at the door.

Our first speaker was Professor Richard Finlay, head of the History Department at the University of Strathclyde, who has written extensively on the period.[1] Richard noted that, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, all of Scotland's Conservative MPs could be fitted in one or two railway carriages, while the Liberal Party enjoyed real political hegemony in Scotland. He suggested four main reasons for Liberal success: the cult of individualism; the use of the Tory Party as a bogeyman; the broad church that the party appealed to; and its ability to portray itself as the Scottish party.

The strong cult of individualism within Scottish society tends to be overlooked, but it appeared in many aspects of Scottish society at the time. One example would be in the very late and very weak development of trade unionism in Scotland before 1914. This is, in part, explained by the Scottish economy, which was very much an artisan economy dependent on activities such as shipbuilding and heavy engineering. Although mass industries in many respects, these were also based on almost mediaeval craftsmanship. With the necessity for so many different types of workers specialised in so many different skills, a collective working-class identity, or collective trade union identity, found difficulty in emerging, as each group had its own interests and its own concern to define itself in terms of status and working pride.

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Such individualism was also very much a part of Scottish political culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century: the idea that you as an individual are responsible for your own actions. And it is worth noting, too, that the notion of 'self-help' was developed by a Scot – Haddington's Samuel Smiles. As the party which best protected the rights of the individual and which kept government at bay, the Liberal Party could encapsulate this sense of individual freedom and the notions of laissez-faire and of a meritocratic society, where those who had talent and ability would prevail.

Finlay's second point was the role of the Tory party as bogeyman in Scotland in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century – as the antithesis of the radical tradition and of freedom and progressiveness. The Liberal Party was able to associate the Tory party with privilege, corruption, decadence, and with putting a break on the good things within Scottish society. Key to this was the remarkable longevity of land issues within Scottish politics. Even after the First World War, people were talking about land reform (despite the fact that most Scots lived in an urban environment), which enabled the Liberal Party to raise the spectre of the demons, the Tory aristocrats.

And, again, in terms of church politics, the Conservatives greatly aided this development by a constant tendency to shoot themselves in the foot. A very good example of this was their inability to get their heads around Scottish ecclesiastical politics. The Church Patronage (Scotland) Act of 1711 was strongly opposed by the Church of Scotland because of its intrusion into church elections, and the Tories were blamed for the consequent Disruption of

1843.[2] By the time the Act was finally repealed in 1874, too much antagonism had built up towards the Tories for Scottish ecclesiasts to consider a rapprochement. And the Tories were further wrong-footed with the formation of the United Free Church of Scotland in 1900. So the Tories in Scotland presented a stark contrast to the vision of what the Liberal Party stood for.

A third factor was that the Liberal Party was very much a 'broad church' organisation: beneath an umbrella of high principles was encompassed a wide variety of issues, from land reform to church disestablishment, from temperance to educational reform. Indeed, up until 1914, Liberals were convinced that the Labour Party was merely a more advanced section of the Liberal Party, and Liberals were very much involved in the Fabian Society. This broad approach gave the party an enormous elasticity which has sometimes been described as a weakness – although the speed with which the Liberal Party recovered in 1886 from the secession of the Liberal Unionists is testament to the strength of a broad church in its ability to withstand the loss of one element.

Richard Finlay's final point was that the Liberal Party was very good at portraying itself as the 'natural Scottish Party', the party that was best suited to Scotland. It was able to portray many characteristics which usefully dovetailed with Liberal ideas – such as thrift, temperance, hard work, meritocracy, honesty, uprightness, and independence – as being national characteristics and good traditional Scottish values. The way that the Liberals were able to reinvent parts of Scottish history again tells a 'Liberal tale'. In the nineteenth century, William Wallace became portrayed as a 'man of the people', the 'people's champion' – the person of ability who stood up to the corrupt aristocracy who would sell the nation out to Edward I of England. This story was repeated in the idea of John Knox as a man of the people, standing up for principle against the despotic Catholic tyranny of Queen Mary; or in that of Robert Burns, a lad of parts, who was done down by the aristocracy – and, again, the virtues that Burns extolles were 'Scottish virtues', which just happened to be the same virtues espoused by the Liberal Party.

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Perhaps the Liberal Party's greatest achievement was, by 1914, to have tied this belief in individualism to social policy. When the Liberals started to tackle social issues, it was done not from the perspective of collectivism but from that of ensuring individual freedom – because freedom without the means of realising it, such as education or a minimum standard of living, was effectively meaningless. So the Liberal pursuit of social policy became inextricably tied to individual liberty, as a way to realise that liberty. This they did very cleverly, and as a result Labour made almost no inroads into Scottish politics before 1914.

All this was changed by the First World War, which unleashed forces within Scottish society that fatally compromised the Liberal Party. Firstly, there was the growth of collectivism, sectionalism, communism, or perhaps even just class. The individualism which was such a key aspect of Scottish society before the war was swept away; the key question became whether you were middle class or working class, rural or urban. Under such class polarisation, what mattered was not the individual but groups, or sections within society. This obviously did not help the Liberal Party.

The second factor was that of an alternative bogeyman to the Tories: the spectre of socialism. Conventionally, historians talk about class polarisation and the effect it had on the working class, but far more significant was the effect on the middle class, who were much quicker at mobilising themselves, and displaying a stronger sense of class identity and solidarity, in response to the threat of Bolshevism. It has often been said that 'Red Clydeside' was a myth, but it certainly did not seem to to middle-class imaginations in Scotland. And it was not just a question of class: rural Scotland was also terrified of a land-grabbing invasion of Glasgow slum dwellers somehow determined to set up farms in the Highlands. The Liberal Party was therefore caught: it presented itself as being above class interests and class sectionalism, a party of conciliation rather than of class war; but as a result, however, the Conservatives sounded better at keeping the socialist bogeyman at bay.

On the other hand, from the point of view of the left, the Liberal Party was tarred by association with the dreaded Conservatives (irrespective of the existence of the Asquithian splinter group), as a consequence of the wartime coalition. As Minister of Munitions, for example, Lloyd George had been responsible for the Munitions Act, which had been used to quell the working class. Again, the Liberal Party was caught between two stools. This was exaccerbated by the decision on the part of both Labour and the Conservatives to attack the Liberal Party, and the failure of the Liberals to grasp the implications.

The final, critical factor was poor organisation in the era of mass politics. One of the strengths of the Liberal Party in the period up to 1914 was a very good organisation, but during the war that started to collapse. In contrast, the Conservative Party reorganised itself, building up its organisation and becoming very well funded. The Labour Party, for their part, had access to trade union funds, members, organisation, and volunteers. After 1918, the professionalisation of politics stepped up a gear, and the Liberals simply did not have the resources to compete.

This was not, however, the end of Liberalism. Although after 1924 the Liberal Party ceased to command the central position in Scottish society, that is not to say that Liberal values disappeared. What Labour politicians were saying in the early 1920s was not that different from what Liberal politicians had been saying in 1914. Many Liberal qualities, principles and ideas, including laissez faire and the free trade economy, and an emphasis on international diplomacy, carried on. The Liberal Party left a considerable legacy which should not be forgotten.

If Professor Finlay's contribution was wide-ranging, our next speaker, Dr Catriona Macdonald, Senior Lecturer in History at Glasgow Caledonian University and Chair of the Scottish Local History Forum,[3] looked at the story in microcosm. I had read and admired her book, *The Radical Thread*,[4] on Paisley politics between 1885 and 1924, but her presentation was a real treat. As per her book, Dr Macdonald took the focus inwards to look at the Paisley constituency in particular. She said it had been suggested that she call her contribution 'The Last Firework in the Display', but she decided instead on 'Paisley Patterns'.

On 10 March 1920, in the wake of her father's victory in the recent by-election, Lady Violent Bonham Carter, daughter of Herbert Asquith, breathlessly confessed at a meeting of the National Liberal Club that 'there isn't an inch of Paisley which isn't hallowed ground to me'. Just how a Scottish industrial burgh on the banks of the Cart River came to occupy such a cherished place in the heart of this Liberal aristocrat in 1920 requires explanation, since just a year before, it certainly would not have been immediately obvious.

Paisley was famed for its textiles. After a trade depression in the 1840s, the iconic Paisley shawls had been replaced by thread as the town's most famous export. But other manufacturers were also evident: Brown & Polsons and Robertson's Preserves were, of course, household names, and there were also engineering works and shipbuilding interests on the banks of the River Cart. So it is not surprising that in 1911 over 77 per cent of the employed population of Paisley worked in industry. If we take 'class' as our guide and nothing else, then it was not obvious territory for Scottish Liberalism's 'last hoorah'. However, in Paisley burgh there was a Liberal tradition of long standing: in every parliamentary election since the Great Reform Act of 1832, Paisley had elected Liberals, and, except when the Liberal candidacy was contested, at no time did the Liberal majority drop below 10 per cent.

By 1920, then, Paisley Liberalism had survived the various threats posed by Chartism in the 1840s, Liberal Unionism in the 1880s onwards, and, of course, the burgeoning Labour interest in Scotland that had emerged most forcefully in the opening years of the twentieth century. Certainly, for each generation, Liberal loyalties had a unique dimension, but over the years a few factors were consistently evident: well-known local candidates; the influence of Liberal-inclined employers, most notably the Coates family; an unrelenting commitment to free trade in the burgh; a certain 'vocabulary' of democratic rights; an appeal to community; the uncomfortably close relations between Unionist and Orange forces in the burgh; and a Labour movement plagued by disunity and, as Richard Finlay had suggested, by residual Liberal sympathies. All of these aspects together grounded Liberal success in this very proud burgh.

