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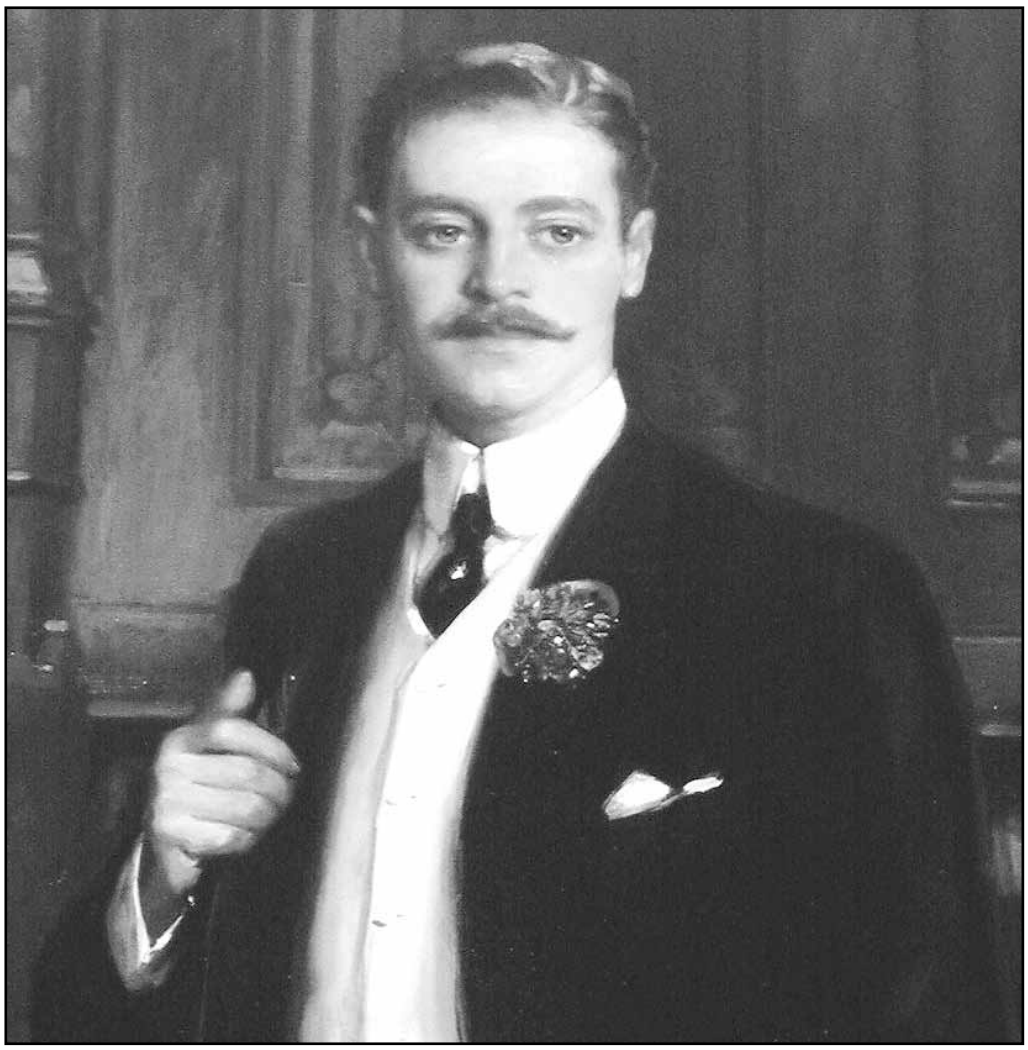

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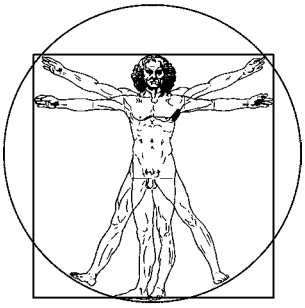

Liberal Democrat History Group

LETTERS

The 1906 election, and Sir Charles Grey MP

Being surrounded by election statistics, I thought I would take another look at the question (Liberal History Quiz 2008, *Journal of Liberal History* 61), 'In which 20th century election did the Liberal Party achieve it highest share of the vote?' The stated answer of 1906 was correct but the associated 49.0 per cent quoted was slightly inaccurate and perhaps somewhat misleading.

In both my immediate sources to hand, the Liberal share of the vote is given as 49.4 per cent. However, the significance of plural voting (business and universities) should be appreciated, as also should the fact that 114 MPs (17 per cent) were returned unopposed (13 Conservatives, etc., 27 Liberals, 73 Irish Nationalists and 1 other) and that, by reason of the Gladstone–MacDonald pact, 24 of the Labour MPs elected in England had only Conservative, etc. opposition.

Thus and otherwise, the Liberal vote of 49.4 per cent represented the vote for 509 candidates (with an average vote of 5,404) whereas the Conservative, etc. vote of 43.4 per cent represented the vote for 543 candidates (with an average vote of 4,461). Accordingly, the real Liberal/Conservative, etc. votes ratio was about 100:83 rather than about 100:88, as from the basic percentages. If statistical account could be taken of all that and all other factors, the Liberal share of the 1906 vote, perhaps in the UK and certainly in Great Britain, could be adjusted to over 50 per cent.

On another tack, in the context of writing biographical and family notes on all the Liberal Cabinet Ministers from 1859 to 1932, can anyone advise if George Charles Grey – Liberal MP for Berwick-on-Tweed from an uncontested by-election in August 1941 until he was killed in action on 30 July 1944 – was related to Sir Edward Grey, Liberal Foreign Secretary in 1905–16 and Liberal MP for Berwick-on-Tweed from the 1885 general election until he was created Viscount Grey in 1916?

Contact details: 1 Pantoch Gardens, Banchory, Kincardineshire AB31 5ZD; tel. 01330-823159; email s.waugh.bnchry@btinternet.com

Sandy S. Waugh

Margaret Wintringham

Journal of Liberal History 36 (autumn 2002) carries a biography of Margaret Wintringham, the Liberal MP from the 1920s, written by Larry Iles and Robert Ingham. They state that: 'She was not asked to contest the 1937 by-election for the seat (Aylesbury), nor did she pursue an initial interest in contesting the Gainsborough constituency', before going on to conclude that: 'The Liberal Party lost one of its biggest assets by marginalising Wintringham from the 1930s until her death'.

Both these points undervalue the worth placed in her by the party. She did more than pursue an initial interest in Gainsborough – she was in fact prospective candidate for the seat in 1939. A general election was anticipated that year and Gainsborough was one of the party's best prospects for a gain.

In addition, it is interesting to note that the Labour Party did not have a candidate in place, as they had done in 1935. In 1939, there was much speculation (nurtured by the Popular Front proposals) that Labour candidates might not appear in seats where the Liberals were well placed to defeat sitting Conservatives. It is not hard to imagine that in 1939 Wintringham might have overturned a Conservative majority of less than 2,000 with over 4,000 Labour voters looking for a new home.

(Sourced from: *Liberal Magazine* 1938 and 1939 for Wintringham's Gainsborough activity; *Labour Party National Annual Report 1939* for confirmation of no Labour candidate in Gainsborough.)

Graem Peters

Albert McElroy

In my article about the use of the online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia, which appeared in *Journal of Liberal History* 65 (winter 2009–10), I stated incorrectly that the Ulster Liberal Party had two MPs elected to the Parliament of Northern Ireland. In fact there was only one, Sheelagh Murnaghan, who served as MP for Queen's University, Belfast from 1961 to 1969.

Albert McElroy was never elected to Stormont. He was a Glasgow-born Minister of the Non-subscribing Presbyterian Church who had previously supported the Northern Ireland Labour Party and a breakaway group, the Commonwealth Labour Party. In 1956 he resurrected the Ulster Liberal Party (ULP) for its last phase. The ULP had previously existed from time to time in the province from 1886, when Gladstone's espousal of home rule destroyed the Irish Liberals. Support from the British Liberal Party revived it briefly in 1906–14 and again in 1929. After 1970 it lost support to the newly formed Alliance Party of Northern Ireland and was finally wound up by 1987. My thanks go to Dr Sandy Waugh for bringing this mistake to my attention.

Readers can find out more about McElroy by accessing *Journal* 33 (Winter 2001) which is available to download free from the History Group website at http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/item_single.php?item_id=10&item=journal This contains an article by Berkely Farr, 'Liberalism and Unionist Northern Ireland', which tells the story of the ULP and the role played by the remarkable Albert McElroy. *Journal* 33 also has an article by Denis Loretto on the formation of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland which contains a critique of the ULP approach, also well worth revisiting.

Graham Lippiatt

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See **www.liberalhistory.org.uk** for details of History Group activities, records of all past *Journals* and past meetings, guides to archive sources, research in progress and other research resources, together with a growing number of pages on the history of the party, covering particular issues and periods in more detail, including lists of party leaders, election results and cabinet ministers.

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- http://www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup
- http://act.libdems.org.uk/group/libdemhistory

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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**.

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

LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS SPRING 2010

Liberal History News is a new regular feature in the *Journal* (except in special themed issues), reporting news of meetings, conferences, commemorations, dinners or any other events, 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**

Gladstone bicentenary

A wreath-laying ceremony in Westminster Abbey on 12 January 2010 completed the bicentenary year of the birth of Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone. History Group chair **Tony Little** was there:

The wreath was laid on Gladstone's grave, after evensong, by children from Gladstone's family in the presence of Sir William Gladstone, the Dean of Westminster Abbey and a congregation of around a hundred, including eminent historians of the Victorian era and prominent Liberal Democrat politicians Charles Kennedy and Lord McNally.

The ceremony took place in the shadows of the Abbey's statues of Gladstone and Disraeli which, failing to look each other in the eye and separated by a 'neutral' monument, give the impression of continued rivalry on either side of an invisible House of Commons, Gladstone posed next to the statue of his mentor Sir Robert Peel.

Appropriately, David Steel read Gladstone's warning to 'remember the rights of the savage, as we call him', from the 1879 Midlothian campaign speech on the Afghan war. Rev Paul Hunt, chairman of the National Liberal Club, hinted at the expenses scandal when he spoke of Gladstone's assertion that 'nothing that is morally wrong can be politically right', while Rev Peter Francis, Warden of St Deiniol's Library, Gladstone's national memorial, noted the Grand Old Man's belief that 'life is a great and noble calling, not a mean and grovelling thing'. Sir Alan Beith delivered the eulogy, which is reproduced below.

On Gladstone's birthday at the end of December, wreaths were also laid in ceremonies in Liverpool, his birthplace, and Edinburgh, where he was MP between 1880 and 1895 (see story below).

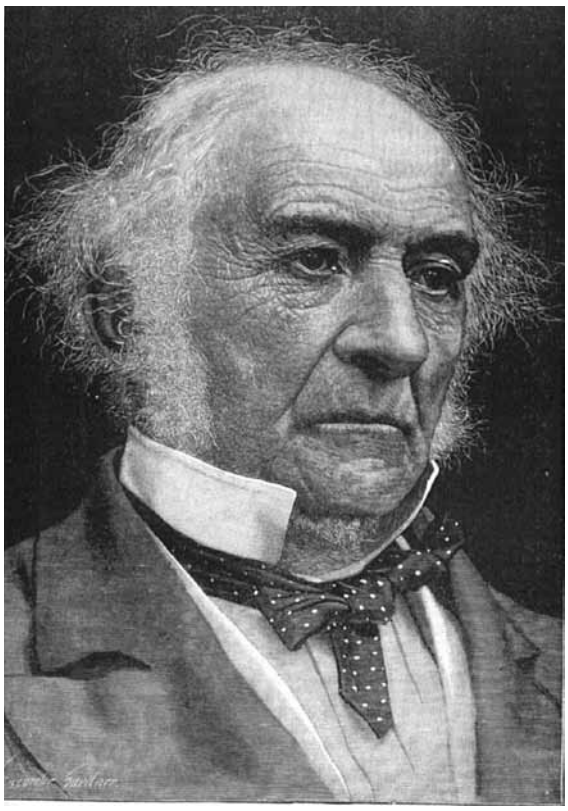
He made politics matter

Rt Hon Sir Alan Beith MP's address at the wreath-laying ceremony in honour of the 200th anniversary of Gladstone's birth, Westminster Abbey, January 2010:

Today we honour William Ewart Gladstone, four times Prime Minister of this country and Leader of the Liberal Party.

Born 200 years ago, he not only lived through almost all of the nineteenth century, he dominated the politics of that century. He achieved that dominance with a sense of moral purpose rooted in his Christian beliefs, and it is all the more fitting that we honour him in this Abbey, which he knew so well, following the Evensong service of the Church of England of which he was a devoted member. Yet at the same time this devoted churchman was the political hero of most Nonconformists, he devoted much of his political capital to an attempt to end the religious and political subjection of the Catholics of Ireland, and he fought for the right of an atheist to sit in the House of Commons.

He had turned from a Tory upbringing to the promotion of Liberalism. It was a Liberalism which asserted the value of every human being. It embraced, as we heard in his own ringing terms, 'the meanest along with the greatest' over 'the whole surface of the earth'. At home it involved tackling the very issues which challenge today's politicians,



most notably stabilising the public finances and modernising the political system by opening it up to voices and groups which had previously been excluded, from Westminster right down to the parish council.

In his support for the National Liberal Club, of which he was the founding president, he sought to create a centre in London for those newcomers to politics from all over Britain who would not readily have gained admittance to the gentlemen's clubs of Victorian London. Party leaders today worry about how to make politics relevant to ordinary people. Gladstone drew vast crowds to listen to his ideas at open-air meetings in Scotland, Wales and the industrial centres of Northern England. Wherever he went he was presented with petitions backing the causes he had espoused. He was a celebrity whose picture hung in tens of thousands of homes and stared out with his steely gaze from cups, plates, medals and much else of what we would now call 'merchandise'. He clearly made politics matter.

Gladstone was no stranger to Prime Ministerial leadership battles or party divisions, but he never let them blunt his determination to fight for what was just. He was a man of formidable intellect, incredible industry, massive self-consciousness and turbulent spirit. He cannot have been easy as a political colleague, or easy to live with; indeed, he found it difficult at times to live with himself. But such is the way with people who embody greatness. He was a giant in the land. We should honour him not only in the wreaths we lay but in what we do to advance the freedom and well-being of humankind.

Gladstone was no stranger to Prime Ministerial leadership battles or party divisions, but he never let them blunt his determination to fight for what was just. He was a man of formidable intellect, incredible industry, massive self-consciousness and turbulent spirit.

Gladstone and Bulgaria

York Membery traces the historic connections between Gladstone and Bulgaria.

'Some of my countrymen might be admirers of Margaret Thatcher or Tony Blair,' said Dr Lachezar Matev, the Bulgarian ambassador to Britain, 'but William Gladstone will always be number one as far as we're concerned.' Matev was speaking at the launch of Gladstone's bicentenary celebrations at the four-time Liberal Prime Minister's former London residence in Carlton House Terrace last year. But the anniversary of his birth in December 1809 was celebrated in almost equal measure by the ambassador's countrymen. Not only was there lecture and reception at the Bulgarian embassy in London, there was also a special Gladstonian academic conference in the country's capital, Sofia, and a trip by the British-Bulgarian Friendship Society to Bulgaria to investigate his legacy.

The reason for the Grand Old Man's enduring popularity is simple. In 1876, news of the brutal suppression of the 'April Uprising', an insurrection organised by the Bulgarians in what was then part of the Ottoman Empire, involving regular units of the Imperial Army and irregular *bashi-bazouk*, reached the other end of Europe. The Tory government of Benjamin Disraeli, in keeping with normal British foreign policy, regarded the Ottoman Empire as a bulwark against possible Russian expansion into eastern Europe, and was reluctant to become entangled in what it regarded as a largely domestic issue. But Gladstone was enraged by reports of the massacre of thousands. He published a powerful polemic, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, which called for the Ottomans to withdraw 'bag and baggage' from Bulgaria. 'Let the Turks now carry away their abuses in the only possible manner, namely, by carrying off themselves,' he raged.

The pamphlet sold 200,000 copies in a month, helped rally other influential figures such as the Italian nationalist Giuseppe Garibaldi to the Bulgarian cause, and led to Europe-wide demands for reform of the Ottoman Empire, which contributed to the re-establishment of Bulgaria as a de facto independent nation in 1878.

In the ensuing Midlothian campaign of 1880, Gladstone drew frequent attention to the Bulgarian Horrors in a series of mass public election rallies in which foreign policy played a surprisingly large part, leading to the Liberals' triumph at the ballot box.

Gladstone's actions gained him heroic status and his name was championed across Bulgaria. 'There is hardly a town in Bulgaria that doesn't have a street named in his honour,' said Dr Matev. Even during the long years of communist rule, his importance in the creation of the Bulgarian state continued to be emphasised.

'For someone like Gladstone to speak out so clearly and passionately – such a commanding figure in the most powerful nation on earth – had a huge impact,' said Professor Richard Aldous, author of an acclaimed co-biography of Gladstone and Disraeli, *The Lion and the Unicorn*. 'While the parallel is far from exact, look at the importance that Barack Obama's opposition to the war in Iraq on moral grounds had on a global audience and the importance that had in his subsequent election campaign.'

What would Gladstone himself have made of all the fuss surrounding the bicentenary? Peter Francis, warden of St Deiniol's, the prime ministerial library founded by 'the People's William' in Hawarden, North Wales, says: 'I think he would have been deeply gratified, for the two countries both had a special place in his heart.'

Gladstone bicentenary event in Edinburgh

The bicentenary of the birth of W.E. Gladstone was celebrated in Edinburgh on 29 December 2009; report by **Nigel Lindsay**.

Amid thickly-falling snow, a wreath-laying ceremony took place at the Grand Old Man's impressive statue in Coates Crescent Gardens, part of his Midlothian constituency, in the city's west end. The wreath, which had been specially made in the Victorian fashion by Maxwell's of Castle Street, was laid by Lord Steel. It is a tribute either to the reverence in which Edinburgh citizens hold W.E.G, or perhaps to the continuing icy weather, that the wreath was still undisturbed in its place on the plinth of the statue a fortnight later.

Gladstone commemoration in a snowy Edinburgh, 29 December 2009

Among those attending in overcoats, scarves and hats were Liberals who represented all strata of elected office in the area. In addition to Lord and Lady Steel, the company included Dr George Grubb (the Lord Provost of Edinburgh), John Barrett MP, Robert Brown MSP, and councillors Paul Edie and Phil Wheeler of Edinburgh City Council. Of these, John Barrett then represented an area that was once part of Gladstone's Midlothian constituency, while Phil Wheeler was Liberal candidate for Midlothian in 1974. Donald Gorrie, who previously represented part of the constituency, was also present.

The ceremony was necessarily brief because of the winter morning temperature. The organiser of the event, Nigel Lindsay, welcomed those who had braved the weather, and reported apologies from two councillors who were unavoidably absent. He recalled a centenarian elector who had supported him in an Aberdeen election in the early 1970s because of positive memories of Mr Gladstone.

Willis Pickard then read the following email message he had received from Gladstone's descendants Hannah Kempton, Beth Marsden and Tom Gladstone:

> In his later years W.E. Gladstone enjoyed spending his birthdays on the Riviera, escaping the inclement British winter weather. As the great, great, great, great, grand nieces and nephew of W.E., we are more accustomed to the Scottish habit of celebrating in all weathers and can think of no better place to do this than Edinburgh. Two of us called the city home for the four years that we attended the University, and others of Gladstone's direct descendants have also studied here. So we join you all in wishing the Grand Old Man a very happy birthday and thank you for braving the elements to remember him.

Lord Steel then laid the wreath and paid tribute to Gladstone's unique record as four times Prime Minister, concluding at the age of 84. He drew attention to the huge audiences Gladstone attracted to his public meetings and referred to some tickets he had for one of those meetings – priced at 5/-, 7/6, and 10/-. Lord Steel told how Gladstone had nevertheless cost him a vote at the 1966 general election; that of a woman who said she could never vote Liberal, much as she liked his year as MP, because 'they would not send help for General Gordon'. He paid tribute to Gladstone as a nineteenth-century politician whose work remained relevant in the twenty-first century, mentioning Gladstone's advocacy of what would nowadays be called 'an ethical foreign policy' in Afghanistan and the Balkans and the G.O.M's emphasis on extending educational opportunity. He referred to the esteem in which Gladstone was held in Scotland, and pointed out that the completion and inauguration of the huge statue in 1917, in the midst of the First World War, was evidence of this.

After a brief pause for photographs (see left) those present adjourned to the nearby Hilton Hotel in time to avoid frostbite setting in.

What would Gladstone think?

THE QUESTION of Gladstone's political views made its appearance in the 2010 election campaign, after the Conservative leader David Cameron quoted him in a speech on 27 April. The following day, BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme took up the issue, with an interview conducted by Justin Webb from the BBC's Bristol studio.

JW: David Cameron invoked the great Liberal Prime Minister William Gladstone yesterday: 'Government should make it difficult for people to do wrong, and easy for them to do right'. Well, perhaps we're all Liberals now, and if we are, has the West Country's life support of the party in the barren post-war years been a service to the nation?

Professor Richard Aldous is author of *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone versus Disraeli*, and Duncan Brack is Editor of the *Journal of Liberal History* and chair of the Liberal Democrat Conference Committee. Good morning to you both.

RA: Good morning.

DB: Good morning.

JW: Professor Aldous, there's nothing terribly revolutionary, is there, about David Cameron praising William Gladstone; didn't Mrs Thatcher like him as well?

RA: Yes, Mrs Thatcher always claimed that she was a Gladstonian liberal and was very proud of it, and in some ways, of course, it's entirely legitimate for David Cameron to claim Gladstone, because before Gladstone was a Liberal, he was a Conservative. He began his political career as a Tory; he was a Peelite, and he only really split from the mainstream of the Conservative Party in 1846, over the Corn Laws. So in many ways, Cameron is exactly right to say that Gladstone is as much part of the Conservative tradition as he is part of the Liberal one.

JW: Duncan Brack, how much is he part still of the Liberal one?

DB: Oh, enormously, I think. And I think that the quote that David Cameron came up with – I'm not sure I can think of anyone who would disagree with it! There are plenty of other quotes that he could have made; for example, from Gladstone: 'Liberalism is trust in the people, only qualified by prudence; Conservatism is mistrust in the people, only qualified by fear.'

I think there's a core of belief in liberty, and diversity, and tolerance, and decentralisation, and internationalism, that exists still in the Lib Dems of today, and we inherit from the Gladstonian Liberalism of the nineteenth century.

JW: But I suppose something then happened, didn't it, in the early part of the twentieth century, when you think of other Liberal leaders, more recent Liberal leaders, who took a sort of different tack, who believed much more in the state, to put it over-bluntly?

DB: Well the New Liberalism of the early twentieth century, of Lloyd George and Asquith and Churchill – social liberalism, as we would say today – certainly accepted a bigger role for the state in setting the conditions in which people can realise their freedom: good education, a good health service, help in old age and unemployment. But I think that Gladstone is mis-remembered often; he was pretty pragmatic about economic interventionism – he nationalised the telegraphs, and he was ready to nationalise the rail companies if it proved necessary. So there's not such a big change that happened in the early twentieth century; I think there is a consistent theme from Gladstone.

'Liberalism is trust in the people, only qualified by prudence; Conservatism is mistrust in the people, only qualified by fear.'

JW: Professor Aldous?

RA: It's important to remember as well – Duncan's quite right about the social side of things – but we have to remember the other things which would appeal particularly to the Conservatives at the moment. Gladstone's big themes were retrenchment and low taxation; these were in many ways two of the key things that underpinned his philosophy. His idea of retrenchment was that you should always get rid of waste in government, even to the extent that he insisted that the diplomatic bags should always have the labels scratched off them, so that they could be used again. So, ideas in the Conservative manifesto now about getting rid of waste, I would have thought would be things that would very much appeal to Gladstone.

DB: That's true up to a point, but remember that government expenditure in the mid-nineteenth century was very heavily directed to things that benefited the upper classes. They were things like the military and the diplomatic service; John Bright called it 'a gigantic system of outdoor relief for the aristocracy'. Gladstone was concerned about not giving subsidies to the privileged elite.

JW: Can I ask you both about the West Country? We've spent three days now in the West Country, and when you talk to people, Liberal Democrats are now very much obviously part of the political mix here, in some places they have had representatives, and they're very much hoping to get a few more this time round. Duncan Brack, is it down to the West Country that the Liberal Party managed to stay alive in the barren times?

DB: Yes, pretty much – along with Scotland and Wales, I think. Those three areas almost always retained Liberal MPs, even in the darkest days in the 1940s and '50s and '60s.

JW: Why do you think that was? What is it about West Country folk?

DB: Yes, it's interesting. Again it's the same with Scotland and Wales; these are areas which I think have quite a strong distinctive sense of geographical identity, and they see themselves as very different from the centre, from the metropolis. And also, I think, in the earlier part of the century the survival of Nonconformity was very important; the Liberal Party was always a Nonconformist Party in its backbone. Somebody described the people who were prepared to vote Liberal still in the '40s and '50s as 'awkward Nonconformists'.

And I think it was really important in keeping the parliamentary tradition of the Liberal Party alive, so that people who thought they were Liberals, but didn't think there was much point in voting for them anywhere else in the country, then began to see the point of voting Liberal when disillusion grew with the other two parties in the' 70s.

JW: Duncan Brack and Richard Aldous, thank you both.

You can hear this interview at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8648000/8648296.stm

New on the History Group website

The Liberal Democrat History Group's website, at **www.liberalhistory.org.uk**, is gradually being updated and expanded.

New on the site recently is a biography of **Sir Clement Freud** (1924–2009), Liberal MP for Isle of Ely 1973–87, written by Sir Alan Beith MP. The biography can be found at: http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/item_single.php?item_id=60&item=biography

Apologies ...

... for the late despatch of this issue, which should have been available in early April. Normal service will be resumed with *Journal* 67, a special issue on 'Liberalism and the Left', which should be available in early July.

'A VERY ENGLIS

THE HONOURABLE THOMAS CHARLES REG

The death of Captain the Honourable Thomas Charles Reginald Agar-Robartes MP, at Loos during the First World War, robbed Great Britain of a talented, charismatic and hard-working politician. **Paul Holden**, House and Collections Manager at Lanhydrock House in Cornwall (the Agar-Robartes family estate), assesses the life and career of this backbench Liberal MP who served in the great reforming Liberal governments between 1906 and 1915 – 'a very English gentleman'.[1]

H GENTLEMAN'

GINALD AGAR-ROBARTES MP (1880–1915)

To his Cornish constituents Agar-Robartes' popularity was based as much on his colourful character as on his impartial mind and independent stance. Amongst his peers he was a much admired and gregarious talent whose seriousness and moderation sometimes gave way before an erratic – and often misplaced – wit that drew attention to his youth.[2]

Nine generations prior to Tommy's birth, Richard Robartes (*c.*1580–1634), regarded as the 'wealthiest in the west', purchased the Cornish estate of Lanhydrock near Bodmin and, controversially, paid £10,000 to the Duke of Buckingham for a peerage (Fig.2).[3] His eldest son, the staunch Parliamentarian John (1606–85), was created 1st Earl Radnor in 1679 after a successful career in the Restoration parliaments of Charles II. By 1757 the Radnor title had became extinct and the Cornish estates passed, first, to George Hunt (1720–98), long-standing MP for Bodmin, and second, to his niece Anna Maria Hunt (1771–1861), Tommy's great-grandmother. Her marriage to Charles Agar (1769–1811), youngest son of the Viscount Clifden, produced one surviving son, Thomas James Agar-Robartes (1808–82) who served as a Liberal MP from 1847 until 1869 when his tireless organisation of the evolving Liberal Party in Cornwall brought him a peerage. His only son Thomas Charles (1844–1930) took the Liberal seat of East Cornwall in 1880, a seat he held for two years before succeeding his father as Baron Robartes in1882.

Tommy was one of ten children born into the high-Anglican family of Thomas Charles Agar-Robartes (later 6th Viscount Clifden), and Mary Dickinson (1853–1921) of Kingweston in Somerset (Fig.3). He was educated at Mortimer Vicarage School in Berkshire, Eton College and Christ Church, Oxford. As a young man he developed an ardour for equestrian sports, becoming Master of the Drag Hunt and earning a dubious reputation as 'the most reckless horseman in Cornwall'.[4] University brought out his outgoing and flamboyant personality. Like his father he became an active member of the prestigious dining club, the Bullingdon Society, and in 1901 alone his personal bills for wines/spirits and cigarettes /cigars totalled £91 5s 8d (£5,200 in 2010 prices) and £44 12s 6d respectively (£2,500). With close friends like James de Rothschild and Neil Primrose, second son of Lord Rosebery, Tommy was a regular at country house parties, and with his passion for the turf his academic studies understandably suffered, his exasperated tutor writing to Viscount Clifden in 1902, saying: 'I have done my utmost for him'.[5]

After an unsuccessful attempt to join the army Tommy ventured into politics. In 1903 the *Western Daily Mercury* enthusiastically reported on his speech for the Liberal Executive at Liskeard: 'He spoke with ease and confidence and his remarks were salted with wit … he gives promise of achieving real distinction as a speaker.'[6] Highlighting the Unionist government's failures, as published in the *Boer War Commission Report*, Tommy declared:

> It was the most disgraceful thing he had ever read … a more disgraceful piece of criminal carelessness and neglect it would be impossible to find. Might it sink into their minds as hot iron into wax, and might it ever remain there like a brand on a Dartmoor pony.[7]

Perhaps mindful of his political inexperience, he wisely avoided speaking on the principles of the war, preferring instead to vent his disapproval at the pitiful organisation and inadequate armaments of the troops. He continued:

> It was something akin to murder to send out men to fight our battles on horses unfit to ride

Fig. 1: The Hon T.C.R. Agar-Robartes. Oil on canvas by Richard Jack, 1906/7. Lanhydrock collections.

> … As to the reserve of 200,000 rifles, it was discovered that the sighting was incorrect and that the rifle shot eight inches to the right at a distance of 500 yards.

Like his political mentor Lord Rosebery, Tommy's passion and belief in empire was enduring. At Liskeard he said that he did not wish to see the British Empire lose 'one grain of its greatness'; in his 1906 election pledges he wrote that: 'the present condition of affairs in South Africa [is] deplorable to the last degree'; and in 1910 he applauded self-government in South Africa, which he considered had 'brought a valiant people within the circle of the British Empire'.[8]

In 1905, as President of the Wimpole Liberal Association in Cambridgeshire (the local organisation to the family's Wimpole Hall home), Tommy attacked the Tory government's stance on tariff reform. He concluded his speech with the cry:

> Out with the present Government … Mr Balfour … has clung to office like a drowning man clutching a straw … they have broken … the eleventh commandment, 'Be thou not found out'.[9]

Tommy's political future, however, was to be rooted nearer his Cornish home. Edwardian Cornwall had suffered severe social and economic instability as a consequence of continued agricultural and industrial decline. Consequently Nonconformist religion and Liberalism both grew between 1885 and 1910. With his good looks, sharp mind and fervent personality, Tommy was 'enthusiastically adopted' as Liberal candidate for South-East Cornwall, a seat that had been held by the Liberal Unionists at the two previous elections with majorities of 543 (1895) and 1,302 (1900).

Lanhydrock immediately became the centre of industrious political activity, with the guest book recording the names of, amongst others, Herbert Asquith and Winston Churchill (Fig. 4). On Saturday 25 November 1905 Tommy's mentor and family friend Lord Rosebery visited Bodmin as part of his speaking

tour of the south-west. His visit coincided with a period of Liberal division over Home Rule policy and internal scheming over party leadership. Two days prior to the Bodmin rally the Liberal leader Henry Campbell-Bannerman had given a speech in Stirling in which he had outlined his step-by-step approach towards Irish Home Rule. Rosebery's reaction to the press reports was one of anger.

Preceding Rosebery on the platform, Tommy set the evening's controversial mood. His speech has not survived, although a draft letter dated 28 November to the Fowey-based author, Cambridge professor and local Liberal President Arthur Quiller-Couch remains in the collection. Tommy wrote:

> I am sorry that you should feel aggrieved at the position and attitude I took in Bodmin this week. I think perhaps that I was wrong in using an expression of Sir H C B's in the way I did, but I thought at the time that it was most appropriate to Chinese labour … Lord R after the meeting said to me 'a sort of cold shudder beat through the meeting after you [Agar-Robartes] said that the campaign was a game against C.B his name was never mentioned until his words were read on Friday morning, then I admit there was much bitterness, for owing I hope to his words having been misinterpreted, I felt that those words had ruined the prospects of the Liberal Party'[10]

Worse followed when Lord Rosebery rose to address the crowd. Denouncing Campbell-Bannerman's position on Home Rule, Rosebery said: 'I, then, will add no more on the subject, except to say emphatically and explicitly and once and for all that I cannot serve under that banner'. Many took this to indicate that he would never serve in a government pledged to Home Rule; certainly the public rift both with his party leader and with his fellow Liberal Imperialists Asquith, Edward Grey and Richard Haldane, irreversibly widened. So serious were his comments that Campbell-Bannerman thought him 'off his head'. Tommy too realised the seriousness of the situation, writing:

> I repudiate any suggestion ~~that that it was my desire to oust C.B & to obtain~~ suggestion that the business was a 'put up job' as I have heard it described. Lord R as he got into the motor with me after Bodmin said 'I think that is probably the last speech I shall make on a public platform'. He said to me on Monday – 'I should be absolutely miserable if C B retires (what I meant by 'I cannot serve under that banner' was that I could take no further part in his campaign)'.

Tommy apologised for his misjudged comments and vowed in future to adhere to his usual well-prepared notes. It was later remarked that 'Mr Robartes was only voicing, like a parrot, the views of his political mentor'.[11] Rosebery, true to form, refused to express any regret later, saying: 'to very word, to every syllable of the Bodmin speech I absolutely adhere'.[12] Even though he consistently rejected any ideas of reclaiming party leadership many, Tommy included, hoped that he would assume the mantle once Balfour was defeated. Tommy concluded his letter

> … much as I personally should like to see Lord R in the position of Leader of the Liberal party, I do not believe that he would accept the position ~~Great as~~ Great as is my affection for him, I put ~~personal friendship~~ the Liberal party before my personal friendship.

The controversy came during a period of tentative Liberal division. In the hope of precipitating a lasting Liberal split, Balfour's government resigned within days of the Bodmin speech. For the impending January 1906 election, Tommy – 'the Farmers and Miners Friend' – published his election pledges (Fig. 5), appealing to:

> … the Electors of S.E. Cornwall … 1st, To repair as far as possible the mischief accomplished by the late Government; and, 2nd, to help forward those great social reforms which are urgent and necessary.[13]

His wide-ranging pledges were aimed at the popular Cornish vote. Free trade he considered 'essential to the welfare of the Empire … and the happiness of the people'. Opposing the 1902 Education Act, he supported an amendment to take all schools into public control and to abolish religious testing for teachers. He viewed the situation in South Africa as lamentable and, in view of the Cornish mining interests in the Transvaal gold mines, was opposed to the impending humanitarian disaster of the Chinese 'slaves'. Moreover, he championed land reform (particularly in amending the Agricultural Holdings Act), better working-class housing, protection of trade unions and fairer local taxation. He was staunchly opposed to an independent parliament for Ireland – a position based largely on Cornwall's Nonconformist sympathies, its geographical proximity to Ireland and the more practical concern of fishing in Irish waters. On the issue of the 1904 Licensing Act Tommy saw it as detrimental to temperance reform, asking: 'Why should the drink traffic be the only trade allowed to carry on business on the Sabbath?'[14] Some years later he was quoted as saying:

> I like my beaker of ale in the morning as much as any man – judging from the lively manifestations of joy from the gentlemen opposite, a considerable number of them must be financially dependant on the hop trade.[15]

Under the free trade and cheap food slogan, 'Vote for the Big Loaf – Vote for Robartes', eighty campaign meetings were held across his prospective rural constituency. For the first time in many of these scattered areas the motor car was in evidence; indeed three of the Agar-Robartes' private motor-cars were requisitioned in addition to over a dozen others. The enterprising Liberal agents also organised: 'a cyclist corps who darted hither and thither bearing electioneering literature, the handle bars of their machines

Fig. 2: Lanhydrock House, Bodmin, Cornwall. Completed in 1644, Lanhydrock was fully refurbished after a fire in 1881. The property was bequeathed to the National Trust in 1953.

Fig. 3: The Agar-Robartes children, 1896. (L-R) Gerald (later 7th Viscount Clifden), Mary Vere, Cecil, Everilda (Tommy's twin) with Alexander, Tommy, Constance, Victor (later 8th Viscount Clifden) and Violet.

Fig. 4: L-R Sir Clifford J. Cory (Cornwall West, St Ives), the Hon T.C. Agar-Robartes (Viscount Clifden), Rt. Hon. H.H. Asquith, the Hon. T.C.R. Agar-Robartes (Mid-Cornwall, St Austell), George Hay Morgan (Cornwall, Truro). Lanhydrock, 1906.

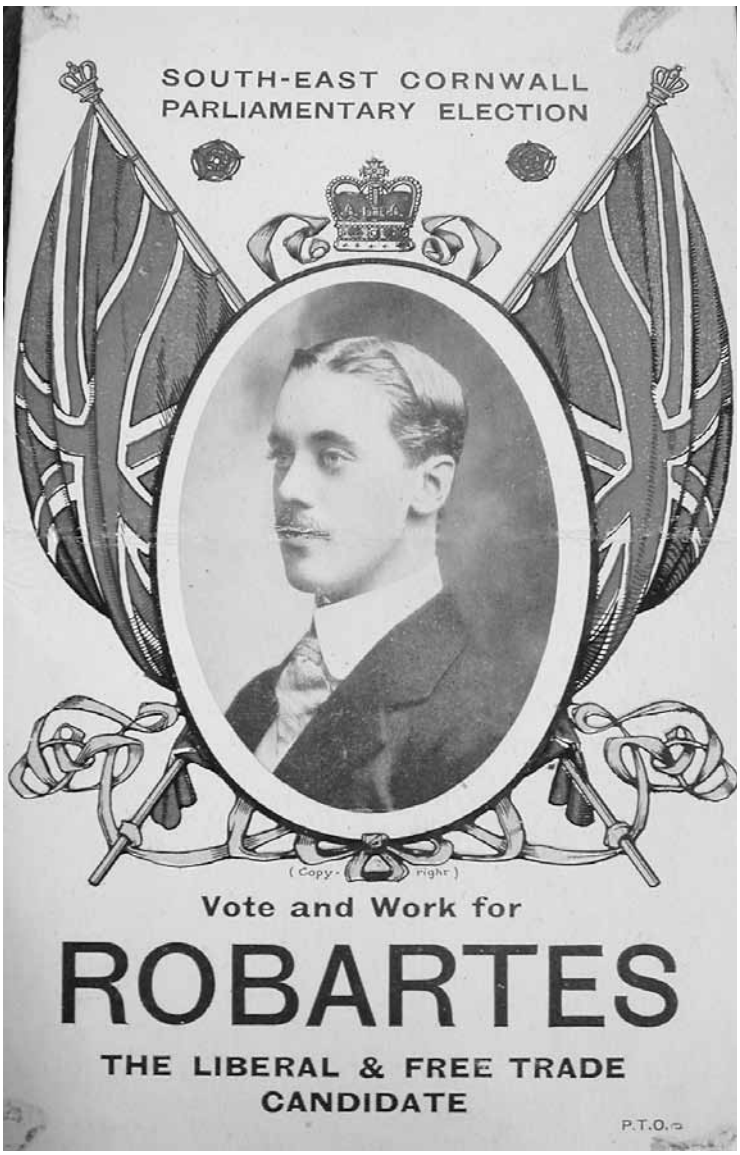


Fig. 5: *Vote and Work for Robartes: The Liberal and Free Trade Candidate,* election leaflet 1906.

supporting placards announcing their latest triumphs'.[16]

Alfred Browning-Lyne, the founder of the *Cornish Guardian*, proved a loyal supporter, describing Tommy's 'truly democratic' outlook as having a 'genuine sympathy for the masses of the people … He was that seeming paradox, a democratic aristocrat.' On his opponent's side, a critical press campaign was initiated by the *Cornish Times* who blamed 'again and again the manner in which the mine-owners of the Division, through the Shylock qualities of their agents, have squeezed the life out of the mining industry'. Although this was in part a justified attack on the landed Cornish elite the *Cornish Guardian* leapt to Tommy's defence: 'The remarks set forth are made solely with the intention of injuring the candidature of the Hon. Agar-Robartes and are wholly unfounded'.