On first appraisal, therefore, there appears little to explain when it comes to that iconic Liberal victory of Herbert Asquith in 1920. But things were not that simple. As Richard Finlay had suggested, war had changed the political environment in Scotland. In Paisley, a generation of women whose working lives in the thread mills would previously have ended in marriage had become aware of their own potential as they worked on the town's trams and munitions factories and acted as the leaders of rent strikes. A generation of young men had also been radicalised as a result of their war service, the inspiration of Red Clyde leaders such as John MacLean or Jimmie Maxton, or their experience of what state intervention in the economy could achieve. Whole families had become acutely aware of their power as consumers (something which is often forgotten), as numbers in the co-operative societies across Scotland rose dramatically in the war years. And finally, whether disheartened by the fractured Liberal leadership in wartime, the introduction of conscription, the militarisation of society, or the compromises of Versailles, many Liberal stalwarts were questioning their loyalty to a party that seemed strangely out of step with both the harsh realities of the modern world and, indeed, the Liberal radicalism of the past.

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By the 1918 general election, the sitting Liberal MP in Paisley was John McCallum, a soap manufacturer. He faced two opponents. The first, brandishing the Coalition 'coupon', was a Glasgow furniture maker called John Taylor – a Unionist and a member of the staunchly patriotic British Workers' League. On the left, with the hopes of this emergent class interest squarely on his shoulders, was the third candidate, J. M. Biggar – a housing factor by profession and the new Co-operative Party candidate for the Paisley burgh. McCallum won with a wafer-thin majority of 0.5 per cent – just 106 votes ahead of the Labour hopeful. It is not surprising, therefore, that when McCallum died less than two years later, many feared that the great and proud Liberal tradition in Paisley would end with him.

The Paisley by-election of 1920 necessitated by McCallum's death was the first contest in an independent Liberal seat since the 1918 election. Although in the mean time the Asquithian Liberals had notched up by-election victories in Leyton West, Hull Central and Central Aberdeenshire, by May 1919 it was clear that the initiative in the constituencies had passed to Labour. Paisley Liberals were realistic about their chances. Their first plan was to seek a compromise Coalition candidate with the Unionists to unify the anti-Bolshevik vote but, just as this consensus was forming, rumours began to circulate that Asquith could be persuaded to challenge in Paisley. However, as the *Daily Record* commented, the Liberals were clearly not united behind him, and it took a long time for the group to come together. In the end Asquith won the Liberal nomination with only an eighteen-vote majority over J. C. Watson, an Edinburgh advocate and the son of the editor of the *Paisley Daily Express*. And it was quite clear, too, that a joint candidate would have been very popular with the local Unionists. Asquith's celebrity and his

gravitas no doubt carried much weight in a constituency eager to uphold its proud reputation against its neighbour Glasgow's claims that, by 1920, Paisley was little more than a suburb to the second city of the empire. And nationally, the contest of 1920 would be hailed as a 'second Midlothian' – a reference point in the Liberal history of Britain. But from a local perspective, Asquith's candidature merely papered over cracks within the local constituency party and left unresolved many of the dilemmas that war had brought to the surface.

Notwithstanding all that, however, Asquith's campaign sought to reaffirm the relevance of the party identities that the post-war Coalition had undermined. He stated: 'We are perfectly contented with our old name and our old creed'. But this 'old creed' did have an air of novelty in 1920. Asquith's Paisley speeches were collected and published as the 'Paisley Policy' in an attempt to assert the contemporary relevance of rather well-worn Liberal shibboleths: dominion self-rule for Ireland, proportional representation, the establishment of a partially nominated second chamber, cuts in public expenditure, the taxation of land values, opposition to nationalisation, the local veto, and free trade. None of these would have seemed out of place in a pre-1914 manifesto, but there was something about 1920 which affirmed their potency.

Asquith's close association with Irish home rule in the pre-war years paid dividends in 1920, as Paisley boasted a long-established Irish community that was loyal to Liberalism. Indeed, it was not until 1919 that a Paisley branch of the Catholic Socialist Society was formed, whereas a branch was set up far earlier in Glasgow. So when the election was called, Labour had had insufficient time to secure the Irish vote for their candidate, and there was evidence throughout the election period of disunity within the United Irish League in the community.

Asquith's record on the female franchise hardly endeared him to the womenfolk of Paisley: he had consistently resisted the female suffrage throughout his premiership. However, in 1920 his entourage included secret weapons that would establish his claims to the female vote and divert attention from his pre-war record – namely his wife, Margaret Asquith, and, more importantly, his daughter Lady Violet Bonham Carter. The *Paisley Daily Express* commented that Lady Violet had won the sympathy of women voters; her unostentatious manner and racy speeches (they did not record them!) had secured her a very large following.

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Asquith's message, which Richard Finlay highlighted, of community over class was also pertinent in Paisley in 1920. Memories of the 1919 forty-hour strike were all too fresh in the minds of workers on the eve of the poll. Those weeks of direct action had brought tanks on to the streets of Glasgow, and over 15,000 people in Paisley alone had been involved in strike action and in violent picketing. The failure of organised Labour made many rethink their flirtation with socialism. To them, Asquith's words that no interest and no class was entitled to prevail over the dominant interests of the community offered reassuring consolation. In fact, despite protestations to the contrary, Labour in Paisley were also divided. J. M. Biggar was the candidate yet again, and as a Co-operative candidate he was treated with suspicion by many on the left of the party. Indeed, his Labour endorsement had been carried by only thirteen votes to twelve in 1919, and, on his defeat in 1920, the ILP asserted their right to choose the next candidate in Paisley.

So what did 1920 actually mean? It is important that there were clear local determinants of Asquith's success. This was no great, grand, national expression of Scotland's 'natural' Liberal sympathies; there was a local story in all of this that is largely forgotten in the literature so far. But there was also a national message. 1920 did not mean the rebirth of Liberalism, much as many would have hoped; rather, as the *Paisley Daily Express* put it, it was a point where men hopped between two opinions. It can be seen almost as an interface between the old and the new. The question is, what happened next? The election results for the 1922 and 1923 contests reveal, from an uncharitable point of view, that first Asquith held on to the seat by the skin of his teeth in 1922 against the unified Labour opposition, and second, that he would have lost it in 1923 had it not been for a divided Labour challenge and the emergence of a Unionist challenger who, having dared to split the anti-socialist vote, probably did Asquith a considerable favour by highlighting the real danger of a Labour victory in Paisley.

But there were other stories behind these results. In the 1922 election, Asquith had to fight both as a local MP and as a national leader, and it is very hard to do both. In one very mundane aspect he could not do both: Asquith's national profile meant that he spent many days away from Paisley, and local colleagues did not appreciate coming second in his attentions, not even to the gravest affairs of state. He should have learnt that lesson in East Fife in 1918 but he did not, and he fell foul of it again in Paisley. Paisley was also a constituency in which Labour were getting their house in order. The Irish, for example, had very little reason to believe that Asquith, any more than Ramsay Macdonald, would deliver on the Irish Question by the early 1920s. But, most importantly, there was the impact of the worsening economic situation in Paisley at the time. It was clear that with unemployment and short-term working, free trade would not secure the future of this burgh. There had to be another alternative. They did not like to think that they would find it in tariff reform, and Labour offered them an alternative, which was nationalisation.

But Labour had been suffering from an unpopular candidate. J. M. Biggar, being a house factor, had to be dropped, and, in 1924, in stepped the new Labour champion, Edward Rosslyn Mitchell. Mitchell was a lawyer and a well-known Glasgow councillor and magistrate. He had been an

enthusiastic progressive Liberal before the war began. However, during the rent strikes of 1915, he had been an influential advocate of the tenants' case and in 1918 he joined the ILP. Importantly for Mitchell, he had also fought Bonar Law in 1922 in the Central division of Glasgow and had reduced the Conservative majority in that constituency to just 2,514. He contested that seat again in 1923 against Sir William Alexander and slashed the Conservative majority to just 416. He was debonair, articulate and middle class. With the experience of having fought a major parliamentarian, he was the ideal choice for the Labour Party in Paisley in 1924.

The question to be asked about that election is not why Asquith lost but why Mitchell was not a Liberal. There was very little in his message that would have distinguished him from Asquith; this was no wild Clydesider of the Maxton mould – Mitchell himself joked that Davy Kirkwood had offered him membership of the Clydeside Paternity on condition that he removed his spats – but a different man altogether, and what he offered was not a class-based vision of society. His election pamphlets read like modern catechisms. If the message was then ostensibly a Liberal one, why did Asquith lose? The answer lies largely in the pact between the Liberals and the Unionists in Paisley in the 1924 election. More so than anything else, this seemed to confirm Labour allegations that Liberalism had become a party of the establishment, that it had surrendered its radical inheritance and was 'buried in the bowels of conservatism'.

So what came after? 1924 represented an organic crisis in the heart of the Paisley Liberal Party, when the traditional party of the burgh ceased to be recognised as such by the classes that had once identified it as the main champions of their political aspirations. Labour won again in 1929, but the Liberals retook the seat in 1931 and again in 1935. Their candidate in those elections was Joseph Maclay – who was supported by a local Liberal–Unionist pact – and it is understandable that the economic climate of the time encouraged people to reach out to identities which they knew had survived earlier crises and could possibly take them through this new one; it was no time to field a new independent Liberal candidate. But for Paisley, it sounded the death knell for Liberalism in the constituency – by that action, noted the *Paisley Daily Express*, the Liberal Party had ceased to exist so far as Paisley was concerned: Liberalism had purchased victory at the expense of its own history. After the war the seat was contested by Lady Glen-Coats in the Liberal interest, but she secured only 10 per cent of the vote.[5]

Dr Macdonald's conclusion was that the Liberal hegemony that had been sustained in Paisley throughout the nineteenth century through the influence of the thread giants and the final vestiges of a local radical tradition had been eclipsed. The Labour victory of 1924, however, did not represent the birth of a new vision of the social order, but a rearrangement of the political chessboard whereby the Liberal traditions were subsumed into, and perhaps diluted by, the new dominant political forces of the Labour Party and Unionism.

I had asked Jim Wallace, former Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Scottish Liberal Democrat leader, to draw together the strands of the discussion.[6] Jim commented that, when he had said that he was speaking at a fringe meeting on Liberal Democrat history, he was asked whether that was because he had now become history!

He began by noting the claim that the real significance of the 1906 general election lay not in the landslide majority of Campbell-Bannerman's Liberal Party, but the election of twenty-nine MPs affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee (LRC). So he took his starting point as finding out more about the twenty-nine, noting his debt to Roy Douglas's *History of the Liberal Party* for some of the analysis.[7]

Jim entertained a healthy scepticism about predicting seismic political shifts. During his political lifetime, there had been excited commentators foreshadowing the demise of one party or another. Would the Alliance replace Labour in 1983? Would the Liberal Democrats be finally obliterated after the Euro elections of 1989? When the Tories won their fourth majority in 1992, pundits were drawing parallels with Japan's Liberal Democrats and the permanent hold on office they apparently enjoyed. By 1997, it was the Tories' turn to suffer electoral defeat. Would they ever recover? And now it is Labour, demoralised and disunited, over whom the question mark hangs today. He made the point that, if we cannot get it right in predicting the immediate future on the evidence of the present, are we more likely to see the future through the crystal ball of past history?

The Labour victory of 1924, however, did not represent the birth of a new vision of the social order, but a rearrangement of the political chessboard whereby the Liberal traditions were subsumed into, and perhaps diluted by, the new dominant political forces of the Labour Party and Unionism.

The interesting point about the 1906 election is just how different the electoral landscape looked. No woman had a vote. Several MPs were returned unopposed. Some cities and large burghs had two or three seats to form the one constituency. (I note in passing that my own home area – the Royal Burgh of Rutherglen – was represented in parliament until 1918 as part of Kilmarnock Burghs, a disparate group of geographically unconnected traditional burghs spread across the west of Scotland.) One further, crucial difference was the existence of electoral pacts and the rather loose understandings at the margins about which whip elected MPs would take.

By the opening years of the twentieth century, there was a key group of 'Lib-Lab' MPs who took the Liberal whip, were concerned with workers' issues and were generally encouraged within the party. By 1906, there were approximately twenty-five Lib–Labs, but the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) put up fifty candidates, of whom twenty-nine won. Thirty-one out of the fifty did not have a Liberal opponent or ran in tandem with a Liberal in a two-member constituency; of these, twenty-four were elected. Only five were elected against Liberal opposition, of whom only one took a Liberal seat, in Dundee (the pact between the Liberal Party and the LRC did not extend to Scotland).

In short, the embryonic Labour Party was given a huge hand up by the Liberal Party. Given the size of the Liberal win in January 1906, the architects may well have thought that they had been vindicated. By 12 Februray, they may well have had second thoughts, as the twenty-nine LRC members plus one Lib–Lab member formed the Labour Party in parliament, established their own organisation and their own whip and sat on the opposition benches (although Roy Douglas suggests that may have been more attributable to overcrowding on the government benches). Although the new Labour Party generally supported the Liberal government, and did not always present itself in a coherent way, the genie was out of the bottle and the Liberal Party could be cast in the role of midwife of the birth of this new parliamentary party.

Arguably it was in the second decade of the twentieth century that the tectonic plates of British politics shifted. By the 1910 elections, miners' MPs who had been elected as Lib–Lab members in 1906 were cajoled by the Miners' Federation to stand as Labour candidates; twelve out of fifteen did. Douglas records that there is scant evidence of any countervailing pressure from the Liberal Party. Various electoral agreements were reached in individual seats, which does not give the appearance of coherence in handling this emerging political and parliamentary force.

In 1909, a Liberal railwayman and trade unionist, Mr Osborne, objected to his union paying money to the Labour Party. He pursued his grievance through the courts, ultimately succeeding in the House of Lords: it was held that a trade union could not pay over money received as subscriptions to the Labour Party. At a stroke the Labour Party's main source of funding dried up. Responding to the judgement, the Liberal government brought in a bill – later the Trade Union Act – which stipulated that a separate fund had to be established, from which a member could opt out. With the onset of war and no general elections held for eight years, by the time the 1918 election was called, a substantial 'political fund' had been created for the Labour Party – money which could not be used for non-political trade-union purposes. So having given the Labour Party a helping electoral hand, a Liberal government was also instrumental in ensuring it had the funds to fight an effective election campaign after the war.

To this was added the huge upheaval of World War I: mass conscription (not something which sat easily with Liberals); the contribution of women to the war effort, and by 1918, votes for women over the age of thirty; and the total breakdown in relations between the Liberal Party's two biggest hitters – H. H. Asquith and David Lloyd George – each of whom led a part of the Liberal Party into the election. And then the situation was complicated even further by the Lloyd George Liberals entering into a coalition with the Conservatives and, in the four years after the end of the war, becoming increasingly eclipsed by their Conservative partners. The glory days were well and truly over for the Liberal Party.

Against such a background, it can be seen that the Liberal governments elected in 1906 and 1910 did much that was right. We can proudly look back at the radical agenda implemented by our political forebears – an agenda which undoubtedly resonated with the working men (and later women) who might otherwise have been attracted to the Labour Party. But Jim thought that the unchecked growth of the Labour Party, and the failure by the Liberal government to relate better to the constituency of working people, meant that the electoral benefits which should have flowed from the government's record did not do so. By the time that the Lloyd George-led coalition fell in 1922, the party was in considerable disarray, with Natural Liberals fighting Asquithian Liberals. And although, in the immediate aftermath of the elections, Lloyd George and Asquith set up a reunited, if uneasy, party, the damage had probably already been done: Labour had become the largest party in Scotland, and, in many parts of Britain, an electoral landscape had been established that would persist for the rest of the century. And so it was that, in January 1924, the votes of Liberal MPs helped to defeat the Conservative government and installed the first Labour government.

Against that historical background, Jim was sceptical about the lessons to be learned or parallels to be drawn today. It is inconceivable that the Labour Party will entertain any electoral pacts which would serve to advance the Liberal cause. Can we really imagine a Labour government legislating to place the funds of an opposition party on a more secure footing? With the franchise now extended to women, there can be no new increase in the electorate which could suddenly upset the political balance. There are signs of division within the Labour Party, but nothing on the scale of the split which took place when the SDP was formed in 1981, let alone the factional experience of the Liberal Party after Lloyd George ousted Asquith – as Roy Jenkins said, at this crucial point in Liberal Party history, the party did not so much shoot itself in the foot as shoot itself much closer to the heart.

But, if this sounds a terribly negative approach, the moral of the story is that, if Liberal Democrats are to make further electoral progress, we cannot necessarily rely on the other parties to get it spectacularly wrong; rather, the challenge to us is to get it right. And if we are looking for some touchstone from the period in history to which this fringe meeting refers, there are key lessons to take to heart:

- The party's commitment to Scottish Home Rule.
- The importance of localism and local democracy.
- The commitment to a fundamental change in welfare protection heralded by the 1909 People's Budget.
- The innovative new campaigning techniques pioneered by Gladstone in the Midlothian campaign (maybe not the technique for today, but in its time, well ahead of the rest).
- Upholding basic Liberal principles such as

The moral of the story is that, if Liberal Democrats are to make further electoral progress, we cannot necessarily rely on the other parties to get it spectacularly wrong; rather, the challenge to us is to get it right.

championing free trade against protectionism.

A different time, a different agenda; but on issues from the credit crunch to the global environmental challenge, the essence lies in the articulation of Liberal Democrat principles and radicalism.

During the discussion that followed the presentations, the question was asked whether there was any difference between rural and urban voting and between men and women in terms of their support for Liberalism? Richard Finlay said that the rural vote in Scotland leaned heavily towards the Liberal Party – farms were smaller and the relationship between farm owners and land owners was not always that great. Furthermore, the Liberals had had plans to create smallholdings which would have further attracted the rural vote; the Conservative Party was seriously panicked by this suggestion because they thought that it would diminish Conservative support in rural constituencies. The war, however, increased agricultural productivity and death duties wiped out many of the big landed estates. After 1918, the Conservative Party said to people: 'You now own that land and you need us to protect you from socialism.' So while Liberalism survived in some areas, such as the Highlands, it lost the rural vote more generally after 1918 due to the social changes.