Tory trickery was rife. One campaign worker claimed that Viscount Clifden's tenants were forced to vote for his son. Another, on polling day itself, saw 'a Tory Sandwich man carrying posters made up of Liberal colours (blue and gold), but asking the electors to vote Tory'. The impromptu aphorism 'Vote for Robartes and Resent Trickery' was adopted and Tommy Agar-Robartes, aged 26, was elected as the Liberal MP for south-east Cornwall with a 1,172 majority over his Liberal Unionist opponent Horace Grylls. The *Cornish Guardian* reported 'A Triumphant Victory: South-East Cornwall Returns to Liberalism, Toryism Vanquished'.[17] At the dissolution of the 1905 Parliament, of the seven Cornish seats, four were Liberal and three were Unionist; after the 1906 election all seven were Liberal.

Glory, however, soon turned to despair. In May 1906 the *Lostwithiel Guardian* reported 'a sudden bolt from the blue' – Tommy had been accused of 108 counts of bribery and illegal treating.[18] The election petition for his unseating included such further indignities as excessive expenses, illegal payments and a 'meat tea' for the estate workers that was considered 'a very extraordinary proceeding' by the presiding judge. Although political inducements at this time were relatively common, the family strenuously denied any wrongdoing. The *Cornish Guardian* immediately launched and published its own investigation which was later considered as having a potential influence on the trial and thereby implicated in contempt of court.[19] The public trial, held at Bodmin Assizes Court, ended with Tommy being found guilty and disqualified from his seat. In the process his mother and father were humiliated in the witness box by Judge Lawrence. Tommy later vented his anger:

> When I saw my mother standing as a butt to the cheap jibes of a judge (shame) I thought to myself Bodmin will never forgive this (loud and continued cheering), and if it does then it is not the Bodmin that I used to know … You have seen the [Robartes] name besmeared, a name, which I am proud to say, has always stood for freedom under three generations and has thrice fought the battles of the people (tremendous cheering).[20]

Such emotional oratory was typical of Tommy's style. Needless to say, the press enjoyed the scandal; the *Daily Mail* mischievously reported 'wry smiles from the Liberals' and claimed 'the whole Division is laughing today … The appeal to feudalism is regarded as quaint coming from a once Liberal member.'[21] Effectively considered as bribery, aspects of Tommy's case were later used as a case study in Schofield's *Election Agent's Guide to Electoral Law.*

As one of 220 new Liberal MPs elected to the House of Commons during the 1906 election his disqualification meant that he had

all too briefly experienced the character of the new British parliament. He did however make a significant contribution when, on 9 March 1906, he introduced the Land Tenure Bill to the Commons. The bill entitled farmers to full profits from their capital input and payments for any improvements they made to the soil; had it passed in its original form the bill would have benefited many Cornish tenant farmers. The *Daily News* reported 'young Mr Agar-Robartes, sat on the steps of the throne, with the inevitable bunch of violets in his coat and watched the proceedings … [His] agreeably youthful and slightly dandified appearance, demure emphasis and boyish wit secured him a very friendly, even a charmed audience.'[22] As it was, his disqualification deprived the Cornishman of guiding it through its later stages. In recognition of his short period in office, 15,000 Cornish Liberals subscribed to a portrait of Tommy delivering the second reading of the bill (Fig. 1); a commemorative book records the presentation 'in affectionate recognition of a contest gallantly won for the Cause of the People'.

Tommy's Liberal colleague, and the joint secretary of the imperialist Liberal League, Freeman Freeman-Thomas, took victory at the by-election on 24 July, with a majority similar in size to Tommy's. Welcoming the result, Tommy reminded his constituents that he would return to say to Mr Freeman-Thomas: 'Give me back my constituency!'[23]

His absence from politics was indeed short. In 1907 William McArthur resigned the safe Liberal seat of Mid-Cornwall (St. Austell) and on 5 February 1908 Tommy was elected unopposed.

As part of Asquith's first Liberal administration Tommy supported the government's initiatives on free trade and temperance reform. As his confidence grew, however, shortfalls in his character became more apparent. One was impetuosity – a throwback to his Oxford days, when his lecturer regarded him: 'very careless – [he] rushes wildly at a paper without thinking of what he is putting down'. During a debate on the Finance Bill in October 1909 Lloyd George highlighted Tommy's lack of organisational skills, remarking 'Before he makes another speech … give a little more time to the study of the bill.'[24] Furthermore, a hasty temper was often in evidence. After the Lords' rejection of temperance legislation, he dashed off a speech which, hopefully, remained in draft:

> What happened then? A large number of Tory peers, the owners of brewery shares, Little Englanders, pro-brewers, the friends of every country but their own, ~~narrow minded bigots~~ assembled together in a ~~compound~~ mansion in Berkeley Square, decided to throw out this Bill after an hour's discussion, dashed off in their motors and bought more brewery shares … from that moment this Bill, was supported by all the forces of Christianity, was dead'.[25]

Such impulsive qualities, coupled with his youthful naivety, isolated him within his own party and shaped his independent and often controversial character. His criticisms of the 1909 'People's Budget' (which led him eventually to vote against it) led his constituents to question his suitability as their representative. As the *Cornish Guardian* reported:

> With all the good feeling possible personally towards Mr. Robartes, I fear his action has been such that will justify many of us asking, 'Is he a suitable representative for us?' … Many a member of the Government would be glad of being the Liberal candidate for the St. Austell division at the next election …[26]

Some weeks later at a public meeting Tommy turned the accusations around and made his audience feel that *they* were being questioned about their attitude towards *him*:

Fig. 6: *To the Electors of the Mid or St Austell Division of the County of Cornwall,* election leaflet 1910.

> I ask those who call themselves Liberals in this constituency, to extend to me the courtesy, which I would certainly extend to them, to write to me first, personally, to ask if I have any explanation to give as regarding my vote – before they indulge in a tirade against me in the public press, which, after all, can only have one effect, to sow the seed for any political opponent to reap. (Hear, Hear!) … If I had any of my own fish to fry, if I had any personal motive in this question, I should have opposed not only the undeveloped land tax … but the whole of the land clauses … super taxes … death duties (Hear, hear). I should have joined and ranged myself from the first with the Tory party if I had any special interest to serve. (Hear, hear). I should have sought by means of Tariff Reform to have thrown the burden of taxation on to the shoulders of the poor. (Hear, hear). I resent those attacks and I think that I am justified in doing so. (Applause).[27]

He rejected the offer of a government whip's position in 1909, for the reasons, as his party agent C.A. Millman later explained, that he wanted to retain his 'manly independence as well as his position near the exit if escape was needed from some of the dreary proceedings'.[28] Millman continued:

> This was an opportunity not to be despised or lightly treated. Mr. Robartes was good enough to consult me on the matter and while I advised him to please himself I expressed the hope that he would see his way to accept the offer and thus commence an official career which I felt would sooner or later command distinction and influence. To my surprise and chagrin he declined the offer made by the Prime Minister on the grounds that if he became a member of the Government he would no longer be able to oppose the Undeveloped Land Tax!

Tommy's staunch objection to the introduction of undeveloped land taxes was based on his passion to defend agriculture, in particular Cornish farmers, who worked in what he called 'the greatest industry in this country'.

In December 1909 Parliament was dissolved. On 8 January 1910 Tommy published his election pledges (Fig.6):

> I appeal to you for your support to retain the victories of 1906 and 1908, in order that Free Trade may be secure, and that the House of Commons, elected by your votes, shall predominate for ever over the unrepresentative House of Lords.[29]

Despite the inevitability of his own peerage he regarded 'the principle of Hereditary Legislation as indefensible and injurious to the best interests of a democratic community'. On the crisis of the People's Budget of 1909 he wrote: 'Who are the rulers, the People or the Peers?' Of the Lords themselves he questioned:

> Why then were they there? They were not there by choice or approval of their fellow countrymen; they were not there from any personal merit, but were there simply by an accident of birth … They had no political death; they had merely political immortality … How could they give consent to put an end to their own existence? It would be like asking a fellow whom one did not care about to hang a stone around his neck and chuck himself into Dozmary pool.[30]

To his constituents he wrote:

> It is, therefore, with confidence that I appeal to the Electors of this Constituency to maintain the unbroken privileges of the House of Commons. Although I desire to see a Second Chamber performing its proper functions of revising and checking Legislation, I am unalterably opposed to an inheritable right of rejection that only asserts itself when a Liberal Government is in office. I am prepared to support the abolition of the Veto of the House of Lords, and am also in favour of the establishment of a New and Impartial Second Chamber, constituted in the future by Order of Merit instead of by Accident of Birth.[31]

'Although I desire to see a Second Chamber performing its proper functions of revising and checking Legislation, I am unalterably opposed to an inheritable right of rejection that only asserts itself when a Liberal Government is in office.'

The Hon. Gerald Agar-Robartes, later 7th Viscount Clifden and a Liberal minister in the Lords, said in support of his brother: 'The hereditary principle was absolutely indefensible … the will of the people should prevail over the privileges of the Peers'.[32]

During the campaign Winston Churchill supported Tommy at a rally in St Austell. Rather overstating Tommy's political successes he said:

> Our chairman is himself largely, if not mainly, responsible for the great deal of legislation that passed through Parliament … I predict for him – if you will return him to the House of Commons, as I am confident you will – a successful political career which will do honour to this constituency before all the country and will strengthen the great hold which the cause of Free Trade and liberalism and national freedom has made upon the hearts of Cornishmen.[33]

Tommy rallied – 'This day I am occupying the Chair; on Tuesday I shall occupy the seat'. He was returned as MP for mid-Cornwall with a 3,087 majority, and in the second election of 1910 was elected unopposed. His popularity was expressed in a letter published in the *St Austell Star*:

> To our Tommy. I sincerely wish you a Merry Christmas Mr Robartes. All through the year you have stuck to your post and to your duties in the House of Commons splendidly. It has been hard, grinding work too, and most exacting, with a tremendous amount of overtime thrown in. And worse luck, and worse still, so much of the work accomplished by the People's House has been mutilated, murdered, done to death by the Peers' House.[34]

As an industrious independent backbencher Tommy travelled to the United States of America in

1910 and Canada in 1912, taking pains to attend important presidential meetings.[35] The *Somerset Gazette* described Tommy as 'The best dressed man in Parliament but so exquisite was his taste, that he never displayed ostentatious luxury'.[36] His colourful appearance was matched by his sharp humour; George Croyden Marks (MP for North-East Cornwall) noted that his speeches were 'extremely well researched … interesting and witty'.[37] When he criticised his party's Irish policy he was scolded, being 'looked upon as a knave by some, as a fool by others and as both by the rest'.[38] He replied:

> I well remember that my hon. Friend, if I may call him so, the member for West Belfast (Mr Devlin) was so determined in his opposition to my amendment excluding the four counties, that he threatened to sever his head from his body if the amendment was carried, and to sit opposite a truncated corpse, Mr Deputy-Speaker, at that time I considered that as the only solution to the Irish problem.

During the 1910 campaign Tommy had remained committed, as had the by now diminished figure of Lord Rosebery, to opposing an independent parliament for Ireland. He worked long and hard researching the important issues, amassing a cache of Liberal pamphlets, political books, brochures and leaflets on the subject – many of which are still held at Lanhydrock. Articulately stating the cultural and statistical case he moved an amendment to the Government of Ireland Bill in 1912 to exclude 'the counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry'. The amendment split opinion and sparked fierce cross-party debate. Some saw it as a declaration of war against Ulster; others considered the potential Unionist division as wholly unacceptable. The government staunchly opposed the amendment, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Mr. Birrell, commenting that:

> I have no hesitation whatever in saying that it is not the intention of the Government to accept this Amendment which has just been moved by my hon. Friend. Indeed, it would require a very great deal of evidence from Ulster itself to lead to the belief that she desires to cut herself off from the rest of Ireland.

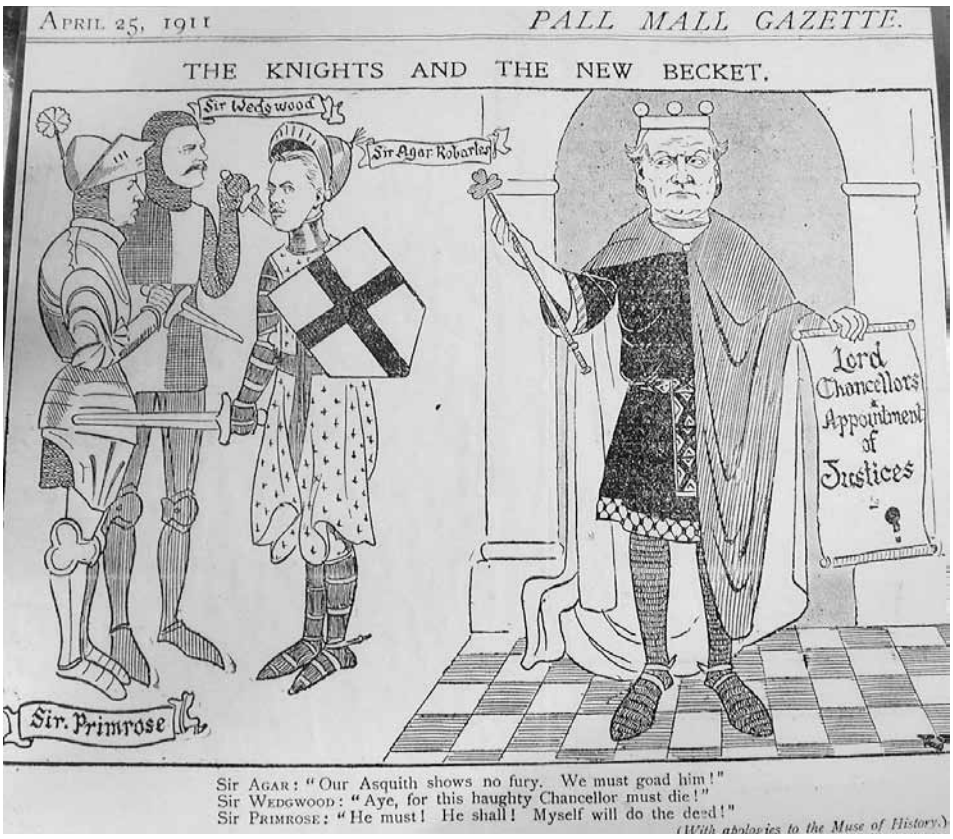


Fig. 7: 'The Knights of the New Becket', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 April 1911.

Sir Agar: 'Our Asquith shows no fury. We must goad him!'
Sir Wedgwood: 'Aye, for this haughty Chancellor must die!'
Sir Primrose: 'He must! He shall! Myself will do the deed!'
(With apologies to the Muse of History.)

Tommy replied:

> This Bill makes the mistake of treating Ireland not as two nations, but as one nation different in sentiment, character, history and religion. I maintain it is absolutely impossible to fuse these two incongruous elements together. It is impossible to reconcile the irreconcilable.

In the hope that the Liberals would become divided, Tommy's great friend, the Tory James de Rothschild, moved an amendment to exclude Ulster from the bill but then withdrew it in favour of Tommy's four counties proposal.[39] With their lack of a majority the government needed the Irish vote, and the amendment was defeated by 320 votes to 251 with Tommy a teller for the 'Ayes'. In light of Asquith's later Irish policy Tommy claimed at least some consistency in his views when strongly questioned in his constituency.

Publicly Tommy held firm to his personal belief that the Liberal Party:

> … is to me a vast number of men and women all marching forward – not agreed to how fast or how far they may go; but all inspired and driven by the same motive power, the desire to march forward with a fixed determination.[40]

Yet privately his independence saw him drifting further from the Liberal mainstream.[41] He was already out of line with Lloyd George's land tax proposals contained in the 1909 budget, and the Liberal approach to Home Rule, when, in April 1911, the *Pall Mall Gazette* published a cartoon portraying Tommy, Neil Primrose and Josiah Clement Wedgewood as plotters against the Liberal Lord Chancellor, Lord Loreburn (Fig.7). It was these 'knights' who drew attention to the widespread discontent at the undemocratic methods of appointing magistrates to the county Benches thereby contributing to his resignation the following year.

Fig. 8: Tommy at his happiest – with his political mentor, Lord Rosebery, at the races. Cover from *The Tatler*, 3 June 1914.

Tommy also voted against the government on Edward Carson's Ulster exclusion amendment of January 1913 and abstained on the guillotine motion on Lloyd George's Finance Bill in July 1914.[42] However, his rebellious nature was soon tempered when events in Europe shifted the patriotic young Cornishman's focus from confrontational frontline politics to out-and-out war.

In the lead-up to war in Europe, Tommy had passionately supported the growth of the Territorial Army; he was himself an officer in the 1st Royal Devon Yeomanry (Territorial Force) between 1902 and 1911.[43] The enforcement of the military deterrent was in his opinion 'a guarantee for the maintenance of Peace'. Consequently, in February 1914, he drew up his will and in August took up an appointment as 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Bucks Hussars.[44] Being stationed in England, he 'could not bear the thought that others were taking risks which he did not share', so in February 1915, after returning to England to perform best man duties at Neil Primrose's wedding, he left for France as an officer in the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards. Three months later he wrote to the St. Austell Liberal Association a 'Letter from the Trenches':

> 1st Coldstream Guards
> In a dirty ditch somewhere in France
> May 17, 1915
>
> Dear Mr Hancock – I am sending you this short note to ask you to give my kindest regards to the Liberal delegates of Mid-Cornwall, who, I understand, will be meeting together as usual on Whit Monday. I hope that every one of them is assisting by every possible means in the great struggle that lies before us. I have noticed with satisfaction that Liberals and Unionists in my constituency have worked together on the same platform with the same object in view, the final triumph of Great Britain and her Allies over the fiendish atrocities of our enemies, whose hideous massacres of women and children have left them to claim no right to an inch of the sun.
>
> We cannot utter the word peace until they have been repaid the uttermost farthing. The more complete our victory the more assured is peace and prosperity of the civilised world in days to come.
>
> Every man can help! Every effort is required, for, although our ultimate victory is certain, I would venture to remind the delegates that it is a long, long way to Berlin. So one and all must help.
>
> With kindest regards to yourself and to my many friends in all political parties in mid-Cornwall, believe me, yours sincerely,
>
> Thomas Agar-Robartes

By September his battalion had advanced on Loos. The regimental war diary records:

> At about 6am on September the 26th 1915 two Sgt's, Hopkins and Printer, who were in this officers company, went out in front of our trenches at the chalk-pit almost up to the Bois Hugo to bring in a wounded man. When they were about to return Sgt Hopkins was shot down by a German sniper. Sgt Printer continued on with the wounded man and brought him into the lines. Captain Robertes [sic] who had been watching this whole episode, at once went out with Sgt Printer and brought back Sgt Hopkins who was severely wounded. The whole ground in front of the chalk pit-was covered in the Enemy's machine Guns, Captain Robertes was himself severely wounded shortly afterwards.[45]

On 28 September Tommy was unsuccessfully recommended for a Victoria Cross for conspicuous gallantry in the field. He was, however, to be put forward for a high military decoration if he were to survive his injuries. Two days later, Tommy, aged 35, died in the 18th Casualty Clearing Station (Fig.9); he was mentioned in despatches on 30 November.[46]

On his death the *Cornish Guardian* reported: 'His Death was Grand, The Cause was Just'; his mother simply wrote 'we do not know how to bear our grief'.[47] At the St Austell Liberal Club meeting on 8 October 1915 a great gratitude was tendered from the constituency members. The club had:

> … watched his Parliamentary career with great admiration, and felt confident that his straightforward and firm adherence to his convictions, as well as his statesmanlike abilities, would secure for him in the future a high place in the administration of national affairs, and it unfeignedley regrets that those hopes have been so soon cut off.[48]

Fig. 9: Grave of Captain The Hon T.C.R. Agar-Robartes at Lapugnoy Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France (picture by Mr A Smith).