Catriona Macdonald explained that, with regard to women, every constituency was very different because, even though the franchise regulations seemed general, they had very nuanced differences in the various constituencies. In Paisley, Annie Maxton blamed the women of Paisley for Liberal dominance in the 1920s – partly because it was the older women who were enfranchised. Unlike Dundee, where there was a tradition of working married women, women in Paisley did not tend to go out to work in this period. So the Liberal Party in its domestic agenda very much spoke to these enfranchised older women voters. However, although this was a factor in Asquith's success, it also worked in Mitchell's favour in 1924, given his charismatic personality.

In the last analysis, did Scottish Liberalism – and Liberalism across the UK – fail in the 1920s because it lost that spark?

Three speakers, providing a national and analytical perspective, a microcosm of political change in Paisley, and the view of a modern, practising politician, illuminated the story of the dominance and decline of the great Liberal Party in Scotland. The death of Liberal Scotland is no less curious than the strange death of Liberal England. It tells us that political success has to be based on relevance and credibility – a constituency of interest which identifies with 'us' rather than 'them', which attracts people beyond its core voters by the appeal of its message, which is able to weave a story and sing mood music which is both contemporary but also tells the national story in a way which matches the country's beliefs – and an organisation fit for purpose. In Scotland, the issue may be whether we can build an alternative view of Scotland in Britain to that of the Nationalists – a view which again makes the Liberal Democrats and Liberal ideals the natural expression of choice for our people. There are lessons to be learned from history, but the warning is that history never repeats itself in the same way.

Finally, can we recapture that inspiration and dynamism that gave Liberalism in 1906 its special quality? In these modern days of political disrepute, a political party like ours must have a message of hope, of reform and of radicalism, which appeals to hearts as well as minds. In the last analysis, did Scottish Liberalism – and Liberalism across the UK – fail in the 1920s because it lost that spark?

Robert Brown is Liberal Democrat MSP for Glasgow, and former Convener of the Scottish Liberal Democrat Policy Committee.

1 Professor Richard Finlay's publications include *Independent and Free: Scottish Politics and the Origins of the SNP* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1994); *A Partnership for Good?* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1997); with Edward J. Cowan, *Scotland since 1688: The Struggle for a Nation* (London: Cima Books, 2000); *Modern Scotland: 1914–2000* (London: Profile, 2003). He has also edited such books as T. M. Devine and Richard J. Finlay (eds.), *Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Edinburgh University Press, 1996); Dauvit Broun, Richard J. Finlay, Michael Lynch (eds.), *Image and Identity: The Making and Remaking of Scottish National Identity Through the Ages* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1998); Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (eds.), *Scottish History: The Power of the Past* (Edinburgh University Press, 2003)

2 The break between the established Church of Scotland and the Free Church which split away from it on the issue of patronage in 1843. Over 450 ministers left the Kirk to set up their own Free Church of Scotland, with major ecclesiastical and political consequences which were not healed until reunion in 1929.

3 Dr Catriona Macdonald is a senior lecturer in History at Glasgow Caledonian University, and over her academic career has studied at the Universities of St Andrews, Emory (Georgia, USA), Strathclyde and Heriot Watt. Her main research interests lie in the late-modern social and political history of Scotland. Her major publications to date include *The Radical Thread*, *Unionist Scotland* and *Scotland and the Great War*. Her most recent monograph, *Whaur Extremes Meet: Scotland's Twentieth Century* was published in October 2009 Birlinn. She is currently working on a history of student politics in Scotland, and – having completed the period 1880–1948 – will be embarking on an oral history of student political life in the years after 1948 over the next two years.

4 C. M. M. Macdonald, *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland, Paisley Politics, 1885–1924* (Tuckwell Press, 2000).

5 Lady Glen-Coats was later Chairman of the Scottish Liberal Party. As the last political representative of a famous Paisley Liberal dynasty, she survived to see the first fruits of Liberal revival under Jo Grimond, himself, of course, married to Asquith's grand-daughter.

6 Jim Wallace, now Lord Wallace of Tankerness, MP for Orkney & Shetland 1983–2001, MSP for Orkney 1999–2007, Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats 1992–2005, Deputy First Minister of Scotland 1999–2005.

7 Roy Douglas, *The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1971).

A delicate balance

Fringe meeting (supported by *The Guardian*), 20 September 2009, Bournemouth, with Professor Martin Pugh, Lord Tom McNally and David Laws MP; Chair: Duncan Brack (Editor, *Journal of Liberal History*).

Report by **Mark Pack**

In his introduction, the meeting chair Duncan Brack explained that the reason for picking the topic was that work such as that by John Curtice has shown that the odds of the next general election producing a hung parliament are much higher than they have been for many years – a point also made earlier this year by BBC Newsnight's Michael Crick.[1] The point of the meeting was to examine how the Liberal Party, or Liberal Democrats, had handled the situation when it found itself holding the balance of power: at Westminster in the 1920s and 1970s and in the Scottish Parliament in 1999.

Professor Martin Pugh kicked off the trio of talks, looking at the two Labour governments of the 1920s. The Liberals were still badly divided between the Asquith and Lloyd George camps, even though the domination of the 1923 election by the question of free trade had helped to bring them together. The outcome of that election was a hung parliament: 258 Conservative, 191 Labour, 158 Liberal.

Based on his experience of the First World War, Asquith did not want a coalition government to be formed with either party. The Liberals did, though, have a choice of which party to let form a minority administration. Asquith took the view that a Labour government was inevitable at some point in the future – and so better to 'trial' one now in the, as he thought, safe conditions of a hung parliament. Churchill and others argued, however, that both Labour and the Conservatives should be voted down, hoping that the Liberals would therefore be given a try. Be bold, be quick in voting down a minority government – and hope something better would emerge.

Photos: Chris Millington

This call for boldness did not carry the day, and Labour under Ramsay MacDonald formed a minority government. MacDonald had clear, long-term strategic aims: keep the Liberals out of power and further strengthen the position of Labour relative to the Liberals. While Labour was pursuing its long-term vision of replacing the Liberals, Liberal MPs were shocked to discover that Labour did not cooperate in parliament and, in the constituencies, was gunning for their votes and seats. This included running candidates in many seats where they would split the anti-Conservative vote and so let Conservatives win from the Liberals. For Labour, the short-term pain of strengthening the Conservatives was worth it for the long-term gain of British politics becoming solely about two parties, with the Liberals not one of the two.

The 1924 electoral landslide for the Conservatives at the end of this period of minority Labour rule was, therefore, not as bad for Labour as it may have seemed. A result of Conservative 412, Labour 151, and Liberal 40 may have been poor for Labour in the short run, but the gap between Labour and the Liberals had nearly trebled.

Despite the Conservative landslide, their hold on power was fragile and the late 1920s saw both a revival for the Liberals under Lloyd George and then a hung parliament after the 1929 election: 288 Labour, 260 Conservative and 59 Liberal MPs. Again, a minority Labour administration was formed.

Although the Liberal revival in terms of votes did not turn into many more seats, Lloyd George was confident of the strength of his position, believing (rightly) that many people had voted Labour because they hoped that the party would implement some of the policies to tackle unemployment that the Liberals had been proposing. By the spring of 1930, Lloyd George was involved

in behind-the-scenes talks with Labour on policy areas such as unemployment and house-building in rural areas. This developed into a stable relationship, with weekly meetings by spring 1931.

Again, however, MacDonald's long-term vision was not one of cooperation. He wanted to ensure that Lloyd George did not back the Conservatives, but he did not really believe in cooperation and did not trust the Liberals. He wrote privately about the need 'to humour' the Liberals. When it came to electoral reform, therefore, there were talks – sufficient to humour the Liberals – but MacDonald was not a believer in electoral reform, even the alternative vote, despite the temptations of it delivering more seats for Labour. That was outweighed in his eyes by the way in which AV would help sustain the Liberals and a three-party system. In the end, he was content for the House of Lords to mangle an electoral reform bill.

For the Liberals, there were two problems – that of propping up a failing government and that of unity. There were persistent rumours that the Conservatives would give a free run to any MPs who opposed Labour and there was a group of Liberal MPs who, by the end, were regularly voting against the Labour government. Lloyd George had got sucked into talking details with the government, but without an overall strategic aim and without delivering the big prize of electoral reform. Given how he had also messed up getting electoral reform during the First World War, Martin Pugh suggested it was an issue he never really got to grips with. All was then swept away by the economic crisis of 1931: MacDonald formed a coalition with the Conservatives, Labour split and the National Government won a huge landslide in the 1931 election.

It was not until the 1970s that the Liberals next had a chance of power courtesy of a hung parliament. The story of the Lib–Lab Pact was taken up by Tom McNally, who had worked in Downing Street in the 1970s and subsequently became a Lib Dem peer. He echoed the dangers of losing sight of the strategic aim, recounting his memories of Paddy Ashdown returning 'bouncing' around after meetings with Tony Blair despite it not being clear what he had achieved.

On the Lib–Lab Pact itself, McNally challenged the consensus in Liberal circles that the Pact was a disaster. The years 1976–78 were the period when Britain was at its most equal, which McNally attributed to the Pact's influence. Moreover, it was sensible for the Liberal Party to act in such a way as to avoid a general election in 1976, the outcome of which would have been far worse than the Pact. At the time, many serious editorials were asking whether Britain was still governable – and again, for McNally, the Pact was a success in showing that it was. By 1978 every economic indicator was moving in the right direction, but the problem was that the Liberals were getting almost no credit for it.