Mr H.S. Hancock added that 'on the last occasion that he had met Captain Robartes at Lanhydrock before he went to the front, he conveyed the impression that he never expected to see England again'.

Politically the loss was tragic enough but for the family it proved to be immeasurable. Being heir to the peerage and 120,000 acres of estate Tommy was set to lead the family forward. He died unmarried despite being 'known in Paris and Monte Carlo as in London, and being a most eligible *parti* was greatly but unsuccessfully courted by matchmaking mammas'.[49] After the war the spirit of the family faded and although nine of the Viscount's ten children survived infancy only one produced a child of their own.

After the Second World War it was apparent that the heir was not committed to the estate so in 1953 it was bequeathed to the National Trust. Tommy's brothers, Gerald (1883–1966) and Victor (1887–1974) became successive Viscount Clifdens, while two of his sisters, his twin Everilda (1880–1969) and Violet (1888–1965) lived at Lanhydrock until their deaths. Today the Lanhydrock estate attracts in excess of 200,000 visitors a year. Personal artefacts of Tommy's are on display in the house, his grave markers are in the churchyard and a memorial window is in the adjoining church. He also had stained glass windows installed to his memory in Wimpole Parish Church and St Wilfred's Chapel at Church Norton in Sussex.

Politically Tommy showed great potential yet quite how his allegiances would have developed in a changing political climate we can only speculate. Political epitaphs flowed thick and fast. The *Manchester Guardian* wrote: 'He revealed an unexpected talent for getting all parties by the ears and yet arousing and holding the by no means unfriendly attention of the general public'.[50] The *London Opinion* believed that 'he showed little respect for [House of Commons] conventions, and declined to treat the assembly as seriously as it treated itself'.[51] His flippancy prompted the Irish MP John Redmond to ungraciously describe him as 'one of the most whimsically incongruous figures in the Government ranks … no one took him very seriously'.[52]

A memorial service was held at St Margaret's, Westminster on 13 October 1915, where Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch said of Tommy:

> He had in him and he carried it eminently, that which I think, if men could be judged like thorough-breds in a show, would make a man an English gentleman, recognisable from every gentleman in the world. And the mark of it is that he, the English gentleman, treats life, under God, as the finest, the gallantest, and the most glorious of all sports … That was Mr. Robartes. No man in this adventure of life, at any moment, weighed danger more cheaply against what I may call the 'fun of it' … He went out in just that way – gallantly out to France to the trenches just as if he were taking a fence or a hedge … His fiery spirit like a star went out into the night and leapt the threshold of another world.[53]

Paul Holden is House and Collections Manager for the National Trust at Lanhydrock House in Cornwall. He has published and lectured widely on aspects of architectural history and curatorship.

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1 This article draws on some uncatalogued resources held at Lanhydrock House (hereafter LHA).

References will include a brief description rather than any catalogue number.

2 *Western Morning News,* 4 October 1915.
3 For a more detailed history of the house and family see Paul Holden, *Lanhydrock House-Book of the House* (National Trust, 2007).
4 'Memorial to Captain the Hon. T.C.R. Agar-Robartes', Liskeard Liberal Club, 30 September 1916 – speech made by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.
5 *The Sketch,* 'The Primrose Path to Matrimony', 14 April 1915. Primrose died in 1917 during the campaign in Palestine. Both men's heraldic crests were originally mounted in the old Commons Chamber and were reinstalled below the new South Gallery after enemy bombing in 1941.
6 *Western Daily Mercury,* 16 March 1903.
7 Ibid.
8 Election leaflet: 'Vote and Work for Robartes: The Liberal and Free Trade Candidate', 1906. Election leaflet, 'To the Electors of the Mid or St Austell Division of the County of Cornwall', 8 January 1910.
9 *Cambridge Independent Press,* 11 August 1905.
10 LHA. Rosebery's actions have been discussed further in David W. Gutzke, 'Rosebery and Campbell-Bannerman: the Conflict over Leadership Reconsidered', *Historical Research* 54, 1981, pp. 241–50 and Leo McKinstry, *Rosebery,* London, 2005, pp. 469–75.
11 *Cornish Guardian,* 8 October 1915.
12 'Lord Rosebery and the Liberal League: Justification of the Bodmin Speech', *The Times*, 12 December 1905.
13 'Vote and Work for Robartes: The Liberal and Free Trade Candidate', election leaflet 1906.
14 LHA undated draft speech. See also *Cornish Guardian,* 26 January 1906 and *Cornish Times,* 26 January 1906.
15 LHA undated newspaper clipping.
16 *Cornish Guardian,* 26 January 1906.
17 Ibid.
18 *Lostwithiel Guardian*, 24 May 1906.
19 Peter Stephens, 'Alfred Browning Lyne, a Man of Conviction!', *Cornish Guardian,* 11 August 2005.
20 *Daily Chronicle,* 21 July 1906.
21 *Daily Mail,* 21 July 1906.
22 *The Daily News*, February Editions 1906.
23 *Cornish Guardian,* 21 July 1906.

'No man in this adventure of life, at any moment, weighed danger more cheaply against what I may call the "fun of it" … He went out in just that way – gallantly out to France to the trenches just as if he were taking a fence or a hedge …'

24 *Hansard,* 20 October 1909, p. 419.
25 LHA undated draft speech.
26 *Cornish Guardian,* 13 August 1909.
27 *Cornish Guardian,* 12 November 1909.
28 *Cornish Guardian,* 8 October 1909.
29 'To the Electors of the Mid or St Austell Division of the County of Cornwall', election leaflet, 1910.
30 LHA undated draft speech. In Arthurian legend Dozmary Pool on Bodmin Moor was where King Arthur requested Sir Bedivere to return Excalibur to the Lady of the Lake.
31 'To the Electors of the Mid or St Austell Division of the County of Cornwall', election leaflet, 1910.
32 LHA.
33 *Cornish Guardian,* 28 January 1910.
34 *St Austell Star,* 17 December 1910.
35 *New York Times*, 7 November 1910. Tommy was reported as a guest at Tammany Hall with Neil Primrose, Murray Graham, James de Rothschild and Cecil Grenfell.
36 *Somerset Gazette*, undated cutting in Lanhydrock collection.
37 Ibid.
38 *Hansard,* 2 April 1914, p. 1467.
39 Thanks to Chris Collins for drawing my attention to this.
40 LHA undated draft speech.
41 'The Liberal cave and the 1914 Budget', *English Historical Review,* June, 1996, p. 632.
42 *The Liberal Magazine,* February 1913, p.49. *Manchester Guardian,* 8 July 1914. *British Weekly,* 7 October 1915.
43 National Archives, WO 337/42464.
44 Whilst in London he resided at 1 Great Stanhope Street, Mayfair, Middlesex. He left £3,688 6s 6d. (£158,820 equivalent in 2010) at the time of his death.
45 Thanks to the Regimental Headquarters Coldstream Guards for this information. The 'Intelligence Summary' (National Archives, WO95/1219) recorded on 28 September 1915 also lists 'Cpt Hon T. C. Agar-Robartes MP (wounded)' amongst 229 casualties.
46 National Archives WO 337/42464. *London Gazette,* 1 January 1916. He was posthumously awarded the 1914–15 Star, the British War Medal and the Victory Medal in 1922.
47 *Cornish Guardian,* 8 October 1915.
48 *Western Morning News,* 11 October 1915.
49 *London Opinion,* 10 October 1915.
50 *Manchester Guardian,* 18 January 1915.
51 *London Opinion,* 10 October 1915.
52 *Manchester Guardian,* 18 January 1915.
53 'Memorial to Captain the Hon. T.C.R. Agar-Robartes', Liskeard Liberal Club, 30 September 1916.

REPORT

What's left of Gladstonian Liberalism in the Liberal Democrats?

Evening meeting, 25 January 2010, with Dr Eugenio Biagini and Chris Huhne MP. Chair: William Wallace (Hon. President, Liberal Democrat History Group)
Report by **Mark Pack**

William Gladstone's legacy for modern political parties was the subject for discussion at the January meeting of the Liberal Democrat History Group. The meeting was addressed by both Eugenio Biagini, of Cambridge University, and Chris Huhne MP, the Liberal Democrat Shadow Home Secretary and keen collector of Gladstone memorabilia.

Dr Biagini highlighted the contradiction at the heart of Gladstone's reputation. He is seen both as a quintessential Victorian – more Victorian than Queen Victoria – but also as someone who has continued to be sufficiently revered by the National Liberal Club (where the meeting was taking pace) for its premises to be decorated with paintings and statues of the man. He was both a man of his times and a hero for our times.

Gladstone's political legacy has variously been claimed by people across the political spectrum. Although neither speaker directly made this point, this is perhaps unsurprising for a politician who predated the modern party system and was a member at different times of the Conservatives, a centrist group (the Peelites) and then also the Liberals. Biagini highlighted two of these claims in particular – that of the Conservative Keith Joseph, appropriating his economic liberalism, and that of the *Economist*, labelling him a 'prophet for the left' – a progressive free of class – in a 1992 editorial.

His own explanation of the eclectic appeal of Gladstone's legacy is that a man prominent in politics for over sixty years, and who reshaped the Liberal Party during that time, was bound to leave behind a wide range of actions and beliefs for different people to pick and choose from. In particular, Gladstone mixed a belief in free trade and laissez-faire economic policies with, over the years, increasing support for the new forms of regulation required by the country's swift social change – a mix which cuts across conventional left/right dividing lines but sits comfortably with many modern Liberals and then Liberal Democrats.

Both Biagini and Huhne picked out Gladstone's readiness to nationalise the railways – putting a provision for this into railways legislation – as an example of his willingness to be pragmatic when it came to laissez-faire beliefs. He did not in the end nationalise the railways, but wanted the powers to do so, as he could envisage circumstances in which that would be the right thing to do. This was not a one-off aberration. Gladstone did nationalise the telegraph system and was fully in tune with the increasing municipalisation (nationalisation at a local level) of gas and water supplies.

As Biagini put it, Gladstone gave the needs of people priority over ideology and economic dogma. He was willing to tackle natural monopolies with government intervention and to provide public goods via the state.

In addition to echoing these views, Chris Huhne emphasised the two phases in Gladstone's career as Chancellor and Prime Minister when it came to national debt. Gladstone initially halved the public debt to GDP ratio, in dealing with the huge debt left over from the Napoleonic wars. But then in the second half of his career Gladstone instead emphasised spending on social causes, and the debt ratio stayed largely static. This reversal of Gordon Brown's record – who spent first and is now worrying about cutting debt – reflected the increasing demands on the state to respond to the social strains and challenges of the industrial revolution as the nineteenth century progressed.

The Gladstone who initially sought to abolish income tax was by the end sufficiently keen on spending in areas such as education that Huhne even argued that the New Liberals were not a radical departure from his policies. As he aged, Gladstone left behind his initial near-obsession with thrift – well illustrated by Huhne's account of how Gladstone had bemoaned the Foreign Office's use of thick sheets of notepaper instead of thinner paper – but through his career he retained an interest in transparency and control over spending. Gladstone may have become keen on spending, but he was not slapdash with it and the financial controls he introduced, such as the Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor-General, still heavily shape our contemporary systems.

Gladstone's emphasis, by the end, on wise public spending is not the only respect in which his policies sit comfortably with Liberal Democrats. Both Biagini and Huhne spoke of how Gladstone's emphasis on humanitarian concerns in foreign policy are echoed by the more modern concerns such as those of Paddy Ashdown over the Balkans. Huhne also noted that William Gladstone was the first western statesman willingly to take part in decolonisation, in his case of the Ionian Islands.

Both Huhne and Biagini concluded that the overall shape of Gladstone's policies – economic responsibility married with willingness to mend market failures, concern for social reform, a humanitarian foreign policy and political reform – have all been followed by subsequent party leaders, right through to the present.

The application of moral principles and the international rule of law to matters of foreign policy, as pioneered by Gladstone, has been repeatedly followed by his successors as party leader – and so too, as Biagini pointed out, has Gladstone's emphasis in foreign affairs on working with other countries and appreciating the European context. Huhne agreed, and extended the point by reminding the audience that all three parts of Gladstone's famous trio – peace, retrenchment and reform – were still very much applicable to the party's approach. Having already talked about peace and retrenchment, Huhne pointed out that Gladstone was a keen reformer of the political system. His strident belief in devolution was married to major efforts to introduce a politically impartial civil service, changes to the electoral system and more.

During questions from the audience, it was pointed out (by William Wallace) that even the new Supreme Court being brought into existence at the time was originally proposed in the Supreme Court Act of 1873, a measure which was then stymied by the fall of Gladstone's first government.

Both Huhne and Biagini concluded that the overall shape of Gladstone's policies – economic responsibility married with willingness to mend market failures, concern for social reform, a humanitarian foreign policy and political reform – have all been followed by subsequent party leaders, right through to the present. Gladstonian Liberalism is alive and well in the modern Liberal Democrats.

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VIOLET & CLEM

'The only purpose of politics is the expression of one's deepest convictions – and their translation into facts.' Lady Violet Bonham Carter.[1]

Dr J. Graham Jones examines the contentious relationship between Clement Davies, leader of the Liberal Party 1945–56, and Lady Violet Bonham Carter, dutiful daughter of Liberal Prime Minister H. H. Asquith and formidable mother-in-law of Liberal leader Jo Grimond.

Violet Bonham Carter (1887–1969) and Edward Clement Davies (1884–1962)

Violet Bonham Carter was born Violet Asquith on 15 April 1887 in Hampstead, London, the only daughter and the fourth of the five children of Herbert Henry Asquith and his first wife Helen Kensall, who died prematurely of typhoid fever in 1891 when her daughter was only four years of age. The following year her father became Home Secretary in Gladstone's last administration, and in 1895 he married his second wife, Margot Tennant, who thereafter became an important influence in her step-daughter's life. Violet's education (rather like that of her eventual arch-rival, Lady Megan Lloyd George) was highly informal: she was educated at home by a succession of competent governesses and then 'finished' in Dresden and Paris. Yet she emerged as an independent woman of considerable intellect who remained a passionate, committed Liberal for the rest of her days. In Winston Churchill's memorable phrase, she became her father's 'champion redoubtable'.

Violet endured much distress in her early life. Her first real love, Archie Gordon, died following a car accident in December 1909. During the terrible carnage of the Great War, she lost many of her closest friends as well as one of her brothers. Political problems multiplied, too. Her father, who had succeeded Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as Liberal premier in April 1908, was ousted from office at the height of the war in December 1916 – in Violet's eyes through the 'treachery' of the conspiratorial Lloyd George. Asquith's subsequent defeat in East Fife, in the 'coupon' general election of December 1918, made his humiliation complete and convinced his ever-loyal daughter that she must strive to defend his reputation for the rest of her days. She was by this time a married woman: she had wed Maurice Bonham Carter, her father's private secretary, in 1915, and was to bear him two daughters and two sons.

Although Violet served as president of the Women's Liberal Federation in 1923–25, her father's retirement as party leader in favour of Lloyd George in 1926 saw her rather lose interest in political life, a tendency which became even more marked following Asquith's death in 1928. She did, however, speak out in

support of the so-called National Government formed in August 1931, and was especially virulent in her condemnation of the rise of fascism in Nazi Germany from 1933, criticising most particularly the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Spurred on, and indeed incensed, by the dramatic course of events in Germany, she now readily spoke at Liberal Party meetings and on election hustings, savagely denouncing 'Hitlerism, that monstrous portent' in 1933 and condemning the government's appeasement policies in 1938 as 'peace at any price that others can be forced to pay'.[2] In her view, the 'collective security' policy embraced by the League of Nations was the only route to 'peace with honour', a stand which won her the admiration of her lifelong (if intermittent) friend Winston Churchill.

During the Second World War, Violet's patriotism resurfaced in her work as an air-raid warden, while she also accepted a second stint as president of the Women's Liberal Federation. She listened to all the key parliamentary debates from the public gallery of the House of Commons, and made strenuous efforts to reunite the two distinct factions within the Liberal Party born of the 1931 split (the Samuelite Liberals and the Simonite Liberals), readily participating in 1943 in the ultimately ill-fated 'unity negotiations' as one of the representatives of the mainstream Liberal group. Their eventual failure distressed her deeply. The following year she expressed a genuine interest in the Liberal candidature for the Berwick-upon-Tweed division caused by the death on active service in Normandy of the sitting Liberal MP, George Grey, but she soon sensed that she had little in the way of local support and she then gave her backing to the nomination of William Beveridge who was duly elected to parliament in October 1944.

Earlier the same year, Violet Bonham Carter had announced her willingness to run for president of the Liberal Party Organisation. She was not, however, encouraged by the state of the party in 1944. One of the many Liberal MPs who did not generally impress her was E. Clement Davies, the MP for Montgomeryshire since May 1929 who had joined the ranks of the Simonite Liberal group in 1931, returning to the mainstream party fold only in 1941. As she wrote in her diary in February 1944:

> The die is cast – I do not feel exhilarated by the prospect which faces me. There are too many lunatics & pathological cases in the Party – Clem Davies & [Tom] Horabin [Liberal MP for North Cornwall] – also rather small people bulking larger than they deserve because of the size of the Party. We badly need an infusion of new blood.[3]

'The die is cast – I do not feel exhilarated by the prospect which faces me. There are too many lunatics & pathological cases in the Party …'

In the general election of July 1945, she stood unsuccessfully as the Liberal candidate at Wells, predictably coming third. Only twelve Liberal MPs were returned to parliament in a general election which saw the shock defeat of party leader Sir Archibald Sinclair in Caithness & Sutherland, the constituency which he had represented continuously since 1922. Other prominent Liberals, too, failed to secure re-election, among them the party's chief whip Sir Percy Harris, the victim of a powerful Labour challenge in Bethnal Green South-West.

The shell-shocked Parliamentary Liberal Party turned to the depressing task of selecting a new party leader. Very few politicians of national stature remained in their ranks. Their choice eventually fell on the little-known and somewhat maverick Clement Davies, who was initially elected as the temporary 'chairman' of the Liberal Party, pending, it was thought, the imminent re-election of Sinclair in a by-election. Hopes that Sinclair would soon return to the Commons were encouraged by the declaration of Gandar Dower (the successful Conservative candidate in Caithness & Sutherland) during the 1945 election campaign that, if he won, he would resign his seat and stand again there following the defeat of Japan.

Violet certainly had her doubts about the new leadership; her fundamental mistrust of Clem Davies had not diminished in the least. Interestingly, the tiny group of Liberal MPs still pretentiously referred to itself as 'the Liberal Shadow Cabinet'. It met for the first time with Clement Davies as party leader in Lord (Herbert) Samuel's room at the House of Lords on 28 November 1945. Davies took the chair at a meeting devoted mainly to a discussion of foreign affairs, notably Palestine, and the atomic bomb. In Lady Violet's view, 'Nothing very new said or decided. Clem very "agreeable" & full of blarney to Megan [Lloyd George] – whom he had so hotly abused to me! I can't understand these Welsh! But perhaps they understand each other!'[4]

As the first female president of the party's organisation, Lady Violet was inevitably in a pivotal position. It was the fate of poor Clem Davies to be caught in the crossfire between her and the equally formidable Lady Megan Lloyd George, by now well established (since May 1929) as the radical, left-wing Liberal MP for Anglesey. Both women remained ferociously loyal to the good name and reputation of their respective fathers. The primary theme of Lady Violet's published diaries and correspondence is one of criticism and suspicion of Clem Davies and disagreement with the way he led the Liberal Party. But her unpublished letters in the Clement Davies Papers at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, do provide surprising evidence of mutual support, even occasional commendation and encouragement. Lady Violet was unfailingly jubilant whenever Davies stood up to the left within the Liberal Party and when he made sympathetic gestures to the Conservative Party. Equally, she disapproved strongly of any concession he might make to the Labour Party, and she often wrote to him to express her contempt in no uncertain terms. Generally, between 1945 and 1956, her respect for his judgement and qualities of leadership grew considerably, especially as he appeared to drift steadily ever more to the right during his eleven-year stint as party leader.[5] The same theme in reverse is evident in the relationship between Clem Davies and Lady Megan.

For the post-war Liberal Party, although it was severely depleted

in numbers at Westminster, all was not total doom and gloom. New Liberals, able and relatively young, had come to the fore in the general election campaign of 1945. Old stalwarts remained too – Sinclair, Sir Percy Harris, Beveridge, Samuel, Isaac Foot and Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, as well as Clem Davies, Lady Violet and Lady Megan. All of these were potentially of Cabinet rank.

Generally, during the first two years of the first Attlee administration, there was a tendency for the Liberals to support Labour, but the Parliamentary Liberal Party failed to act in unison. One glaring example was its attitude to the government's National Service Bill, whose third reading took place in the Commons at the end of May 1947. Clem Davies, a conviction Nonconformist, had been convinced by his colleague Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris (the Liberal MP for Carmarthenshire) to oppose peacetime conscription. However he changed his mind at the eleventh hour as the result of the intervention of Lady Violet Bonham Carter, who insisted that conscription was necessary, and made a volte-face at a meeting of the Liberal Party Committee – much to Hopkin Morris's chagrin.[6] By the time the vote took place in the House of Commons, Davies had backtracked yet again, speaking in the debate against the measure and voting, together with four other Liberal MPs, against it, while five others chose to abstain.[7] Such glaring vacillation caused Jo Grimond, Lady Violet's son-in-law, who entered the Commons as the Liberal MP for Orkney & Shetland in February 1950 (having stood unsuccessfully there in 1945), to reflect in his memoirs years later: 'Loyalty, gratitude and admiration bound me to Clem, but I was never quite sure on what branch he would finally settle.'[8]

Lady Violet often despaired for the future of her beloved Liberal Party. In mid-October 1947 she took lunch with Frank Byers, the party's chief whip, at the House of Commons, speaking to him 'very frankly' about the party's very gloomy future prospects: 'We must face the possibility of being completely wiped out at the next Election as a Parliamentary force.' In her view, the only possible route to electoral salvation was 'a deal over seats with the Tories with P.R. as a condition & an agreed programme.' Byers then raised with Lady Violet 'the question of making Clem the official leader of the Party – on the ground that he (Frank) cld control him better in this capacity. I said I cldn't possibly accept him as my political Pope to give the "Party line" as I had no respect for his political judgement.'[9]

She even shared her concern with her arch-rival Lady Megan Lloyd George, who was always perched on the far left of the Liberal Party. Officially it was Liberal policy to 'stand firm against Conservative overtures',[10] and, in a high-profile speech at the Royal Albert Hall, London, Megan detected a likely Liberal breakthrough born of the political situation at the end of 1947: 'Must this country … be condemned to the choice of two evils?'[11] Her impassioned peroration spurred Lady Violet to make contact to express her personal view that talk of a likely Liberal revival was misplaced: 'Well now quite frankly I no longer believe that that can happen – (certainly not by 1950) – … One must face the *possibility* of parliamentary extinction. *Or do you think this an exaggerated fear*?' Her survey of the party's electoral prospects suggested that only two seats were realistic Liberal targets at the next general election – Caithness & Sutherland, where Sir Archibald Sinclair had been defeated in 1945, and Orkney & Shetland, where her son-in-law Jo Grimond had come within 200 votes of victory:

> What can a Party of 10 *do*? Containing at most 4 "effectives"?? (& even these not always agreed on major issues?) … But I am convinced that the only condition which will ensure the ultimate survival of any 3rd Party in this country is Electoral Reform. … I shld be strongly opposed to any sort of "alliance" on policy – or Coalition or agreement to put or keep anyone in.'[12]

Reluctantly, however, Lady Violet came to the conclusion that an electoral agreement with another political party was now an option which should not be overlooked, though Megan would never have agreed to such a suggestion.

'What can a Party of 10 *do*? Containing at most 4 "effectives"?? (& even these not always agreed on major issues?) '

Indeed, Lady Violet had already had a meeting with Churchill on 22 April to discuss the possibility of a measure of electoral reform. The Tory leader had proved conciliatory, suggesting that 'we might help each other – make some [electoral] arrangements which would be mutually convenient'. The meeting had left Violet much heartened: 'He touches me very much & I feel a certain *pathos* about him. He harks back to his [Liberal] beginnings & I think he definitely – *emotionally* – desires a rapprochement with Liberals.'[13] The events of subsequent months encouraged her to believe that she was on the right path, an attitude strengthened by an article in *The Economist* during the following January which presented the viewpoint that a third political party like the Liberals could survive 'only through a definite alliance'.[14] Within days she had communicated with Lord Samuel, party leader in the House of Lords since 1944 and a highly respected Liberal elder statesman, expressing the view that it was now 'quite possible to make an arrangement about seats, coupled with a pledge on Electoral Reform, which would be consistent with our sovereign independence and which would ensure our survival'. The nub of her argument was that their adored party was now 'advancing open-eyed towards extinction'.[15]

Weeks later Lady Violet revealed to Lord Samuel, an old friend, the gist of her deliberations with Churchill. A 'stormy' exchange ensued, Samuel protesting at once that any such long-term arrangement with the Tories was an 'amoral' political proceeding. Both agreed, however, that on the eve of a general election discussions concerning an electoral deal might well be justified.[16] The subject was left to await a dissolution of parliament. Other issues, meanwhile, were to occupy Lady Violet's attention, notably her energetic membership of the United Europe Movement which had been launched in May 1947.

Lady Violet's despair grew as 1948 ran its course and increased still further in September of that

year as a result of the voting record of the Parliamentary Liberal Party on the third reading of the Parliament Bill. Again she gave vent to her feelings to Lord Samuel: 'I feel the most profound depression about this latest public exhibition of Party disunity. … How can we hope to raise large sums of money when no one knows where we stand on a major issue of this kind? Are we solidly united against Iron and Steel Nationalisation? I have no idea.'[17] In fact, the question of iron and steel nationalisation was to prove one of the most thorny issues to face the Parliamentary Liberal Party. In 1948, Emlyn Hooson, who had recently been chosen as the Liberal candidate for Lloyd George's old seat of the Caernarfon Boroughs, was invited to join the Liberal Party Committee (a body quite distinct from the Liberal executive committee), which to a large extent determined party policy. Here he found proceedings to be 'to put it mildly, vitriolic' and largely dominated by the incessant bickering between Lady Violet and Lady Megan. At one meeting, when the colour to be adopted by the party at the next general election was under discussion, Megan commented tartly, 'I don't mind what colour they have provided, of course, it's not violet.'[18]

Early in 1949, a dispute broke out between Lady Violet and Frank Byers over the former's alleged anti-Israeli stand; In Violet's opinion, a party meeting on 8 March left 'Byers looking hot red & speechless & Clem inexpressibly foolish'.[19] In May, Lady Violet directly took issue with Clement Davies in relation to his claims at the party's annual assembly at Hastings the previous month that party membership had doubled during the previous year, quizzing him relentlessly concerning the source of his seemingly spurious information – 'Many of us would be placed in a difficult position if we were asked to justify such a statement' – and casting doubt on the veracity of the Gallup polls, 'a fallible and fluctuating index'. She also raised the question of the secrecy surrounding the proceedings of the Liberal Shadow Cabinet, and was assured that these should always be 'strictly private and confidential'.[20]

As the Parliamentary Liberal Party had, since 1945, been reduced to a small rump of MPs, most representing the rural Celtic fringes, Lady Violet felt acutely that there had never previously been a parliamentary party which was 'less representative of the party as a whole. Its ten members', she went on 'are constantly at variance with one another, with the Liberal Party Organisation and with their colleagues in the House of Lords'.[21] As a consequence of the small number of Liberal MPs and their conspicuous failure to act in unison as a group, poor Clem Davies, far more than any of his predecessors as party leader, was compelled regularly to take account of Liberal Party opinion outside parliament. Hence the unprecedented influence (at least as great as that of the Liberal MPs) enjoyed by people like Lady Violet who never themselves succeeded in getting elected to the House of Commons.

As the general election drew closer, the question of electoral arrangements became more pressing. Lady Violet had always hoped for some kind of 'deal' with the Conservatives, an attitude which seemed more realistic by 1949 as a result of the Liberal Party's perceived opposition to the Attlee government. Speaking at Aberystwyth in October, Clement Davies expressed his party's hostility to the government's focusing on nationalisation schemes while neglecting the severe economic and fiscal problems facing the nation.[22] The former left-wing Liberal MP Dingle Foot, still influential as a party vice-president, wrote to his political soulmate, Lady Megan Lloyd George: 'The position therefore is that Clem intends to sound a clarion call during next month to blood, toil, tears and sweat. But the quantity of the blood, the nature of the toil, the number of the tears and the precise purpose of the sweat are still undecided.'[23] Towards the end of the year an unexpectedly acrimonious dispute surfaced among the Liberal peers in the House of Lords over their party's electoral strategy, notably the number of candidates it should adopt and its relationship with the other parties.

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On 10 January 1950, Attlee announced a general election for the following month. Clem Davies, determined to make a valiant effort to turn around the severe reversals of 1945, remained true to his impassioned words to the 1948 Liberal assembly – 'Let Liberals of little or no faith leave the party' – expressing his revulsion for 'the Quislings who had been among them'.[24] An approach from Churchill for some kind of electoral bargain was at once dismissed by the Liberal leader as 'unworthy subterfuge', and no fewer than 475 Liberal candidates were nominated.

On the second day of the new year, Sir Archibald Sinclair, standing for re-election in Caithness & Sutherland, wrote to Clem Davies:

> Lady Violet Bonham Carter's speech was mis-quoted in my hearing during my recent speaking tour of England by two Tory hecklers. The misquotation was in the same terms on successive nights at places as far apart as Newquay and Bath. It seemed pretty clear, therefore, that the question had been drafted for the hecklers by Tory Headquarters. They asked whether the speakers agreed with Lady Violet Bonham Carter that Liberals should support Tory Candidates in the absence of Liberal Candidates. Dingle Foot at Newquay and I at Bath replied that Lady Violet had never asked Liberals to vote for Tory Candidates but that she had stated, and we agreed with her, that although, if she had lived in a constituency in 1945 in which there had been no Liberal Candidate, she would have voted Labour, if she were in the same circumstances now and had a thousand votes she would not give one to the Socialist Candidate. This answer met with a tumult of cordial applause from practically the whole audience and it seems to me that this is the line we should take.[25]

Lady Violet felt little enthusiasm for the impending trial of Liberal strength: 'I feel little zest about plunging into the fray – but it is as

well to know the worst.'[26] Three official radio broadcasts were allocated to the Liberals: twenty minutes for Clement Davies, and ten minutes apiece for Lady Megan and Lord Samuel. Then, in a bizarre twist, Churchill telephoned Lady Violet to offer her one of the five Conservative Party broadcast slots – 'quite unconditionally, one of the allocation of 5 which had been made to them. I cld say *what I liked*. He trusted me to be anti-Socialist. He was very sweet and asked me to come down on Monday to discuss it.' The meeting took place in 'a luxurious downstairs bedroom' followed by 'luncheon tête-á-tête & a bottle of champagne' in the dining room at Chartwell. the Churchills' home in Kent.

Violet was sorely tempted and then telephoned Clem Davies whom she found to be 'wholly negative & ended by offering me his own broadcast if I desisted – an empty gesture – for of course I cld not take it.' Lord Samuel proved 'even more negative – said it wld be quite *disastrous* etc etc.' Her decision to refuse his suggestion left the Tory leader 'obviously *terribly* dashed & disappointed – begged me to reconsider it.'[27] But his efforts came to nothing. Claiming to be unaffected by the impassioned 'screams' of her colleagues in the Liberal Party, Lady Violet turned him down – 'It was the fear that all the humble, loyal rank-and-file Liberals in the country who trust me & believe in me, would feel that on the eve of battle I had stabbed them in the back.' She then signed her letter, 'Your drooping, moulting & bedraggled Bloody Duck – *Violet*'.[28] Unfortunately for the Liberal Party, the episode became public knowledge after Frank Byers accused Churchill of attempting to deny the party its fair share of election broadcasts and the Conservative leader then felt obliged, in his own defence, to reveal his approach to Lady Violet ,who was then accused of conspiring with her old ally at Chartwell.[29]

There were also petty exchanges between Churchill and Clement Davies over the use of the titles 'Liberal-Conservatives' or 'Liberal-Unionists' by some National-Liberal candidates.[30] The Tory leader taunted Davies that, as he had been a Simonite Liberal for fully eleven years, 'I should not presume to correct your knowledge of the moral, intellectual and legal aspects of adding a prefix or suffix to the honoured name of Liberal.'[31]

In the aftermath of the election, Churchill met Lady Violet and Grimond to discuss possible anti-Socialist collaboration and future electoral reform.

In her heart of hearts, Lady Violet would probably have liked to have accepted Churchill's offer. Licking her wounds, she travelled north of the border to speak on behalf of Archie Sinclair at Caithness and her son-in-law Jo Grimond in the neighbouring constituency of Orkney & Shetland. Both seats were among the very few realistic Liberal targets in the 1950 general election. Lady Violet spent fully ten days in the islands, addressing a succession of political meetings in support of Grimond. Throughout the realm, however, the Liberal Party's claim that it was putting up enough candidates to form a majority government at Westminster appeared an empty sham. Party heavyweights were largely confined to their own constituencies, fearful of losing their own seats. Alarmed at the likely outcome, party leaders had even taken the step of taking out insurance cover against a maximum of 250 lost deposits.

In the event, there were to be no fewer than 319, with only nine Liberals returned to Westminster, out of a total of 475 candidates – 'a defeat on a scale which it would be hard to parallel'.[32] Frank Byers went down in North Dorset by just ninety-seven votes and, agonisingly for the party, Sinclair very narrowly failed in his brave bid to recapture Caithness. The only real crumb of comfort was Grimond's success in Orkney & Shetland, an outcome which delighted Lady Violet. But she shared fully, too, her colleagues' devastation at the results nationally: 'Two of our dear supporters slunk in with a *N[ews] C[hronicle]* looking shattered. One hardly dared look at them. It was like meeting after a death.'[33] The massive loss of Liberal deposits vexed her particularly. But the very narrow Labour victory at the polls at least gave the small band of Liberal MPs at Westminster a potential significance which they would otherwise have lacked. To Lady Violet's delight, the novice Grimond was chosen to be his party's chief whip in the House of Commons in succession to the defeated Frank Byers.

In the aftermath of the election, Churchill met Lady Violet and Grimond to discuss possible anti-Socialist collaboration and future electoral reform. There were also exchanges between the Conservative leader and Clement Davies, who now found himself pressurised into considering electoral reform by many leading Liberals. Throughout the rest of the year the beleaguered Liberal leader was bombarded by repeated epistles from Lady Violet, Archie Sinclair and the prominent Liberal academic Gilbert Murray urging him to agree to an electoral pact with the Tories. Meetings took place at Westminster to discuss matters.[34]

The idea of a Liberal–Tory electoral pact was undoubtedly in the air during the early summer of 1950, and Lady Violet was prominent in the discussions which took place.[35] To her intense annoyance, the press got wind of the negotiations and gave publicity to an alleged pact whereby the Liberals were to be given 'a free run in forty constituencies at the next election'.[36] Churchill was forced to concede publicly that a Conservative 'study group' had indeed been instituted to discuss these matters. The unfortunate publicity gained by the clandestine negotiations alarmed Lady Violet. As she put it to Samuel, 'I think the probability is that we shall fail in our present object and peter to extinction.'[37] There was good reason for her heartfelt pessimism: talk of a Liberal–Tory pact was particularly badly received by Conservative backbenchers, and even more so by the vocal left wing of the Liberal Party, which included Lady Megan Lloyd George, Emrys Roberts, Edgar Granville and Dingle Foot. These four in particular were growing increasingly hostile to the tenor of Clement Davies's leadership.

Lady Violet drew encouragement from her relationship with Churchill, but sensed, justifiably as it turned out, that Clem Davies was extremely reluctant to play ball. Although the Liberal leader could see that a small number of local arrangements might well work to the party's electoral

Lord Samuel, Liberal leader in the Lords, and Clem Davies

advantage, especially if the Conservatives might be inclined to support the Liberal call for electoral reform, there could be never be any 'overall or central agreement' between the two parties nationally. As he put it in a memorandum to Churchill and Lord Woolton:

> The Liberal Party is and shall remain an independent party. … [There was to be] no agreement with any other party which would jeopardise or weaken the Liberal Party. … There can be no overall or central agreement … for the allocation of constituencies whereby one party would undertake to withdraw its own candidate in favour of the candidate of the other party. Such an agreement would never be permitted by the rank and file of the Liberal Party even if the Party Leaders or HQ were willing to enter into such an agreement.

Candidate selection, insisted Davies, must always remain the preserve of the local Liberal associations.[38] Churchill for his part was later to claim that he was prepared to give the Liberals a free run in as many as sixty constituencies – clearly an alluring initiative to right-wing Liberals like Lady Violet.[39] Reflecting on the stand taken by the party leaders during the February 1950 general election campaign, she wrote privately to her daughter Laura, 'I think the people at the top *have* been "irresponsible" – & that their attempts to convince the public that we *could* form a govt. have been either fraudulent or so blankly out of touch with reality as to disqualify those who made them from any claim to political *sense* …'.[40]

During the high summer of 1950, Lady Violet shared Clem Davies's harsh criticism of the government's attitude towards Korea. She even feared that a third world war lay in prospect. There is evidence at this point of a greater rapport and understanding between the two of them than ever previously. In an impassioned speech in the House of Commons in late September, Davies taunted the government for pressing ahead with its plans to nationalise the British steel industry, at best a controversial initiative, at the time of a severe national crisis. Lady Violet was delighted to read the account of the '*brilliant* fighting speech. … One of the best speeches you ever made', proceeding:

> You wiped the floor with Herbert Morrison! How I wish I cld have heard you & seen his face! I am so glad you exploded his fictional accounts of the fall of the 2 Labour Govts – they both died by their own hand – & thro' their own ineptitude. We put them both in – as you pointed out – & we suffered for their sins. I thought the quotation from my Father's speech in 1914 *most* relevant to the present situation & I think it must have been impressive. Thank you for recalling what I had forgotten.'[41]

Davies had castigated Morrison most effectively for accusing the Liberals of making common cause with the Tories.

The very next day, building on the newfound rapport and apparent understanding with Davies, Lady Violet wrote to him at length to press her advocacy of 'regional arrangements' with the Tories over seat allocation

'on "Huddersfield" lines' (a local arrangement through which the Conservatives and Liberals each fought only one of the two Huddersfield seats):

> Everything of course depends on local goodwill & desire to implement such plans. *Where this exists* the kind of arrangement I have adumbrated is: Where Liberals have polled a *negligible* vote – say 3,000 or under – & where *half* that vote cld put the Conservative in, the Liberal shld stand down. Where the Liberal has polled a *substantial* vote – say 8,000 – even though he may be bottom of the Poll – the Conservative shld. We have got to bear in mind that we are making a virtue of necessity. *We cannot fight every seat* – arrangement or no arrangement. As you know, we have no money & few candidates. Our bargaining-power is really nil. At best we have a little nuisance value left …
>
> It is because this pact has stared me in the face ever since the last Election that I have been working steadily along these lines. It seems to me to be the only way to save the Parliamentary Party from virtual extinction. Without some such arrangement who cld get back next time? Yourself, Megan perhaps, possibly Jo (who has a 3000 majority in hand.) D[onald] Wade – *if* his present position holds. (I don't know how Bowen & Emrys Roberts stand?). In times of crisis people go for *decisive* solutions. 'End the stalemate – give one of the 2 Parties a proper majority. Stop this nonsense of carrying invalids on stretchers into the division lobbies etc.' That will be the public mood – & it will be fatal to what is left of our Party – whose survival I passionately desire.[42]

In an addendum to this lengthy letter, however, she came down firmly against the idea of 'simultaneous "deals" with Labour – in the West etc. … It wld appear wholly cynical – & look as though our Party had no *political* purpose.'[43]

The situation in the autumn of 1950 was complex, apparently shrouded in plot and counterplot. On the one hand, it is clear that there were negotiations between Clement Davies, Churchill and the Conservative Party chairman Lord Woolton on a whole range of issues. At the same time, there were much more clandestine meetings between Churchill, Lady Violet and Grimond, of which Davies apparently knew nothing. In fact, Grimond in his heart of hearts feared which way Davies might jump when the crunch time came, writing to his mother-in-law, 'There are the usual unknowns which centre round Clem. Attlee has shown a slight tendency to pat him on the head. This of course is nectar to him.'[44] Grimond then told Lady Violet that it was Clem Davies's intention in his forthcoming annual assembly speech to appeal to the Labour Party to dilute its socialism so that a broad-front radical Lib–Lab set-up might be established: 'He expects to draw a derisive reply from the Socialists. Winston can then weigh in with a conciliatory anti-Socialist speech & local arrangements can follow. … Winston says apparently that he is getting his way with the Tories, and hopes for 30 Liberal members & some sort of electoral reform in the Tory programme.'[45] Grimond had become convinced that, as the Liberal Party was so desperately short of money, workers and support, 'Therefore if we want a Parliamentary party we have got to swallow some unpalatable medicine.'[46]

The situation was muddied still further by the fact that Lady Megan Lloyd George, appointed deputy leader of the Liberal Party by Clem Davies back in January 1949 (primarily as a tactical ploy to prevent her from defecting to the Labour Party, to which she had obviously been making tracks for years), was now participating in secret discussions with Herbert Morrison about how the Liberals could help to prevent the Conservatives from regaining power. Small wonder that the beleaguered Clement Davies seriously considered resigning the party leadership at this point. But he stayed on, as did Lady Megan as deputy leader.