So what was wrong with the Pact? For Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan, and for Labour as a whole, it was only a shotgun marriage of convenience; there was no parity of esteem between the two parties. There was also a complete lack of parity of resources. Both of these echoed the position in 1920s, as did the third problem – the failure to achieve electoral reform. As in the 1920s, David Steel did not push the issue to breaking point –though it was McNally's opinion that he had no alternative, as Labour was not willing to move.

This was in contrast to the Cook–Maclennan Labour/Lib Dem constitutional talks in the run-up to 1997, when the Liberal Democrats went in well briefed and with a clear idea of what they wished to achieve, whilst Labour had no clear set of objectives. Back in the 1970s, the idea of working together was still too hard for Labour to stomach. There was no long-term stability based on shared commitment and shared objectives.

It was in 1999 that there was the next round of Labour–Lib Dem talks, a story taken up by David Laws. He is now MP for Yeovil, but in 1999 he was the party's Policy Director and gave advice to the Scottish Liberal Democrats on how to handle the hung parliament that arose from the first elections to the Scottish Parliament. He talked about 6–13 May 1999, the period when the coalition agreement was put together. Looking at the experience of this week, he derived seven rules of coalition negotiation for Liberal Democrats:

1. There is huge pressure from the media, and others, to see a deal struck quickly, if at all.
2. About 20 per cent of colleagues will be happy with any sort of coalition, 30 per cent will oppose any sort of coalition, and the rest will decide based on the details of the proposal.
3. Any coalition has to address issues of policy substance.
4. You have to be tough and prepared to walk away to get a good deal.
5. But you can agree to postpone tackling some large and complicated issues if more time is genuinely needed to work out a compromise – and if there is always the threat that the coalition will end if compromise is not reached.
6. You need to get commitments in writing about the administrative details of how coalition government will work.
7. Vigorous internal party debate over the proposed terms is vital for any deal to stick.

Recounting the events of 1999, Laws said he was struck at the time by how, due to the heavy focus on fighting the elections, there was relatively little prior attention paid to what a coalition might involve. He had had two documents as a jumping off point – a draft coalition document that had been going round the party since the 1970s, which was of very limited use, and the Scottish elections manifesto. Laws therefore modelled his first draft of an agreement on the New Zealand coalition document that he and Malcolm Bruce MP had studied on a prior visit there. This had a very detailed section on how a partnership would work, along with sections on each policy area.

There was – as always – huge pressure from the media to make very quick decisions after the

Labour also found it hard to understand the consultative internal processes that the Liberal Democrats followed. But these processes were crucial, not just to how the party operates but also to making an agreement that could last – and it did, in effect for eight years.

election, despite the time that consultation takes and the exhaustion of everyone at the end of a campaign. Laws erred on the side of believing in the importance of speed, in part because of the need to build confidence that an arrangement would work. The draft agreement went through detailed consultation with the Scottish Liberal Democrats over two days, and then went over to Labour by the Sunday evening following the election. Labour's response was an extremely brief document – only four sides – which was not much of a coalition offer. It talked about 'implementing Labour's manifesto' and on the big issue of tuition fees only offered to monitor the situation for three years.

One reason why Laws did not believe that this was sufficient was due to his observation that around 20 per cent of a leader's colleagues were keen on agreement at any price, and around 30 per cent wanted no coalition under any circumstance, while the remaining 50 per cent were willing to be persuaded – which is why the discussions had to be heavy on policy detail in order to convince them that an agreement would deliver enough of what they believed in. The subsequent negotiations were very intensive: Laws showed the meeting four different drafts of the agreement that were produced in just one afternoon. The civil servants were not impartial, very much seeing themselves as working for the largest party.

Labour believed that the lure of ministerial jobs would eventually mean that the Liberal Democrats would weaken their demands and agree. But, by being clear that they would not fold, the Liberal Democrats extracted a much more substantive and amenable proposal. Labour also found it hard to understand the consultative internal processes that the Liberal Democrats followed. But these processes were crucial, not just to how the party operates but also to making an agreement that could last – and it did, in effect for eight years.

Michael Steed in questions raised the point that stability also came from fixed-term parliaments for Scotland. In all the other cases discussed in the meeting, the Prime Minister had had the nuclear option of calling a general election at any time.

Another question was from Michael Meadowcroft, who highlighted the lack of unity between the Asquith and Lloyd George camps in the early 1920s. He had met someone employed to work on a by-election of the time. The by-election team was based in one building, but split between the two camps over two floors – and the person he met was employed to run messages back and forth between them.

In concluding comments, Tom McNally highlighted how similar the lessons were from all the historical examples, in particular the importance of a united party with a clear strategy and of party consultation, effective but quick. Martin Pugh echoed the point, talking of the need for personalities to gel across the agreement. Looking at MacDonald's flaws, which made him very difficult to deal with and put the Liberals on a hiding to nothing in the 1920s, he suggested that Gordon Brown would be similarly impossible to deal with. Laws echoed this and recounted how Gordon Brown was brought in to the Scottish negotiations at one point and shifted his arguments around in a way which made negotiation extremely difficult. On that rather contemporary note, the meeting concluded.

Mark Pack is co-editor of Liberal Democrat Voice (www.LibDemVoice.org) and a member of the Journal's *Editorial Board.*

A short report of this meeting was posted on the Reuters website on 21 September; see http://blogs.reuters.com/uknews/2009/09/21/liberal-democrats-and-the-balance-of-power/

1 Michael Crick, 'Why a hung Parliament is a good bet', http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/michaelcrick/2009/04/why_a_hung_parliament_is_a_goo.html.

LIBERAL HISTORY QUIZ 2009: ANSWERS

(See page 21 for the questions.)

1. Caithness and Sutherland
2. National Liberals
3. Henry Campbell-Bannerman
4. Charles Kennedy, Simon Hughes, Malcolm Bruce, Jackie Ballard, David Rendel
5. Minister for Education
6. Richard Allan
7. High Commissioner for Palestine
8. The National Trust for Scotland
9. Peter Bessell
10. All Saints Church, Sutton Courtenay, Oxfordshire
11. Highgate
12. W E Gladstone
13. Francis Schnadhorst
14. John Stuart Mill
15. Michael Steed
16. John Bright
17. Six: Margaret Wintringham, 1921–24; Lady Vera Terrington, 1923–24; Hilda Runciman, 1928–29; Megan Lloyd George, 1929–51; Elizabeth Shields, 1986–87; Ray Michie, 1987–88 (and 1988–2001 as a Liberal Democrat)
18. Sheelagh Murnaghan
19. John Morley, Viscount Morley of Blackburn
20. The Beveridge Report

REVIEWS

Land and nation in England

Paul Readman, *Patriotism, National Identity, and the Politics of Land, 1880–1914* (Royal Historical Society, Studies in History New Series , 2008)

Reviewed by **Iain Sharpe**

The notion of 'the land for the people' has become an almost mythical tradition of British liberalism, perhaps because land reform was such an important issue during the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods – the final years when the Liberal Party retained its position as one of the two great parties of state. Lloyd George's land campaign, launched in 1913, is one of the great might-have-beens of Liberal politics, offering the possibility that, but for the intervention of the First World War, it might have reinvigorated the party and prolonged its electoral success. Of course, it was not to be, with the Liberal Party and the land question alike fading from the political spotlight after the First World War. Dr Readman's study of the land question in England during the twenty-five years before 1914 will therefore be of particular interest to students of Liberal history, even though its scope extends well beyond the realm of any one political party.

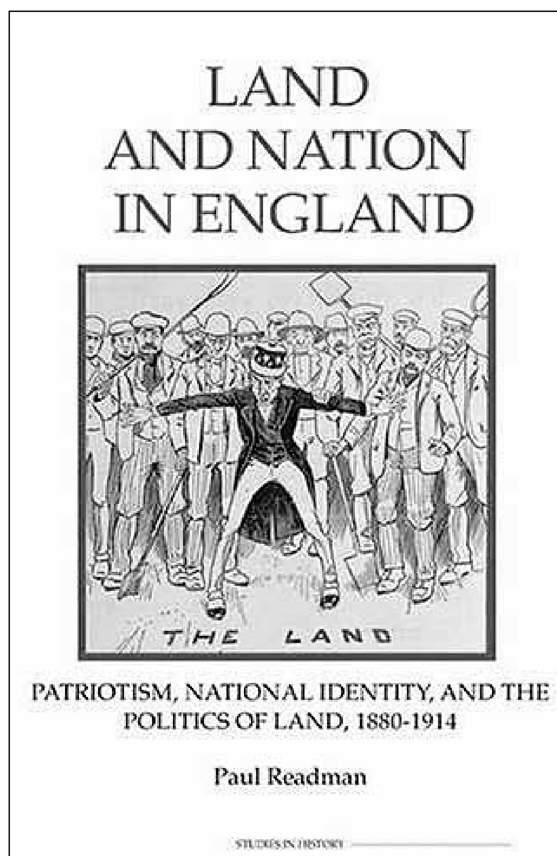
There were a number of reasons why land reform was considered of such importance during this period. In the late nineteenth century there was widespread concern about the perceived decline of British agriculture and the twin problems of urban squalor and rural depopulation. English systems of land tenure, including primogeniture and entail, designed to keep estates together, made the free sale of land impossible, reducing the dynamism of the rural economy. Ideas about spreading land ownership and tenure were discussed as a key to both economic and social progress, for rural communities and the country as a whole, by halting national decline.