At the 1950 Liberal Party assembly in Scarborough, it soon became very clear that there was precious little sympathy for the idea of a Liberal agreement with the Conservatives. When Elliott Dodds, the generally left-wing president of the Liberal Party (who thus acted ex officio as assembly chairman), elaborated to delegates on the finer points of the 'Huddersfield formula', he was roundly rejected. In their respective speeches, both Clem Davies and Frank Byers both powerfully underlined their full commitment to their party's independence.[47] Lady Violet was predictably 'aghast' at the course of events, writing to Davies, 'The Lunatic Fringe seems to have taken complete command & Elliott Dodds' voice was the only one raised in the cause of sanity.' Churchill, she claimed, had been 'very much disturbed' by these events.[48] She had been heartened to hear from Philip Fothergill encouraging reports of a meeting of the Liberal parliamentary candidates the following day where there was 'some plain-speaking & some sound sense – generally accepted by everyone. But what is the good of talking sense in private if we only talk nonsense in public?'[49]

At the 1950 Liberal Party assembly in Scarborough, it soon became very clear that there was precious little sympathy for the idea of a Liberal agreement with the Conservatives.

True to form, she did not give up, encouraged by the proceedings at the next meeting of the Liberal Party Committee which had come out 'in favour of making "regional arrangements" for straight fights' – with only two dissenters (Dingle Foot and MacCallum Scott). 'Where do we go from here?' she asked Davies pointedly:

> *We know* that it is nonsense to talk of 'running for office' now – and such talk only lays us open to ridicule and deceives no one except some of our own deluded rank and file. For us *survival* is the problem. If we come back four or five strong next time (which is quite on the cards), we can no longer pretend to be a National Party with rooms in the House of Commons, a Chief Whip, a Party Broadcast etc. Therefore we must sooner or later make up our minds which way we are going – facing the fact that a decision may split us – (a serious contingency – but better even a split with survival

> than a united death). … I feel that at present we are drifting without much sense of direction and that an Election, even if delayed, may find us unprepared.[50]

Was the Liberal Party once again on the brink of disintegration? Such an outcome appeared ever more likely. For those on the left of the party (Megan Lloyd George, Emrys Roberts, Edgar Granville and Dingle Foot), by this time a distinctive, discrete radical grouping, the recent course of events constituted a pill too bitter for them to swallow. Publicly, they began to condemn what they perceived to be Clem Davies's marked inclination 'to veer towards the Tories'. Rumours intensified that Lady Megan in particular was likely to jump ship at any time and formally join the Labour Party.

In November, this group of radical politicians staged something of a revolt within the Liberal Party, threatening to join Labour at once and again bringing Clement Davies to the brink of resignation. To Lady Violet he was highly critical of the dissident MPs: 'The truth of the matter as it seems to me is this. They are not concerned really about the Party or the country. They are concerned about themselves only and think that their best chance lies through help from the Socialists.'[51] Not for the first time, he really was at the end of his tether and felt that he could not continue. Lady Violet was by now genuinely fearful that Lady Megan might well succeed Davies as party leader. 'Don't speak or even *think* of laying down the leadership. This is the moment to stand fast & *fight*,' she wrote to Davies. 'Neither Megan nor Emrys Roberts [the Liberal MP for Merioneth] have the slightest desire to leave the Party. They know *how* small a part they wld play in the Labour Party & what discipline would await them there!' She proceeded to give Davies her views on the small band of Liberal MPs:

> You & Jo [Grimond] are the trustees of many outside who look to you. Bowen & Hopkin [Morris] can I'm sure be relied on – & I imagine – Wade (tho' he looks like a bit of damp blotting paper which might take any imprint!) is at least honourable – I hope – sane? MacDonald is a political illiterate who might go anyway & shld be looked after. I told Fothergill to have a straight word with him. *No quitting*![52]

The revolt of 'the three' (as they were by now generally known) somehow blew over, but it is clear that, had they joined the Labour Party in November 1950, their departure might well have marked the death of the Liberal Party as a credible parliamentary grouping. It was indeed the most harrowing manifestation to date of the terrible dilemmas which faced Clem Davies almost daily. Small wonder that he told Lady Violet, 'I will willingly lay down this uncomfortable and so-called "leadership".'[53] But had he stood down at this point, there was no obvious successor to replace him.

As the new year – 1951 – dawned, it was clear that a general election could not be long delayed. It was also evident that 'Liberal–Tory' election pacts, as at Huddersfield in 1950, were likely elsewhere. One such constituency was Colne Valley in Yorkshire where Lady Violet Bonham Carter was invited to become the Liberal Party candidate in the hope that she might also prove acceptable to local Tories.[54] She was flattered, and wished to accept the invitation in the reasonable hope that, in the event of a straight fight with a Labour candidate, she might well be elected. But, as she wrote to Clement Davies, 'I am not going into this adventure without the unequivocal support of the Party Organisation – & (I hope) your own.'[55] (She also wrote in a similar vein to Philip Fothergill, Frank Byers and Lord Rea.) Davies responded cautiously, stating that he 'would sincerely rejoice' to see Lady Violet elected as a Liberal MP, but he refused to give an undertaking to support either of the other parties in the Commons after the election. Both seemed to believe that mounting international tensions might well soon lead to the formation of a national or coalition government at Westminster.[56]

'Don't speak or even *think* of laying down the leadership. This is the moment to stand fast & *fight*,' she wrote to Davies.

The next month, local Conservatives agreed not to oppose Lady Violet in Colne Valley.[57] Although there was a substantial Labour majority in the division in the 1950 general election, Violet was enthusiastic about the contest. One reason for her exuberance was her conviction that, in the event of a Tory victory at the polls, Churchill, as the incoming Prime Minister, would offer ministerial positions to leading Liberals. As she told Lord Samuel, 'I am confident that if the Conservatives got in, Winston would make every effort to broaden the basis of his Government and include some men of real ability drawn from outside his party fold.'[58]

Attlee eventually called the election for 15 October 1951. The so-called 'Huddersfield arrangement', made the previous year, continued and was also extended to a much more formal election pact in Bolton where the Liberal aspirant, Arthur Holt, was given a free run by local Tories in Bolton West in return for a reciprocal concession by the Liberals in Bolton East. (There was, however, within the Liberal Party much greater concern and doubt about the arrangement in Bolton, where Holt actually attended and spoke at Conservative events in the constituencies, than there had been in relation to Huddersfield the previous year.) In Colne Valley, Lady Violet was not only unopposed by local Tories, but was blessed by a visit from Winston Churchill who spoke in the constituency on her behalf, much to the chagrin of local Liberals. The hope was that a substantial anti-Socialist swing might enhance her prospects.

In all, just 109 Liberal candidates stood (compared with 475 in February 1950), and the party's election manifesto was largely devoted to a rather pathetic defence of the party's very existence. Yet again, the Liberal campaign never really took off; after the election there were to be just six Liberal MPs and sixty-six lost deposits. Lady Violet was to be sorely disappointed too. There was no anti-Socialist swing in Colne Valley, where the local Labour vote actually increased by some 1,500. Some Liberals there had defected to Labour; some Tories had simply stayed at home.

In the words of one of Violet's campaign managers, 'I'm afraid that the oil of the diehard Tory & the vinegar of the extreme Radical would not mix.' Churchill communicated with her – 'It was a gallant fight'.[59]

Then the new Prime Minister fired what has been described as, potentially, 'the deadliest shaft of all' when he offered Clement Davies the position of Minister of Education within the new Conservative Cabinet.[60] Churchill exerted considerable pressure on Davies to accept and even dangled the prospect of junior ministerial office to one or two other Liberal MPs as well. Davies was undoubtedly sorely tempted. He still retained some ministerial ambition and, at sixty-seven years of age, realised that this was to be his last opportunity to participate in government and make full use of his undoubted aptitude for administration. He was conscious, however, that his response must be a team decision and he felt obliged to consult several leading Liberals such as Grimond, Byers, Lady Violet, Lady Megan and Lord Samuel. Lady Violet alone urged him to accept Churchill's offer. All the others were adamant that Davies must refuse Churchill's alluring olive branch, and he soon acquiesced.[62]

Churchill told Lady Violet that, had she been successful in Colne Valley, he would have offered her ministerial office too. Her response would have been in the affirmative. As she wrote privately to Liberal academic Gilbert Murray, 'I think the Liberals made a mistake in not accepting Winston's generous offer to join the Government. The crisis is far graver than it was in 1931. Had I been returned, I should have gone in without any hesitation.' These were the sentiments which she also expressed in her private diary for late November 1951, when she recorded that Churchill had offered Davies a seat in the Cabinet and two under-secretaryships for Liberal MPs: 'I think poor Clem longed to accept. I shld have gone in unhesitatingly. (I'm told I shld have been offered Education).'[63] Her attitude reflected a much more pragmatic approach to a possible alliance with the Conservatives. But her standpoint inevitably incurred the wrath of the more radical elements within the Liberal Party.

Writing to express her genuine sense of 'sorrow at the end of a *great* chapter in the history of the party', she paid fulsome tribute to Davies's 'courage & *patience* & single-minded devotion with which you have held it together during these *infinitely* difficult years – while the "weaker vessels" were breaking right & left.'

For the tiny band of Liberal MPs who remained, life soon settled down following the trauma of the November 1951 general election. In many ways Clem Davies's position was easier as a result of the bruising defeats of three left-wing Liberal MPs at the election – Lady Megan, Emrys Roberts and Edgar Granville. No longer were they such a painful thorn in their leader's flesh as previously. Early in 1953, Lady Violet led a Liberal delegation to the Prime Minister to discuss reform of the voting system, but Churchill, although still sympathetic to the old Liberal hobby horse, simply could not carry his party with him on this issue. Violet understood, but emerged disappointed at the outcome: 'What alarms me is that the Tory Party should still run so true to form.'[64]

She was somewhat heartened, however, that Clem Davies was invited to participate in a governmental conference on reform of the House of Lords. The previous December, Davies had told her that he had put her name forward to Churchill for becoming a Dame – 'I was annoyed to hear that he had mentioned my name. The very last thing I want is to be a Dame.' When she visited 10 Downing Street on 15 April 1953, Churchill told her, '"Alas! Well you have been recommended by Clement Davies to be made a Dame." I said it was the last thing I desired to be. He replied, "Well – you'll get a letter from me. You can do what you like about it."'[65] In June the offer of the DBE was graciously accepted, following some gentle persuasion from Churchill: 'I never *dreamed* of receiving any honour – & "Damedom" is certainly not one for which I have ever qualified – (or ever shall!), but from the hundreds of letters I have received I realize that it has been taken as a recognition of the *Party's* services to the nation.'[66]

In July 1954 Lady Violet visited the Davies' expansive constituency home at Meifod in Montgomeryshire 'in that green & happy valley – with the river swarming through it', and was delighted to be able to attend Clem's silver anniversary tribute meeting in the constituency, which provided her with 'a wonderful evidence of the vitality of Liberalism in Montgomeryshire & of the personal devotion Clem has inspired.'[67] She was sorely vexed, however, by the conspicuous failure of the national press to report the occasion adequately.

In the May 1955 general election, probably the least memorable of the post-war contests, Dame Violet spoke just once at Westmoreland and twice in north Wales. She certainly missed Churchill, who had retired as Prime Minister and Conservative leader only the previous month, to be succeeded by Anthony Eden, but was heartened to learn that, although now in his eighty-first year, her old friend fully intended to remain in harness as the Tory MP for Woodford. There was a tiny increase in the Liberal vote – from 2.5 to 2.7 per cent – but 60 out of 110 Liberal deposits were lost, and only the six Liberal MPs elected in November 1951 were returned. Even so, some Liberals detected the beginning of a modest recovery in their party's fortunes. Among them was Lord Samuel, who wrote to Dame Violet, 'I think I see some indications that we may now be in the deadwater just at the turn of the tide.'[68]

Clem Davies's days as party leader were now clearly numbered, following the retirements of both Churchill and Attlee and the emergence of much younger successors in Eden and Gaitskell. For many Liberals, after the May 1955 general election Davies's leadership grew ever more moribund and dated. Yet he lingered on, although increasingly unwell, until his party's annual assembly at Folkestone in September 1956.

One of the first to respond to the long-awaited announcement of his retirement as party leader was Lady Violet. Writing to express her genuine sense of 'sorrow at the end of a *great* chapter in the history of the party', she paid fulsome tribute to Davies's 'courage & *patience* & single-minded devotion with which you have held it together during these *infinitely* difficult years – while the "weaker vessels" were breaking right & left.' Reflecting again at some length on his decision

to refuse Churchill's offer in November 1951, she contemplated her attitude at that time:

> You may remember that when Winston wanted you & two Liberal Under-Secretaries to join him in 1951 I wanted you to go in. My reasons were that the economic crisis was *far* greater than in 1931 – when Samuel, Archie [Sinclair] & Donald Maclean joined the national coalition (without any consultation or 'by-your-leave' from the party!) & I thought that the Liberals shld. – through you – make their contribution, & in spite of their small numbers could wield real *power*. ... I did not feel that a Coalition is holy if it is made up of 3 parties, & unholy if it only consists of two! Moreover I thought that responsibility & administrative experience wld. benefit our party which had had none since 1918. One must construct as well as criticize. Whatever you may have thought or felt you refused office then – a great personal sacrifice – because you felt that in so doing you were interpreting the people's will. Looking back I feel that you may well have been right. Your action – however disinterested & patriotic – might well have split the remnant we had left. (I must add that *only* Winston's leadership made me think it possible. I cld never have contemplated it under Eden! Winston was never a Tory – as the Tories know.) But whether right or wrong it was a great & selfless sacrifice – which few would have made – & one that will always be remembered – with reverence & admiration.[61]

She went on to shower lavish praise on the departing leader's:

> 'gift of patience', I have often marvelled at it during the discussions at our Liberal Party Committee. I have never seen you fail in patience or courtesy – however exasperating your colleagues! Leadership is not 'all jam' & cheers – alas! I have watched my father over that thorny & difficult course. How he suffered from the endless discords between colleagues – which it always fell to him to resolve. There is no more wearing or ungrateful task.[69]

'Poor old Clem – one cld not help feeling great affection for him & in one way he inspired respect. He gave up a big income at Levers to serve the Party & refused office in W[inston]'s 1951 Govt. when I thought (perhaps mistakenly?) that it wld have been right for us to go in.'

Davies's successor as Liberal Party leader was to be Dame Violet's son-in-law Jo Grimond, the only real possibility in the circumstances of 1956. There were persistent rumours, never fully confirmed, that Grimond (possibly encouraged and supported by Lady Violet) had actively supported the campaign within the Liberal Party to get rid of the ailing Clem Davies during 1955–56.

Lady Violet was predictably delighted at the unexpected success of her son Mark Bonham Carter in the Torrington by-election of March 1958 – the first Liberal by-election gain since March 1929. She had participated fully in the frenzied campaign and, following her son's narrow victory by just 200 votes, she sent out a personal message to all Liberals throughout the realm: 'Hold on, hold out, we are coming.' She was later to recall (in a pointed reference to the fact that Torrington had previously been held by a National Liberal MP) 'the strange sense of being an army of liberation entering occupied territory which for years had been ruled by quislings and collaborators and that their day was over once and for all.'[70]

When Mark first took his seat following his introduction in the House of Commons, however, just three of his fellow Liberal MPs were there to cheer him. A dejected mother wrote in her diary, 'I remembered my father's introduction when he took his seat after Paisley & how faint the cheers of the survivors of the Liberal Party then sounded to me. But at least they were 27.'[71] It was predicted that Mark Bonham Carter might well soon establish himself as Jo Grimond's natural successor as Liberal Party leader (but to achieve this, he did first need to have a safe seat in parliament).

In the general election the following year, Grimond appealed to his mother-in-law to campaign with him in Orkney & Shetland, something which she had not done since his initial return there in February 1950. His very real fear was that, now that he was Liberal Party leader, his electorate might well feel that he was rather taking them for granted. Lady Violet was not at all amused: 'I know he is as safe as a church, whereas Mark is fighting for his life at Torrington & [Edwin] Malindine [North Cornwall] & Jeremy [Thorpe, North Devon] might win seats. I don't know what to do.'[72] Her estimate was sound. Grimond stood no prospect of defeat; he was indeed 'Jo to them all' in his constituency.[73]

Her son's defeat at Torrington in October 1959, after just eighteen months in the House, came as a severe shock to Lady Violet and to the Liberal Party: 'I cannot bear his exile from the House. I have had a *very* depressed letter from Jo who misses him terribly. Clem is no good, Roderic Bowen never turns up, Jeremy speaks often & is as active as a flea – but does too many outside things & doesn't *sit* there. Nor does he carry Mark's guns.'[74] Yet she remained on generally friendly terms personally with Clem and Jano Davies whom she still met socially from time to time. Still, she rather resented that Davies remained the Liberal MP for Montgomeryshire in spite of advancing years and severe health problems which meant that he now rarely appeared at Westminster. Following a lunch with Jo Grimond in July 1961, Lady Violet wrote in her diary, 'We had a nice talk – but what a heavy burden he has to carry. Wade is ill, Jeremy is ill, Clem is a chronic absentee & useless when present. He wrote imploring [Roderic] Bowen to be with him for the Berlin debate on Monday & to speak – & Bowen replied that he had 'a function'. He does damn all in the House. As Jo says – why go into it? Jo is literally maid of all work to the party.'[75] The Liberal Party's very modest national revival was apparent to all, but so too was its parlous position in the House of Commons.

When Clem Davies fell very seriously ill in late March 1962, Lady Violet was 'so shocked & distressed' to read the alarming reports of his declining health in the evening papers: '*No one* cld understand more intimately & more poignantly *all* that you are going through.'[76] Just two days later he died. Although she had not always approved of his actions,

Lady Violet was now moved to write in her diary:

> Poor old Clem – one cld not help feeling great affection for him & in one way he inspired respect. He gave up a big income at Levers to serve the Party & refused office in W[inston]'s 1951 Govt. when I thought (perhaps mistakenly?) that it wld have been right for us to go in. … He showed no rancour at his displacement from the leadership by Jo – tho' he must have minded it.[77]

It was perhaps fitting that after Harold Wilson formed a Labour government in October 1964 and agreed that three Liberals should be elevated to the upper house, Jo Grimond, still party leader, was able to ensure that Lady Violet, although now in poor health, should become an 'honorary' peer together with the two 'working' peerages for Donald Wade and Frank Byers. It was the appropriate reward for a long life of devoted service to the party. Clement Davies would certainly have approved. When she delivered her maiden speech in the House of Lords on 25 January 1965, it was especially fitting that Lady Violet, now rather frail, was able to pay tribute to her old friend Winston Churchill who had died only the previous day.