Dr Readman examines how Liberals, Conservatives and socialists each engaged with these issues. He does this with an emphasis on political language, and in particular on the ways in which politicians approached the issue in terms of patriotism, national character and the relationship between land and 'Englishness'. The author finds it 'astonishing' that previous scholars have not made the link between land and national identity and aims to fill the gap. I don't quite share the author's surprise, since, although recent years have seen a greater interest among historians in the theme of patriotism (whether British, English, Scottish, Irish or Welsh), it has generally been considered in the context of social, cultural or intellectual, rather than political, history. However, I certainly agree that, in linking the practical question of land reform with the more abstract question of patriotism, Dr Readman is undertaking a welcome new departure, which will hopefully lead to fruitful areas of further research.

Many historians have argued, and it is easy therefore to assume, that during the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, patriotic language was largely the preserve of the political right, from Disraeli giving Queen Victoria the title of Empress of India through to the riotous celebrations of the relief of Mafeking during the Boer War. The author demonstrates clearly that this was not the case – while Conservatives and Liberal Unionists did attempt to exploit a patriotic agenda for electoral gain, both Liberals and socialists developed their own patriotic narrative of land reform and challenged the notion that government interference in the land question marked an unwarranted invasion of established property rights.

For Liberals, this involved arguing that land was different from other kinds of property because it was God-given rather than man-made. They saw the enclosures of the eighteenth century as an act of dispossession of the people that could be put right now that democracy had replaced aristocracy as the basis for government. They wanted to give local authorities compulsory purchase powers to create allotments and smallholdings so that rural dwellers once again had a stake in the land. Legislation in the early years of the 1905–15 Liberal government had only limited success and was ultimately followed by the launch of Lloyd George's land campaign in 1913, which sought not only to transform land tenure, but also to improve rural wages and housing conditions as part of a comprehensive programme for the reform of rural England.

It may too easily be assumed that this was a sign of the Liberals' embrace of a more collectivist political approach associated with the so-called New Liberalism. Dr



Readman questions this, pointing out that much Liberal rhetoric was about putting the land on a business footing and also about land reform as a democratic measure – a continuation of the Liberal commitment to creating class harmony. While state intervention in land ownership and tenure was clearly not compatible with hard-line laissez-faire economics, such views had always had rather less purchase on the Liberal Party than is often thought. Liberal commitment to land reform therefore represented continuity rather than a new departure. Of course, Conservative opponents tried to present Liberal land legislation as socialist in intent and effect. However, partly as a shield against such accusations, the Liberals were careful to situate their reforms within a tradition of Englishness, looking backwards both to the pre-enclosure times and to some extent to the 'popular system of self-government' that applied in villages in Anglo-Saxon England.

Liberal attitudes to land reform contrasted with those of both Conservatives/Unionists and socialists, in terms not only of practical solutions, but also of the historical precedents they cited. Many traditional Conservatives were sceptical of any attempt to widen access to land, regarding such things as an attack on property rights and an unviable way of organising agriculture. However, the widening of the franchise following the 1884–85 reform acts and the accession to the Conservative ranks of the Liberal Unionists meant that a simple defence of the status quo was no longer a realistic option. Instead, Unionists, driven in part by Jesse Collings, an acolyte of Joseph Chamberlain, sought to widen land ownership through the revival of the yeoman class of peasant proprietors that had existed before the enclosures. This approach had briefly held attractions for Liberals too, but the latter had concluded that it would merely widen social divisions by strengthening the ranks of landed proprietorship, rather than giving all classes access to the land. Socialist writers such as Robert Blatchford and H. M. Hyndman likewise had their distinctive perspective. They stressed medieval traditions of 'Merrie England', of land being held in common by the people, and regarded the Reformation and dissolution of the monasteries as the moment when the land was stolen from the people. In contrast with Liberals and Conservatives, their preferred solution was land nationalisation rather than widening access to the land for individuals.

While each party offered different solutions to the land questions, the common thread was that all sought to present historical precedents that provided a patriotic dimension to their plans.

While each party offered different solutions to the land questions, the common thread was that all sought to present historical precedents that provided a patriotic dimension to their plans. The importance of patriotism as a factor in British politics is often overlooked, perhaps because it is so much easier to focus on concrete 'issues' rather than abstract 'themes'. Dr Readman therefore breaks new ground in discussing the land issue within the context of Englishness and national identify.

Inevitably, though, in breaking new ground, the book suggests questions as well as answering them. The most important of these concerns the intention behind the politicians' use of patriotic rhetoric. It is no surprise that patriotism was a feature of debates over land reform – for politicians seeking to win votes it is probably a good idea to articulate an uplifting view of the land and people they seek to govern. But patriotic rhetoric can be used in different ways: for example, as an offensive or defensive weapon or to reassure or inflame popular opinion. During this period, the Unionists clearly used empire and national defence to question others' patriotic credentials as well as to establish their own, and Liberals struggled to counter this. One wonders whether Liberal and socialist patriotic language over the land question was motivated by a genuine wish to contrast their own patriotic vision with that of their Unionist opponents. Alternatively, it may simply have been a means of shielding themselves against accusations of introducing alien revolutionary ideas into British politics. Was patriotism a motivating factor in views of the different parties or merely a rhetorical device? One hopes that the publication of Dr Readman's excellent book will trigger further debate among historians on these and other issues concerning the role of patriotism within political discourse.

Iain Sharpe is working on a PhD thesis on the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London. He is leader of the Liberal Democrat group on Watford Borough Council.

A tale of two symbols

Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2008)

Reviewed by **Tony Little**

Among Liberal Democrat activists traditions are in conflict. The legatees of the classical liberalism of Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill, gathered round the contributors to the *The Orange Book*, dispute with the inheritors of New Liberalism, who published *Reinventing the State*. Battle has been joined in fringe meetings at the party's federal conferences but also surfaces in conference resolutions, most notably in September 2006 when the neo-New Liberals were prominent in the debate on whether the party should retain a 50 per cent income tax rate, not for its revenue potential but as a totem of the party's concern for the less well-off. The clash is evident whenever the party's Shadow Chancellor, Vince Cable, suggests that freer trade might be in the interest of less developed countries.

An Edwardian Liberal would find most of this split incomprehensible. Ministers responsible for the implementation of the New Liberal ideas after 1905 were convinced believers in classical liberalism and, equally, proponents of classical economics. It might even be argued that some of the celebrated elements of the New Liberalism, such as the People's Budget of 1909, were the result of expediency rather than planning. Would Lloyd George's income and land tax proposals have been so radical if he had not had to fund a naval arms race as well as old age pensions?

Edwardian Liberals were fervent believers in free trade, and I use the word fervent advisedly. Frank Trentmann's *Free Trade Nation* is the story of the defence of free trade in the first decade of the twentieth century and the undermining of the old order during and after the Great War of 1914–18.

Free trade was central to Victorian Liberalism. It was the factor which first brought together the elements of what became the Liberal Party. It split the Tories so badly in 1846 that they were out of power for a generation and only clawed their way back after disowning protectionism. The British political establishment accepted unilateral free trade as official policy for the remainder of Victoria's reign, despite some chuntering from the Conservatives and misgivings about the protectionism adopted in America's growing economy and the newly created Germany, which both threatened British manufacturing supremacy.

Joe Chamberlain crushed the cosy consensus in 1903 when he spoke in favour of giving preference to imports from the colonies, imitating the German customs union across the British Empire, and simultaneously providing the funding for old age pensions. Chamberlain's proposals initially split Balfour's government, an alliance of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists, contributing to its landslide defeat in 1906. Curiously, as Trentmann makes clear, Chamberlain's plans were not wholly welcomed by the Empire. The white settler colonies were often themselves protectionist, to shelter infant industries, or, as in the case of Canada, more concerned with nearer neighbours than with the distant mother country. Nevertheless, his panacea came gradually to dominate Tory thinking, and free trade was a significant factor in the remaining elections before the Great War.

Trentmann does not give the details or a comprehensive narrative of the Chamberlain proposals. Rather he is concerned with the reaction to them. And it is here, in the first half of the book, that Trentmann is at his most valuable, by illuminating the popular campaigns and explaining the rationale behind them.

When I learnt economics, many years ago, we were introduced to free trade through the model of a simplified two-country, two-product world market. As the assumptions behind the model were modified it remained the conclusion that trading was in the best interest of both countries, even if one could make both products more cheaply than the other. Tariffs made the products more expensive and damaged both employment and consumers. The models can be made more complex and more dynamic but today the arguments of those proposing reducing trade barriers are largely conducted in the rational logical style of the economist. The passion and emotion of the trade protesters is dismissed as misguided and harmful to the interests of those on whose behalf the students demonstrate. Consequently, free trade does not engage the interest of the consumer and there is no popular lobby in its favour.

Edwardian Britain was very different. Pro- and anti-free traders set up displays in high street stores. Parades and tableaux were organised. Trentmann has incorporated photographs of the shops, of the participants in the tableaux or plays, and of the everyday campaigners haranguing passers-by in the streets. Packed mass meetings lasting up to two and a half or three hours were held with songs sung and hecklers infiltrated into the opposing camps. Indeed, free trade lectures were so popular that they were organised by their hundreds in the popular seaside resorts in the

holiday season, sometimes in defiance of local by-laws. Naturally posters, pamphlets, parodies and cartoons played their part, but, perhaps more surprisingly, recently developed technologies were pressed into action. In one constituency a pantechnicon van, adapted to show early propaganda films, attracted large crowds. Elsewhere, moving pictures of party leaders speaking were synchronised with gramophones, and lectures were routinely illustrated by magic lantern slides. The more enterprising organisers projected images on the outside walls of buildings. One of the strengths of Trentmann's book is the use of a fraction of this wealth of propaganda material as illustrations in the text and, at least in the hardback edition, as colour plates in the centre of the book.