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28 Ibid., VB-C to Churchill, 23 January 1950 (copy).
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HELEN S
AN APPR

Helen Suzman, the liberal member of the old South African parliament, renowned for her courageous and unrelenting fight for human rights and justice, died peacefully in her home in Johannesburg in the small hours of New Year's Day 2009. Her Liberalism was more than a political creed; it was a state of mind, a way of life, a responsibility towards others. **Colin Eglin**, a co-founder of the anti-apartheid Progressive Party, recalls her.

SUZMAN
ECIATION

The expressions of grief at her death, of respect for her person, and of gratitude for her life and her service that came from all sections of the South African people and from representatives all political parties were testimony to the impact she had made on the politics of South Africa and on the lives of its citizens.

Helen served in parliament from 1953 to 1989, the years during which successive National Party governments were imposing the policy of apartheid on the people of South Africa. Apartheid deeply offended Helen's sense of justice and violated the liberal values that she embraced. She was angry at the hurt it was doing to millions of her fellow citizens, and at the damage it was doing to the fabric of South African society.

She spoke out against racial discrimination, against race classification, group areas, job reservation, and detention without trial. She campaigned for the repeal of the Pass Laws. She condemned the abuse of power. She worked for a South Africa in which there would be freedom of expression, the rule of law, an independent judiciary, transparent governance, and an open society in which individuals would be free to make choices. She campaigned for the abolition of the death penalty. She fought for human rights.

During the dark days of apartheid she did more than any other person to keep liberal values alive. Indeed, South Africa's new democratic constitution, with the liberal values that it embraces, is testimony to the inspirational impact that Helen's work and example made on the politics of South Africa

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Helen Suzman was born in Germiston, a small mining town a few kilometres from Johannesburg, on the day of the Russian Revolution, 7 November 1917. Her father, Samuel Gavronsky, and his brother Oscar had emigrated from a small Jewish village in Lithuania and in due course married two sisters who had also emigrated from Eastern Europe. The Gavronsky brothers, who on their arrival in South Africa could speak neither English nor Dutch, went into business together. In due course they prospered and invested in land, property and other businesses

Helen Suzman
MP (1917–2009)

Samuel Gavronsky, wanting the best available schooling for his two daughters, arranged for Helen and her sister Gertrude to go to Parktown Convent, a Catholic school for girls. Upon completing her schooling Helen enrolled at Witwatersrand University to study for the degree of Bachelor of Commerce.

She interrupted her studies in 1937 when she married Mosie Suzman, an eminent physician from a large and well-known Jewish family in Johannesburg. Helen and Mosie moved into a spacious new home and took part in the social and cultural life of the relatively prosperous community. They had two daughters, Frances, born in September 1939, and Patricia, born in January 1943.

In the Second World War Mosie joined up to the South African Medical Corps and was posted to serve in Egypt. Helen completed her Batchelor of Commerce course at Witwatersrand University in a year and, on applying to join up she was assigned to a position with the War Supplies Board. In 1945, after the war, Helen returned to

Helen Suzman
Top: In her office, while an MP.
Bottom: At a mass funeral.

Witwatersrand University, first to take up a tutorship and then to become a lecturer on economic history. During this period she joined the South African Institute of Race Relations.

In 1946 the Institute asked her to assist in preparing evidence that it could present to the Fagan Commission, which had been established by General Smuts, then Prime Minister, under Judge Henry Fagan to review the laws that applied to the Blacks in the urban areas. These laws, commonly known as the 'Pass Laws', were based on a policy that went back to 1922; the laws allowed Blacks to come to the urban areas when their services were required by the Whites, but had return to the Native Reserves when the Whites no longer required their services.

Helen was appalled by what she learned of the disastrous impact these inhuman laws had on Black individuals, their families, and their communities. The Fagan Commission recommended a new approach, namely that the pervaded urbanisation of Blacks should be recognised and should be accommodated within the law. However before Smuts could act on this recommendation he and his party were ousted from power in May 1948 by the pro-apartheid National Party.

Helen was shocked. The Pass Laws were not only going to stay, they were going to be enforced even more harshly. But more than this: where was South Africa heading? Governed by a political party that had opposed the war effort, that harboured many people who had been pro-Nazi, and that was committed to enforce the policy of apartheid in the political, economic, educational, and social life in South Africa?

She reacted by becoming actively involved in politics. She joined the United Party, served on a constituency committee and became heavily involved as the Information Officer of the Witwatersrand Women's Council of the party. She stood as a United Party candidate in the 1953 election and was elected unopposed as the Member of Parliament for Houghton, a position that she held continuously until she retired in September 1989.

When Helen came to Cape Town for her first parliamentary session she became a member of a caucus of a United Party that was confused in trying to define an identity relevant to the politics of post-war South Africa; the party was divided on the issue of an alternative to the Nationalist policy of apartheid.

Helen was soon identified as an outspoken member of the 'liberal group' in the caucus. She and a caucus colleague defied the party's decision to vote for the Separate Amenities Bill by walking out of the House when the Bill was put to the vote. She was one of the group of liberal backbenchers who declared their commitment to restore Coloured voters to the common voters roll (from which the Nationalist government was removing them), at a time when the leadership of the party was trying to avoid taking a stand on this issue.

Helen's maiden speech in parliament was on women's rights, and she went on to take part in every debate that affected women's rights during her thirty-six years in parliament. However she emphasised that while the issue of women's rights still had to be dealt with, the issue of race discrimination and the denial of rights to Black South Africans was the matter of overriding concern.

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Helen and I first met in June 1954 at a lunch arranged by Tony

Delius, the poet, author and parliamentary correspondent of the *Cape Times*. She was completing her second year as MP for Houghton, while I was about to become a member of the Cape Provincial Council. I found her to be very attractive, physically, politically and intellectually. I realised that behind her sparkling blue eyes there was a sharp mind and a tough will. We seemed to be on the same political wavelength, and to share the same judgment of the political players of that time. That lunch marked the start of a personal friendship and a mutually supportive relationship that lasted for more than fifty years during which we worked together in liberal opposition politics both inside and outside parliament.

Over the years I came to appreciate her keen intellect, to understand her commitment to principle, her intolerance of hypocrisy, her scorn for position-seekers, and her concern for people. I also came to realise that she did not suffer fools gladly, but she had a great sense of fun.

She was a warm and generous hostess, and loved her home, with its garden and her dogs. Her home was the focal point of her domestic, social and a large part of her political life. It was there that she entertained friends and house guests, had interviews with the media or discussions with people who had come from afar to meet her. It was here that she issued statements or worked the telephone lines. It was here that she attended to the many people who knocked on her door to seek her assistance or her intervention in their suffering under the discriminatory laws and regulations of the apartheid government.

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When, after the general election of 1958, I joined Helen in the United Party's parliamentary caucus, I learned at first hand that she was one of the most outspoken of a group of liberal members who were trying to move the party away from policies based on racial discrimination and to face up to the future of a multiracial South Africa.

It came as no surprise that at the very tense National Congress of the United Party in August 1959, Helen was one of the focal points of the conservatives' onslaught on the liberals. This came to a head when, at the behest of the conservatives, the congress adopted a resolution through which the party reneged on an undertaking it had given to provide land for 'native settlement.' Helen was one of nine of us public representatives who met that evening and issued a statement condemning the congress resolution, knowing that our action would lead to our expulsion or resignation from the party.

A week later, a number of liberals who had resigned from the party met in Helen's Johannesburg home to form a 'progressive group' with the intention of developing it into a liberal anti-apartheid political party. The Progressive Party was launched in November 1959 at a Congress held in Johannesburg. Dr Jan Steytler MP was elected Leader and Helen was amongst its founder members. As one of the twelve members of the new Progressive Party parliamentary caucus, Helen played an important role in helping to shape party policy and to establish the party's identity as an outspoken opponent of apartheid and as a custodian of liberal values.

At the 1961 election, which Prime Minister Dr Verwoerd called two years earlier than scheduled. Helen was the only progressive to win a seat. During the next thirteen years, when civil liberties and the rule of law were under assault from the apartheid government and the official opposition was either compromising or capitulating, Helen single-handedly stood up against detention without trial, spoke out against racial discrimination and fought for civil liberties and the rule of law.

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She was courageous, she was principled. When she spoke she was clear, lucid and to the point. No obfuscation, no ambiguity, no spin; there was never any doubt where Helen stood on issues.

She was a liberal, but she was no armchair crusader. She was a 'hands on' politician and a tenacious fighter for the causes she believed in. She made sure of her facts. She went to see for herself.

She visited prisons, spoke to political prisoners and detainees and saw the conditions in which they were held. She went to find out what was happening in the squatter camps. She spoke to people being harassed under the Pass Laws or being evicted from their homes under the Group Areas Act.

Armed with first-hand information she returned to the fray, questioning harassing, badgering the apartheid ministers and bureaucrats. Using parliament as a platform she demanded the attention of the apartheid rulers, she got the ear of the media, she endured the vilification of the racial bigots, she earned the respect of the oppressed.

Helen was a liberal, but she was no political ideologue. For her people, not dogma, came first. She had a straightforward political creed: 'I hate bullies. I stand for simple justice, equal opportunity and human rights. These are the indispensable elements in a democratic society and are well worth fighting for.'

She confronted bullies like Prime Ministers Verwoerd and Vorster and President Botha head on. Through her actions and the arguments that she advanced she demonstrated that liberal values were not abstract concepts, but that they formed the basis of good government and of a wholesome society.

For Helen liberalism was more than a political creed. It was a state of mind, a way of life, a responsibility towards others, a commitment to justice.

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Helen's lone years in parliament ended on 24 April 1974 when five more members of the Progressive Party, including myself, were elected to parliament. This breakthrough, after three successive drubbings at the polls, was a watershed event for the development of liberal values in South Africa – for Helen had informed me, as the party leader at that time, that if the party did not win any seats other than her seat of Houghton at the coming election she would resign from parliament.

For the next fifteen years Helen continued with her political work with the same energy and

Helen Suzman with Nelson Mandela.

commitment, and with the same outspoken manner as before. She proved to be a great team player and played a pivotal role in ensuring that the party did not lose its liberal thrust as it grew, through amalgamations and electoral victories, from six to twenty-seven members in parliament and became the official opposition in 1977.

Freed from the workload that she had when she was the sole representative of the Progressive Federal Party in parliament Helen was able to devote more of her energy to her work outside parliament. She continued to visit political prisoners and detainees. She visited anti-apartheid activists who had been banished to remote parts of the country. She took up the cases of people like Steve Biko and Neil Aggett who had died in controversial circumstances while being held by members of the Security Forces.

Her greatest triumph in parliament undoubtedly came on 19 June 1986, when the National Assembly passed a Bill repealing the Pass Laws that Helen had fought against throughout her political career. After the Speaker had announced the result and members of the party caucus had crowded around Helen to congratulate her, two young members of the National Party left their benches on the government's side and, to everyone's surprise, walked across the floor to shake Helen's hand and to thank her for what she had done. Helen had won at last.

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When, during the 1980s and 1990s in particular, the international community became increasingly concerned about and involved in the issue of apartheid in South Africa, international organisations, governments, political movements, religious organisations, and civic bodies recognised Helen Suzman for her courageous struggle against apartheid and her unrelenting fight for human rights and justice in South Africa.

Among the many awards she received were the United Nations Award for Human Rights (1978), the Moses Mendelssohn Prize of the Berlin Senate (1988), Dame of the British Empire (1989), the Order of Meritorious Service (Gold) President Mandela (1997), and the Prize for Freedom of Liberal International (2002). She was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Among the twenty-nine honorary doctorates conferred on her were five from South African universities. The balance was from universities around the world, including prominent universities such as Harvard, Yale and Columbia (United States of America), Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow and Warwick (United Kingdom) and the University of Toronto (Canada).

After thirty-six years in parliament, Helen decided that the election due to be held in September 1989 would be an appropriate time for her to retire. She left parliament as she had done for thirty-six years, still fighting for justice as she persuaded the Speaker to allow her to bring a motion of censure against a judge who in her words, 'had given a derisory sentence to two white farmers who had beaten a Black employee to death'.

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On 2 February 1990, President F. W. de Klerk, to everyone's surprise, announced that organisations such as the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress were to be unbanned, and that prisoners such as Nelson Mandela were to be freed; and also that the process of negotiating a new non-racial democratic constitution would commence. As I sat in parliament listening to De Klerk making that announcement my thoughts turned to Helen. I could imagine her thoughts and feelings. What a pity she was not there to share in the excitement of the moment!

Helen settled down to a life without parliament, but not without politics. Although she did not have the same access to the government service as she did when she was a member of parliament she interceded in respect of the cases that were bought to her attention. She issued statements to the press. She responded to requests from the media for her opinion on topical issues. While apartheid was no longer the issue, Helen spoke out in no uncertain terms when someone in authority acted in a way that violated her sense of justice or abused their power.

Although Helen was not directly involved in the negotiation of the new constitution, she followed developments around the negotiations closely, and was frequently in touch with me, as the Democratic Party's chief negotiator, asking me questions, expressing opinions or giving me advice.

In 1991 the party invited Helen to join its delegation to the first plenary session of the Congress for a Democratic South Africa (Codesa), the multi-party body negotiating the new constitution. In a two-minute intervention, Helen pointed out that, although the text of the statement before the delegates referred a commitment to non-racialism and non-sexism, less than 10 percent of delegates were women. Helen's political acumen and the respect that people had for her became apparent when Codesa promptly resolved that all future delegations had to have an equal number of women and men!

In 1991 Helen was elected as the President of the South African Institute of Race Relations, and in 1994 she was appointed as

one of the five members of the Independent Electoral Commission which supervised South Africa's first democratic election. In 1996 the Helen Suzman Foundation, committed to promoting liberal democracy, was founded.

Over the years since Helen first met Nelson Mandela, when visiting the prison on Robben Island where he was held, the two of them developed a friendship founded on mutual respect and understanding. This did not prevent her telling him quite frankly when at times she disagreed with him or with something his government was doing.

In 1997 President Mandela, at a ceremony in Pretoria, awarded Helen and three distinguished men the Decoration for Meritorious Service (Gold), then South Africa's highest civilian award. At the commencement of the ceremony, having said that he was honoured to confer the award on these four great South Africans, he added, 'But I must tell you that in respect of three of them I decided with my head. In respect of the fourth I decided with my heart. I won't tell you that fourth is, but she gives me a lot of trouble!'

In awarding Helen the Decoration President Mandela referred to her courage: 'It is a courage born of the yearning for freedom, of hatred of oppression, injustice and inequity whether the victim be oneself or another; a fortitude that draws its strength from the conviction that no person can be free while others are unfree.'

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Helen Suzman was a great parliamentarian, but one of a special kind. She did not allow parliament to determine her agenda. Nor did she allow the ritual nature or ambiance of parliament to dilute her message. In fact, Helen was more than a parliamentarian. She was a political activist who, with consummate courage and skill, used parliament to get her message across.

Helen Suzman was a great South African liberal. Her greatness was founded, not on any grand design, or great speech, or momentous event, but on a commitment to a set of basic liberal values combined with a multitude of single acts of courage and caring.

For Helen liberalism was more than a political creed. It was a state of mind, a way of life, a responsibility towards others, a commitment to justice.

Her legacy lives on.

Colin Wells Eglin was born in Cape Town on 14 April 1925. He served with the Sixth South African Armoured Division in Italy during the Second World War. Elected to the South African Parliament as a member of the United Party in 1958, in 1959, together with ten colleagues, including Helen Suzman, he resigned from the United Party to form the liberal anti-apartheid Progressive Party. He served in parliament until 1961, and then again from 1974–2004; for ten years during the 1970s and '80s he was the leader of the Progressive Party and its successors. Following the release of Nelson Mandela, Eglin played a key role in the constitutional negotiations that led to the adoption of South Africa's new democratic constitution; Mandela described Eglin as 'one of the architects of our democracy'. He is the author of Crossing the Borders of Power – The Memoirs of Colin Eglin *(2007).*

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

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

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65)

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

The Lib-Lab Pact

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

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

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

The Liberal Party's political communication, 1945–2002

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

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16

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

Liberal Unionists

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

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

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

Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 1906–1935

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

The political career of Edward Strutt, 1st Baron Belper

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

EMILY HO

AND THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE DES

Emily Hobhouse is not a household name, but neither has she been entirely forgotten. Sister of the New Liberal writer L. T. Hobhouse, she is perhaps best known for her investigations into conditions in the British concentration camps during the Boer War (1899–1902). She is less well remembered for her activities fifteen years later in the Great War, but she succeeded again in stirring up controversy. **David S. Patterson** recalls her role in attempting to reveal the facts behind the German destruction of the Belgian city of Leuven in 1914.

OBHOUSE

TRUCTION OF LEUVEN IN WORLD WAR I

Hobhouse came from a prominent and wealthy family, which was associated with advanced, even radical views on political issues.[1] The Hobhouses were British Liberals, and her younger brother, Leonard T. Hobhouse, was a prolific journalist and author of many books ranging from moral philosophy to metaphysics to political sociology. He became a pervasive intellectual force in the Liberal Party, and his progressive views contributed to the party's new social reform programmes in the early twentieth century. Emily's humanitarian efforts during the Boer War contributed in turn to his anti-imperialist outlook and his maturing interest in international reform, including the creation of a permanent league of nations, and the two siblings would remain close even after Leonard firmly supported British military participation in the Great War and came to disagree with his sister's more radical actions during the conflict.[2]

Another relative, a cousin, converted to the Society of Friends and became a conscientious objector in 1916, taking an absolutist position against serving even with a Quaker medical unit, because he considered it an appendage of the British army. A more distant relative was the pacifistic Lady Catherine (Kate) Courtney, who was married to the well-known anti-war Liberal, Lord Leonard Courtney; both Courtneys sympathised with Emily's peace endeavours and remained her special friends.

Born in East Cornwall in 1860, Emily Hobhouse was the daughter of an Anglican vicar; and although she apparently never converted to the Quaker faith, as did her pacifist cousin, she came to follow its persuasion in accepting everyone as part of common humanity, even in wartime when people were driven apart. She did not publicly articulate her personal religious views, but they clearly influenced her activism.

In Hobhouse's early years, she worked with the poor and infirm in Cornwall and as a missionary to Cornish miners working in the United States. Back in England at the end of the century, she found the Boer War very disturbing. She travelled to South Africa during the conflict and was shocked by the British authorities' harsh treatment of native civilians in concentration camps. Greatly concerned about the diseased, destitute, and ragged inhabitants of the camps, especially the women and children incarcerated in them, Hobhouse organised humanitarian aid for the victims. She wrote scathing exposés of the deplorable conditions in the camps, which made her a well-known and controversial figure.

The Boer War experience pushed her toward peace advocacy. As she later commented, 'war is not only wrong in itself, but a crude mistake … My small means are devoted entirely to help non-combatants who suffer in consequence of war, and in supporting every movement making for Peace.'[3]

Emily Hobhouse (1860–1926)

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Hobhouse's many pacifistic activities during the Great War comprise a series of fascinating adventures. Their outlines will be recounted here, but only as they provide broader context for her journey to Germany and especially German-occupied Belgium in June 1916, which is the focus of this story. It began as essentially a year-long cat-and-mouse game with the British Government, with Hobhouse always managing to stay one step ahead of the British foreign affairs departments which, because of different perspectives and inefficiency in the government bureaucracy, could never quite catch up with her.

The British authorities already suspected her because of her long-standing activism, her support of early private initiatives looking for a mediated peace in the war, and her involvement, in the summer of 1915, as a temporary secretary in the Amsterdam headquarters of a newly founded trans-atlantic group, the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (ICWPP), which had already promoted neutral mediation of the war, including the sending of women envoys to all

European capitals. They were also acutely aware of her earlier efforts with peace advocates in Italy to resist that nation's entrance into the war on the side of the Allies. Hobhouse's familiarity with Italy derived from her extended pre-war visits to sunny Rome each winter as treatment for a serious heart condition and various other ailments, including arthritis and arteriosclerosis. She was in fact a semi-invalid.