The use of high street shops illustrates that much of the campaigning was aimed at the end user of imports and suggests that the 'citizen consumers' acknowledged their dual role. One of the difficulties for the modern campaigner against tariff protection is that while it is relatively easy to identify the producers who might lose from free trade, whether small African farmers or aspiring British manufacturers, consumers rarely see their purchasing

as something through which they interact with government. Edwardian free traders were able to encapsulate the threat to the consumer by the first of Trentmann's symbols, the white loaf. Inadvertently gifted to the Liberals by Chamberlain, the threat to the price of bread, a significant part of the working-class diet, dominated the debate and few speakers neglected to bring large and small loaves to clinch their case. Other components of the breakfast table played their part in homely illustrations to rouse the passions of the voters, while elderly members of the audience were primed to reminisce about the 'hungry [Eighteen] Forties', when Britain had the Corn Laws. Passions were roused to the extent that a riot occurred in Wycombe, which ended with the trashing of a protectionist 'Dump Shop'.

But, as Trentmann argues, it would be a misunderstanding to analyse Liberal commitment to free trade as a cynical exploitation of consumer fears. Cobden's Anti-Corn Law League was not seeking merely to cut the price of cereals. It undermined the influence of the largest landowners who dominated politics as a specially privileged producer interest. Cobden and Bright promoted trade to secure world peace and undermine the aristocratic system of diplomacy with its vested interest in competition between nations and the expansion of empires. Under the Liberals, the state had become not the handmaiden of an elite but a disinterested or neutral umpire in a pact with all citizens represented under a gradually widening franchise. Taxes were levied fairly on all, through a mix of income and indirect taxes rather than disproportionately on the poor through charges on basic necessities. Free competition should work in favour of all groups in all nations.

However, it was this moral case for free trade that was its undoing. The Liberals won the 1906 election and both the elections of 1910 with free trade as an important part of their armoury. But after World War I popular support faded and with it support for Liberalism. Trade clearly had not preserved world peace. Winning the war was not achieved by letting free competition allocate resources. The national interest required that Britain be self-sufficient in some commodities, whatever the economic theory of comparative advantage suggested. Trades disrupted by the war and its aftermath required protection to survive. Cartels and mergers, securing economies of scale, could, arguably, produce more efficiently than old-fashioned smaller firms.

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Each of these developments peeled away free trade supporters, including lifelong Liberals. In future, the state would be more active: no longer the umpire but a player in securing cooperation among producer interests, epitomised by Trentmann's second symbol – milk. The white loaf was demonstrated to be deficient in food values – wholemeal bread was better and wasted less of the wheat made scarce by war. Milk, on the other hand, was not only vital but required the assistance of active government to secure its purity, to prevent profiteering and to organise cooperatives of appropriate magnitude along the supply chain.

Gradually the number of exceptional treatments built up until, when the depression of 1929 struck, free trade no longer had a popular foundation, and when Chamberlain's son, Neville, pronounced the obsequies, few mourned its passing.

The second part of Trentmann's book deals with this decline of free trade, with a coda about modern trade talks made even more relevant by the financial crisis and the temptation towards beggar-thy-neighbour policies that occurred after his text was written. He has focused on the details of the various bodies that considered post-Great War trade, and on the elite thinkers, such as Keynes, who provided the intellectual underpinning for the changing climate. While these chapters lack the novelty of the material on the popular endorsement of free trade, Trentmann has produced a valuable guide to the process by which an argument, and the party that promoted it, were at first sustained and later undermined. What changed was not the economics but the public engagement with an ideal.

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

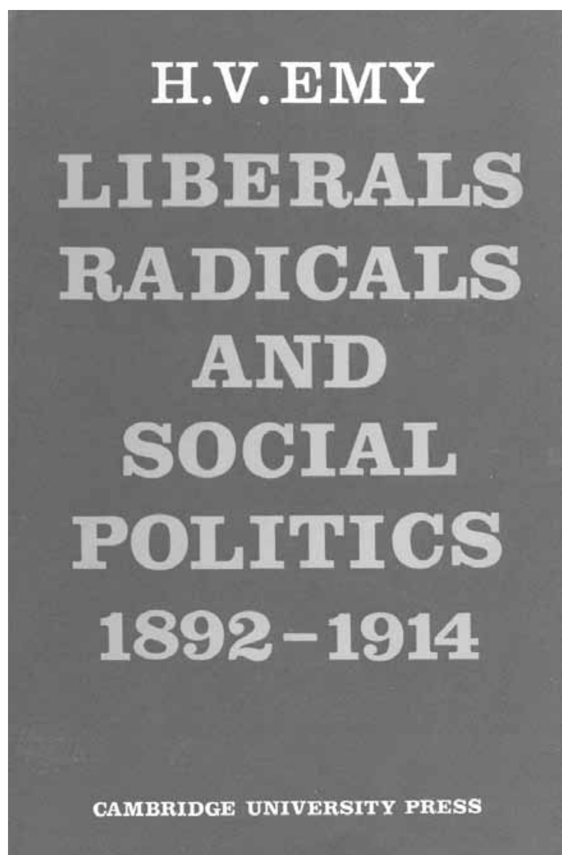
Edwardian Liberalism

H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1973; reprinted 2008)

Reviewed by **Ian Packer**

When this book was first published in 1973 it appeared at an opportune moment. Only two years previously, Peter Clarke's *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* had ignited a wide-ranging debate about the nature and fortunes of Edwardian Liberalism. Clarke had argued that the pre-1914 Liberal Party was in good health and showed few signs of the rapid decline that was to set in after the Lloyd George–Asquith split of 1916 and which was to lead to the party's replacement by Labour as the main anti-Conservative force in Britain. The key to Clarke's case was his contention that Edwardian Liberalism had embraced social reform, and so outflanked the embryonic Labour Party as the obvious choice for working-class voters. Ross McKibbin's *Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910–24* (1974) responded by claiming that Labour's appeal was based on its identity as a working-class party, whatever policies were pursued by the Liberals, and that Labour's organisation and electoral performance were growing strongly before 1914.

Emy's book made an important contribution to the sometimes fierce debate that ensued between Clarke's and McKibbin's viewpoints. *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics* is a study of political ideas at the national level in



the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It argues that the central division between the Conservatives and the Liberals was becoming their disagreement over the extent to which state intervention in the economy could be justified, especially in the arena of social reform. While the Conservatives defended a minimal role for the state in the economy, the Liberals increasingly modified their ideology to accommodate increased direct taxation and welfare provision – the 'New Liberalism'. Emy concentrates on how Liberals made the general arguments for this departure and, in particular, on the group of young men from the professional classes who were committed to these ideas and who entered Liberal politics and journalism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Indeed, he suggests that the Liberal Party could only adopt the cause of social reform because economically conservative businessmen were declining as a percentage of Liberal MPs and being replaced by middle-class lawyers and writers with a strong interest in social reform.

Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics was one of the first extended studies of New Liberalism as an ideology. In addition, the book made a range of important and innovatory points: it emphasised the significance of looking back to the 1880s and 1890s to trace developments in Liberal thinking; examined the use of speeches in Parliament and the press, together with pamphlets and books, to uncover the nature of Liberal thought; used Parliamentary voting patterns to try and identify who the advocates of social reform were among the Liberal MPs; and emphasised the significance of the long-overlooked issue of land reform to Edwardian Liberalism. Yet, despite this impressive list of achievements, Emy's book never quite achieved a central position in the debates about Edwardian Liberalism that Clarke had unleashed. This was partly because it was not obvious on which side of the argument Emy stood. His emphasis on the importance of New Liberal ideology could be read as support for Clarke's case that the Liberal Party had been transformed in the years before 1914 into a vehicle for working-class aspirations. Yet Emy was not convinced that the New Liberalism would do the Liberal Party any good in the long run. He suggested that support for social reform created severe strains within the Liberal Party and, by alienating its business supporters, led to organisational weakness and imminent financial collapse.

But Emy's book was also overshadowed by later works on New Liberal thinking, especially two books that appeared in 1978: Clarke's *Liberals and Social Democrats* and Michael Freeden's *The New Liberalism*. Clarke's work was a superb in-depth study of the interlinked lives and thought of a key group of New Liberal writers and intellectuals, while Freeden expanded the analysis of New Liberalism to look at its relationship to theories about character, ethics, evolution and society. Emy, however, published nothing further on Edwardian Liberalism. By the time *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics* appeared he had already taken up a post in the politics department at Monash University in Australia, where he has pursued a distinguished career as an analyst of modern Australian politics.

Moreover, some of Emy's conclusions need to be put into the context of subsequent scholarship, which suggests that the book's picture of the scale and nature of the changes in Edwardian politics need to be treated cautiously. E. H. H. Green's *The Crisis of Conservatism* (1995) has drawn attention to the way in which many Tories favoured state intervention in the economy through tariffs and, to some extent, social reform. This suggests that the debate between Conservatives and Liberals on the economy before 1914 was not a straightforward matter of laissez-faire economics versus state intervention. Duncan Tanner's *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900–1918* (1990) argues convincingly that Liberal organisation and finances in the Edwardian era were fairly robust and efficient and not subject to the decline that Emy posits. Most importantly, G. R. Searle's article, 'The Edwardian Liberal Party and Business' (*English Historical Review*, 98, 1983) pointed out that the percentage of businessmen in the ranks of Liberal MPs was not falling substantially in the Edwardian era and that they still made up nearly 40 per cent of Liberal MPs in 1914. The business element in Edwardian Liberalism remained powerful and had not been alienated by social reform policies to the degree Emy argued. Some supported the New Liberalism, while others were still attracted by the party's continuing devotion to causes like free trade and its close identification with religious Nonconformity. The Liberal Party remained a house of many mansions, and while social reform was an important part of Liberal identity by 1914, it was only one element.

Cambridge University Press's decision to reprint *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics* is very welcome. The debate on whether the Liberal Party was in decline before 1914 still continues, and hopefully the wider availability that a reprint will bring to this book will lead to a renewed appreciation of its significance. But this reprint comes thirty-five years after Emy's book was first published and a great deal has been written on Edwardian Liberalism since then. It would have been helpful if the reprint

had contained at least a new preface to take account of recent developments in the historiography about Liberalism before 1914 and to relate Emy's work to these developments.

Ian Packer is Reader in History at the University of Lincoln and author of several works on Edwardian politics, including Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land *and* Liberal Government and Politics*, 1905–15.*

British intellectual life, 1918–39

Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Richard Overy, Professor of History at the University of Exeter, is renowned for his numerous highly esteemed volumes on the history of the Second World War, notably *The Origins of the Second World War*, *Why the Allies Won* and the award-winning *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia*, which was awarded the prestigious Wolfson Prize for History and the Hessell Tiltman Prize.

The present voluminous tome is really a history of ideas during the predominantly sad inter-war period when many people became convinced that the West was facing a real crisis of civilisation. Overy's research work is awesomely impressive and complete, comprising material from a wide range of archival repositories (most notably the holdings of the London School of Economics, the British Psycho-Analytical Society, King's College, Cambridge, and the British Library, London), newspapers and journals, and a huge amount of contemporary literature and more recent secondary sources. This wide range of disparate source materials is skilfully brought together in a compelling narrative and analysis.

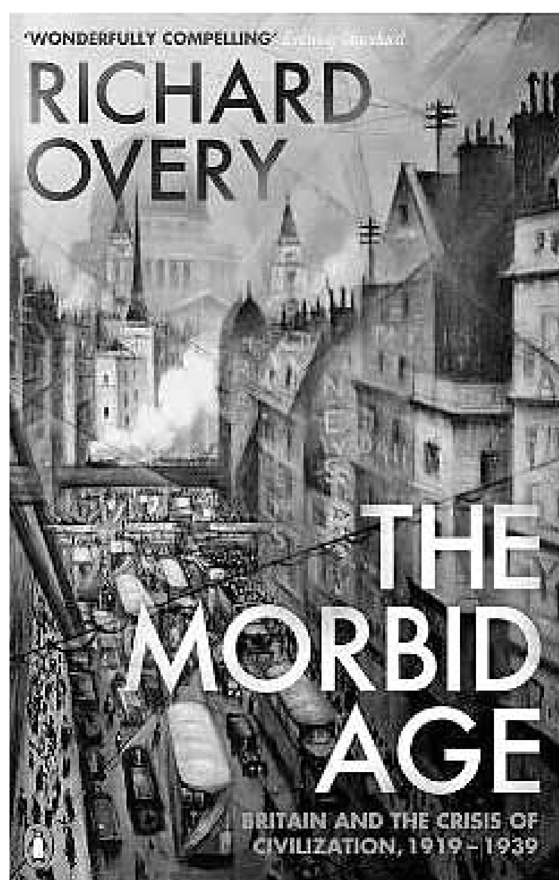
A good number of fascinating individuals are covered in this study, many of them literary figures like Aldous and Julian Huxley, Sidney and Beatrice Webb (also very much political activists, too, of course), H. G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw. There are also political figures like J. A. Hobson, historians like the Oxford don Arnold Toynbee and G. D. H. Cole, and psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Ernest Jones (both of whose papers the author has extensively quarried).

Readers of the *Journal of Liberal History* devoted to the history of their party in a strictly narrow party-political sense are likely to be disappointed. There is a passing reference to former Liberal J. A. Hobson joining the Labour Party (p. 62), and a mention of Lloyd George, as premier of the post-war coalition government, arguing powerfully the case for practising birth control – 'it was not possible to run an A1 empire with a C3 population' (p. 98). Long-serving Labour MP Philip Noel-Baker, lover of Megan Lloyd George, is described as 'a tall, distinctively good-looking man, a sociable teetotaller well known for his dizzying energy, who sustained a lifelong commitment to sport' (p. 225), and here discussed in the context of pacifist movements in the 1920s and 1930s.

But devotees of 'liberal' history more broadly will find much of interest here on the role of pacifist movements like the League of Nations Union (pp. 225–26), the most prominent anti-war society of the 1920s, and the 'People's Front' of the 1930s, championed by the so-called 'Popular Front' (pp. 302–04). The varying fortunes of more minor parties like the Communists and the British Union of Fascists are discussed in the context of inter-war British political evolution (pp. 266–68).

There are many passages here of exceptional interest and highly readable too, among them the story of Walter Greenwood's ground-breaking, highly timely novel *Love on the Dole* (1933), an acclaimed best-seller almost overnight, which quickly spawned a stage play which ran for no fewer than 400 nights (pp. 70–74). Equally compelling is the analysis of the publication and impact of the Webbs' massive tome *Soviet Communism: a New Civilisation?*, which eventually appeared in two volumes, running to no fewer than 1,174 pages, in the high summer of 1935. It was a major enterprise which had cost the ageing Webbs dearly during the first half of the 1930s. As Overy outlines, the work developed a fascinating history all of its own and made a major impact at the very time of the Soviet purges and the growing cult of Stalin in Russia (pp. 294–95).

Equally absorbing is the story of the success of the Left Book Club launched by Victor Gollancz in 1936, which attracted a membership exceeding 50,000 within two years (pp. 304–05). Its growth and influence prompted bookshop owner W. A. Foyle to launch a rival (but rather less successful) Right Book Club in the following year. The other great publishing success of the second half of the 1930s was the series of Penguin



A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

WHAT'S LEFT OF GLADSTONIAN LIBERALISM IN THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS?

Since the publication of *The Orange Book: Reclaiming Liberalism* in 2004, there has been an ongoing discussion in the Liberal Democrats about whether the party needs to return to its nineteenth-century Gladstonian inheritance of non-interventionism in economic and social affairs, self-help and an emphasis on personal and political, as opposed to social, liberalism.

Now, in celebration of the bicentenary of the birth of William Ewart Gladstone in 1809, the History Group is holding a meeting to find out what Gladstonian Liberalism was and how it came to dominate late Victorian politics – and to discover just how much of the classical liberal inheritance the Grand Old Man has actually passed down to the current-day Liberal Democrats.

Speakers: **Dr Eugenio Biagini** (Sidney Sussex, Cambridge; author of many works on 19th century history and ideas, including *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular liberalism in the age of Gladstone, 1860–1880*); **Chris Huhne MP** (Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary).

7.00pm, Monday 25 January 2010 (immediately following the History Group AGM at 6.30pm)
David Lloyd George Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London, SW1A 2HE

Specials launched by Allen Lane to reach 'a vast reading public for *intelligent* books at a low price'. No fewer than seventeen paperbacks, mostly priced at 6d, appeared during 1938 alone and made a major impact on the British reading public who bought hundreds of thousands of copies and trebled the takings of Penguin Books (who, by a happy coincidence, have published the present volume).

Another absorbing read is the story of George Orwell, who travelled from London to Barcelona in December 1936, but was soon compelled by a sniper's bullet to return to England where, exceptionally lucky to have escaped with his life, he wrote his brilliant book *Homage to Catalonia* (pp. 322–24). Probably the most substantial (and indeed compelling) section of the book is the closely argued Chapter 8, which traces the ideas which evolved and developed during the long, tortuous build-up to the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, particularly the circumstances of, and reaction to, the Munich Conference of September 1938 and subsequent agreement. The growing fear, present ever since 1918, that a terminal crisis of civilisation was about to engulf the Western world reached its crescendo during these fateful years.

From beginning to end the book is a good read, but it is sometimes a shade verbose and rather heavy going at times; on occasions the facts crowd in and become difficult to absorb. The volume is well illustrated with a wide range of contemporary photographs and illustrations, but these are simply printed as part of the main text rather than published as independent plates, which would have been more effective and enjoyable. The reproduction of the front covers of numerous books and pamphlet publications discussed in the text is especially welcome.

Strangely, there are but few references to the impact of the First World War and the huge trauma which inevitably resulted for the survivors and the bereaved, all of which formed the backdrop to the obsession with pessimism which followed and the visions of a catastrophic future to come. Subsequently, the traumatic experiences of the General Strike of May 1926 and the subsequent long lock-out in the coal industry, the international slump of the period 1929–32, the rise of the dictators on the continent, and Stalin in Russia in the 1930s, and the politics of appeasement, all added to the development of this, the 'morbid age'. As Overy argues convincingly, the outbreak of World War Two was almost welcomed as a means of resolving the many contradictions and anxieties which had been building up over the previous two decades. The second war, it was widely believed in 1939–40, would either save or totally destroy Western civilisation as it was known.

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