When she applied for a visa to travel via neutral Switzerland to Italy again for the winter of 1915–16, the military departments, supported by the Foreign Office, wanted to deny her request. But the Home Office oversaw British citizens' travel to neutral countries, and Sir John Simon, its Liberal secretary of state in the Asquith coalition government, argued that she should not be denied travel to Switzerland en route. The Italian authorities, he added, could then decide whether to admit her to their country. Simon was aware of his government's earlier efforts to restrict Hobhouse's travel to the continent in 1915 but was more inclined than the leadership of the foreign affairs agencies to approve her request. He may have sympathised with her in part because he knew members of the Hobhouse family, and may have known her personally. But more important was his own scepticism over British involvement in the Great War (he would soon resign his position in protest over the introduction of military conscription in Britain in early 1916), which made him willing to tolerate, if not openly support, her peace endeavours.

Emily Hobhouse also used her good connections with Arthur Ponsonby, a pacifist Liberal in Parliament, to her advantage. After arriving in Berne and finding that the British consulate was still waiting for the Foreign Office's decision on a visa for her entry into Italy, she sent a message to Ponsonby saying she was in 'weak health', could not afford to stay in Berne much longer and had to get to Rome to stay in her apartment and wind up her affairs there. Ponsonby immediately appealed to the Foreign Office, vouching for her uncertain health and modest means. His intervention may have had some effect, as the Foreign Office granted her the visa, but only after she promised the British government that she would refrain from peace activities in Italy. She adhered to that restriction, but en route back to England in the spring of 1916, she stopped in Switzerland and told the startled German minister there that she wanted to visit Germany and German-occupied Belgium; she asked him to forward her request to Berlin for a decision.

In some ways, her desire to visit enemy territory was a continuation of her earlier activism and had elements of *déjà vu*, as her purposes were somewhat similar to those she had pursued in the Boer War. Just as she had then reported on the terrible conditions in the camps in South Africa, a primary objective in the Great War was to investigate Germany's military treatment of the welfare of enemy civilians in a detention camp at Ruhleben outside Berlin. But visiting and inspecting Ruhleben formed only a part of her plans for a broader peace mission. 'I wanted as far as any one individual may to begin laying the foundation of international life,' she confided to her journal, '… to say "Here I come, alone, of my free will into your country to bear you, even while our Governments are at war, a message of peace and good will".'[4] Thus during her stay in Berlin at the end of her trip, she would arrange for a long interview with German Foreign Secretary Gottlieb von Jagow, whom she had befriended before the war when he was Germany's ambassador in Rome. Their discussion was a continuation of her interest in peace talks, and she would bring back to England Jagow's unofficial feeler for peace talks between the warring sides.[5]

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Hobhouse's desire to visit Belgium was another part of her proposed peace mission. The controversy over German behaviour in Belgium had begun as early as the enemy occupation of much of that country in August 1914. In the English-language press, it had early generated contentious discussion. James O'Donnell Bennett, an American correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune*, had reported, for instance, that during his tour through Belgium in late August 1914, he found, contrary to almost daily reports in British newspapers, no German atrocities, and he claimed that four other American journalists then in Belgium also found no outrages. Bennett did acknowledge that Leuven, 'the ancient and renowned university city of northern Europe lies in ashes … The halls in which so many American priests of the Roman church are proud to tell you they have studied are level with the ground.' But accepting the German view, he blamed the local citizens for the disaster. Leuven, he wrote, 'lost its head. It went mad. Its citizens fired from [an] ambuscade upon German soldiers;' and the German destruction in response 'was awful but it was war'.[6] An inquiry by the Belgian government-in-exile, however, soon published a report detailing many German excesses which, it claimed, were perpetrated on unresisting and unarmed Belgian citizens.[7]

In some ways, her desire to visit enemy territory was a continuation of her earlier activism and had elements of *déjà vu*, as her purposes were somewhat similar to those she had pursued in the Boer War.

In early May 1915, the German government responded to these charges with the release of its 'White Book' on the Belgian occupation, which strongly denied the Belgian findings. It minimised its army's offences in Belgium and justified those that occurred as legitimate responses to a 'revolt' – a veritable 'People's War' – waged by the Belgian civilian population in ongoing 'cowardly and treacherous attacks' against the German army. More specifically, the German White Book focused on Belgian *francs-tireurs* (un-uniformed civilian militia) who, it asserted, carried on ongoing guerrilla warfare against the German military. The German report included over 220 affidavits and reports of alleged civilians' 'bestial behaviour' and hostile actions toward the German occupiers.[8]

Hobhouse may have been familiar with the initial contradictory claims only in a general way. But the publication of the British government-sponsored Bryce report on the German occupation of Belgium, which was released only two days after the German

one, caught her attention. The British commission, headed by James Bryce, Britain's venerable and respected scholar-diplomat, expanded on the evidence presented in the Belgian report. The Bryce commissioners collected more than 1,200 depositions, mostly from Belgian refugees who had personally witnessed the German army's behaviour in Belgium. Because the research methodology of the commission was careful and restrained, its findings could be viewed as reliable, even authentic, by objective readers.[9] Nonetheless, the Bryce report came down hard on the German army's behaviour in Belgium, and it documented, sometimes in chilling detail, German war crimes and destruction. Overall, its conclusions contributed to the British mindset of the evil 'Huns' ruthlessly trying to subjugate Europe.[10] The Belgian government's commission also responded in April 1916 with the publication of its own 500-page 'Grey Book', which included a detailed critique and refutation of the German White Book.[11]

As a pacifist, Hobhouse tried to reconcile differences among enemies, and the Bryce report, which only served to drive Britain and Germany farther apart, troubled her. She apparently was unfamiliar with the Belgian Grey Book, but the German minister in Berne had given her a copy of his government's account on her way to Rome in late 1915. The British censor had banned publication of the German White Book in Britain, so unlike her fellow Britons Hobhouse had a fuller perspective of the two sides' evidence and official assertions.[12] Because she had found British rule in South Africa cruel and oppressive, she was prepared to believe that the German occupation of Belgium might also have involved excesses. In any case, having seen written accounts by both sides, she was motivated to see the conditions herself, hoping, as she later wrote to a senior British diplomat, that her own investigations 'would have a softening influence and be a link to draw our two countries [Britain and Germany] together.'[13]

As a pacifist, Hobhouse tried to reconcile differences among enemies, and the Bryce report, which only served to drive Britain and Germany farther apart, troubled her.

While awaiting clearance from Berlin for her proposed visits, Hobhouse met with the Swiss section of the ICWPP to discuss women's peace propaganda. When news of these pacifist contacts appeared in the Swiss press, the alarmed British officials in Berne decided to impound her passport and to give her a new one only for direct passage back to Britain. They had difficulty finding her, however; and when they finally caught up with her and summoned her to the legation, they were too late, for just then Berlin had given clearance for her visits to Germany and Belgium. She replied to the legation that she was leaving Berne but would call upon her return.

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When the German authorities consented to her requested visits, they told her only upon her departure from Switzerland into Germany that she would always be in the company of a German military escort and would not be permitted to talk to Belgian citizens. The curbs on her movements in Belgium also included returning to Brussels each night. Hobhouse protested against these restrictions in vain and later said that if she had known of them in advance, she probably would have decided not to visit Belgium.

Once on German soil, her escort took her straight to Brussels. Over the next ten days (or more than one half of her seventeen-day visit, from 6 to 23 June, to Germany and occupied Belgium), she toured the capital as well as many other Belgian cities and towns. Despite the restrictions, she managed to see a lot. Among the many places she visited, Hobhouse took a particular interest in the German destruction of Leuven. She spent only one full day in Leuven but gained a first-hand look at most of the large university town. 'I walked and drove about the town for several hours,' she wrote upon her return to England, 'and believe I saw it pretty thoroughly'.[14] It is well to remember that her later comments on the conditions in Leuven formed only one aspect of the controversy she sparked when she returned to England and publicly reported her observations.

The contention over the events of late August 1914 in Leuven was of course a part of the larger question of Germany's behaviour in Belgium. The Belgian inquiry had featured allegations of the German military's excessive behaviour in Leuven as a prime example in their general indictment of Germany's actions. The German response in turn had devoted one-third of its report to flatly denying the Belgian charges regarding Leuven and offered a defence of its army's activities there. It denied any 'mistake' of friendly fire incidents among retreating German troops as the catalyst for their atrocities in the town, as suggested in the Belgian report, and instead asserted that 'a deluded population, unable to grasp the course of events, thought they could destroy the returning German soldiers without danger.' It added:

> Moreover, in [Leuven], as in other towns, the burning torch was only applied by German troops when bitter necessity demanded it … [t]he troops confined themselves in destroying only those parts of the city in which the inhabitants opposed them in a treacherous and murderous manner. It was indeed German troops who took care, whenever possible, to save the artistic treasures, not only of [Leuven], but of other towns …[15]

In the Bryce report discussion of the German offences in Leuven had comprised six pages, and thirty-two pages of depositions in an accompanying appendix, more coverage in both parts than of any other Belgian town or city. Its full account of the German army's violent actions in Leuven was presented in vivid contrast to the town inhabitants, who were portrayed throughout as respectful and peace-loving.[16]

The Bryce commissioners may not have deliberately focused on Leuven, but the university town was revered as a historic repository of ancient manuscripts and centre of learning in the Low Countries; the German destruction of university buildings was already widely known in Europe. Universities in Britain and Holland kept alive the memory of Leuven's cruel fate in their public

appeals for books and funds for the re-building of the library.[17] The attention on events in Leuven also benefited from the literate Belgian refugees from Leuven, including professors, who articulated their unpleasant recollections in writing or orally to British lawyers taking down their testimony. The Leuven academics were also particularly quick in rebutting accounts that excused or minimised the German army's outrages there.[18]

Following her return to Britain, Emily Hobhouse helped to revive a still smouldering controversy. She did not comment on the Germans' brutal actions against Belgian civilians, which she could not verify directly – and indeed the Belgian and Bryce commissions, while providing truly graphic eyewitness accounts of numerous horrific incidents, and cumulatively a clear indictment of the German army's extensive atrocities there, did not give estimates of the total Belgian casualties in Leuven.[19] Instead, Hobhouse focused on the physical destruction and general condition of the citizenry, which she had witnessed on her visit. It began when she felt compelled to counter a *Times* report in early October 1916 that mentioned the 'destruction' of Leuven; it went on to assert that this 'nursery of Belgian piety and learning … was wantonly destroyed, and the library, which was its especial pride, reduced to ashes.'[20] In a letter published in the newspaper, Hobhouse rejoined that of these claims 'only the destruction of the library was accurate.'[21] She then summarised her observations of the town:

> I spent a day in [Leuven] and was somewhat astounded to find that, contrary to Press assertions, it is not destroyed. Indeed out of a normal population of 44,000, 38,000 are living there today. It is computed that only an eighth of the town has suffered. The exquisite town hall is unscathed. The roof of the cathedral caught fire, the bells melting and crashing into the nave, but the flames were extinguished before too great damage was done to the main structure. It has been re-roofed, perhaps temporarily, and the nave boarded off, but meanwhile Mass is celebrated in the choir and transepts, where, indeed, I saw many at worship, both invaders and invaded. The other churches are uninjured. The library is, of course, a sad sight, for, in spite of great efforts, only the walls remain. It is whispered in [Leuven] that some of the more valuable volumes were removed to a place of safety, and should this rumour prove to be well-founded they will form the precious nucleus for the new collection of books now proposed in your columns.[22]

From her experience in the Boer War, Hobhouse understood that her first-hand impressions casting doubt on Allied perceptions would not suffice by themselves to convince readers and might even result in more vigorous denials, so she intertwined her remarks with expressions of her humanitarian motives and sympathy for the suffering Belgians.

Hobhouse's account set off a short-lived media frenzy in Britain. Commenting on Hobhouse's letter, *The Times* wrote that when the German military occupation ended, outsiders could see the damage themselves. In the meantime, the paper quoted some revelations in the Bryce report, which had reported that the Germans' 'burning of a large part' of the town was 'a calculated policy carried out scientifically and deliberately'. It also cited the Belgian inquiry's findings that 'the greater part of the town of [Leuven] was a prey to the flames. The fire burnt for several days.'[23] *The Times*' report also referred to a letter from a Leuven professor who said that the librarian at the university had told him that the library had been locked since the onset of the war, and the German army had deliberately set fire to the building with explosive chemicals and prevented anyone from trying to save the library or to enter it to retrieve manuscripts or books. (The 'rumour,' which Hobhouse repeated in her letter, apparently arose from Jesuit fathers removing books from a nearby library and taking them in carts to the railway station. Seeing the books going through the streets, some Leuven citizens mistakenly imagined they were from the university library.)[24]

On the following two days, *The Times* published separate responses from Henri Davignon, secretary of the Belgian inquiry, and a Leuven professor. The latter criticised Hobhouse's acceptance of the German version of events in Leuven, which bore 'a striking resemblance' to Bennett's article published more than a year earlier, which he had already rebutted in print. Moreover, he insinuated that Hobhouse, in writing that 'the roof of the cathedral caught fire,' implied, as did Bennett, that the Germans had not deliberately set fire to the structure.[25] Davignon also cited 'echoes' of this German influence in Hobhouse's description and reiterated 'facts' that the Belgian and Bryce commissions had well established. He particularly stressed the systematic torching of several parts of the town, including the library and the cathedral, which 'was set on fire by the roof … and in the interior by means of piles of chairs.' The town hall, he noted, was spared only because the German military authorities were staying there. The fires, lasting three days, destroyed 1,120 houses because the German authorities prohibited any efforts to save them.[26] When Hobhouse replied that Davignon's figure of 1,120 houses destroyed amounted to about one-eighth of the town and thus substantiated her own figures,[27] he responded in turn that a Catholic cleric had asserted that 'a third of the built area was destroyed'. In any case, he continued, 'the burnt, destroyed, and pillaged [section] was the most prosperous of the town'.[28]

From her experience in the Boer War, Hobhouse understood that her first-hand impressions casting doubt on Allied perceptions would not suffice by themselves to convince readers and might even result in more vigorous denials, so she intertwined her remarks with expressions of her humanitarian motives and sympathy for the suffering Belgians. Indeed, her first published comment about her Belgian adventure was a long letter to the *Daily News*, which explained the critical food shortage in Belgium and implored Britons to contribute funds to Herbert Hoover's relief commission, which was distributing food to the unfortunate Belgian citizenry.[29] She subsequently lamented how bad the German occupation of Belgium was and how British citizens should support financially humanitarian aid to that country. These sentiments may have made her sound more reasonable but did not seem to soften the strong objections to her reporting.

However, Hobhouse had supporters who rallied to her side. *The Herald*, a prominent anti-war Labour Party-supporting newspaper, reprinted her account of her visit to Belgium and declared it a direct refutation of the Bryce report.[30] The escalating controversy reached the halls of Parliament in the early autumn of 1916, with her detractors claiming that she had obtained her passport under false pretences, since her purpose from the outset was always to try to visit German-occupied lands. More seriously, they charged her with actions bordering on treason. They publicly expressed concerns only about her excursion into Germany, but they were surely aware and disapproved of her visit to Belgium too, and her subsequent reports on conditions there. Her supporters claimed, however, that her trip was not premeditated but had been undertaken on the spur of the moment and that she had broken no laws.[31] Surmising that the evidence against her was not watertight, the Attorney General, Sir Frederick Smith, did not indict her. He may have believed that the prosecution of a well-known woman who had influential political friends might make her a *cause célèbre* in Britain. The early autumn of 1916 was a very tense time, with the staggering and still escalating French and British military losses at Verdun and the Somme, and a sensational trial might undermine the nation's commitment to the war effort. Instead, in November 1916 the British government hoped to prevent further private peace missions by issuing an amendment to the Defence of the Realm Act, which henceforth prohibited citizens from entering enemy territory without official permission.

Hobhouse, for her part, denied that she had had any intention of visiting Germany and Belgium until she reached Switzerland on her way back to Britain in mid-1916, and she went on to assert that she had gone there 'quite simply and openly, contravening no law; I went under my own name with a "humanitarian pass", in the interests of truth, peace and humanity; and I am proud and thankful to have done so.'[32]

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Was Hobhouse's reporting on Leuven accurate? Since the Great War, much more has been written about the events of late August 1914 in that town, but until World War II, Germany mostly continued to deny atrocities by its army in Belgium in 1914. Finally, however, in 1958, a Belgian-German committee of historians exposed the selection and suppression of evidence on Leuven presented in the German White Book.[33] Then, thirty years later, a German historian contributed a monograph focused specifically on the destruction of the university library in both world wars as well as the rebuilding efforts after each one.[34]

The fascination with the German actions in Belgium continued in 2001, when two historians published a compelling study of German atrocities and destruction throughout Belgium. They argued that the White Book was an attempted cover-up of German war crimes, and they provided evidence that Leuven's citizens offered no resistance to the German occupiers, who nonetheless proceeded to go on a rampage, terrorising, even summarily executing, many innocent citizens. These historians advanced various reasons for the German

The ruins of Leuven in 1914

behaviour: stories of French *francs-tireurs* who had severely harassed the occupying German troops in the earlier Franco-Prussian War and the German soldiers' easy (though erroneous) assumption in August 1914 that the Belgians must have similar guerrilla units in place; very jittery (and sometimes drunken) German soldiers retreating to Leuven from a counter-attack by the Belgian army; the hostility of the German Protestant-dominated units to the university, a Catholic institution run by prominent clergy and professors; and friendly fire incidents, which the Germans interpreted as coming from Belgian guerrillas. 'Everything points to a major panic,' they wrote, 'in which the German soldiers ran riot.' They also concluded that the German army deliberately set fire to parts of Leuven, including the university library, and that about one-sixth of the city was destroyed.[35] (For her one-eighth estimate, Hobhouse had written, 'I use, of course, approximate figures.'[36]) More recently, at least two other books have focused on German atrocities in Belgium, one specifically devoted to the destruction and rebuilding of Leuven.[37]

Hobhouse's account of the physical destruction of Leuven was mostly accurate; what was controversial was her interpretation of its causes and consequences. Predisposed to believe in reconciliation, she downplayed explanations that would depict German behaviour at its worst. In writing that the fire had spread to the cathedral, for instance, she implied that the Germans had not deliberately set it ablaze. Indeed, after the war she would relate with approval the explanation a young German army captain had given her during her visit to Leuven that it was a Belgian citizens' uprising that had set in motion the events leading to the destruction of the library and cathedral.[38] The evidence is very strong, however, that the destruction of both the library and cathedral were deliberate, calculated actions undertaken by the German army, which also resisted residents' attempts to extinguish the raging fires.[39] And if the flames did not irreparably damage the main part of the cathedral, as she wrote, the reason was that a stone structure with very high ceilings was difficult to burn to the ground. She may have actually witnessed the 'invaders' and 'invaded' worshipping together in the re-roofed and boarded-off part of the cathedral, but after nearly two years the occupied residents would probably have come to an uneasy accommodation with their occupiers. In any event, it is hard to accept the implication of Germans and Belgians living together in a reconciled community.

She was also not forthright in revealing the restrictions Germany placed on her visit. In particular, since the German military officer accompanying her seemed to enforce the prohibition against her speaking with the local residents, one wonders about the sources and veracity of the 'rumour,' 'hearsay,' and 'stories' she recounted that seemed to mollify the worst effects of the German presence in Belgium.[40] Only years later, for example, did she relate to her friendly biographer that a young German officer had been a principal source for the destructive events in Leuven.[41]

Hobhouse's participation in the controversy over the destruction of Leuven, though relatively brief, offers a small window into the larger question of 'war guilt,' which the victorious Allies imposed on Germany in the Treaty of Versailles at the end of the war. Just as post-war German governments never really accepted that verdict in the treaty, so did they continue to deny excesses by German troops in Belgium. Some of the Allied claims against German behaviour in Belgium were indeed exaggerated, however, and Hobhouse's reporting was a useful admonition against quick acceptance of the most vitriolic condemnations of Germany's actions. At her best, she wanted to know the truth, but some of her assertions made her seem an apologist, if not an outright propagandist, for the German position.

Emily Hobhouse died in 1926, and it is interesting to speculate about what she would have thought if she had lived to see the post-World War II confirmation of Germany's culpable behaviour in Belgium in August 1914.

Hobhouse's reporting was a useful admonition against quick acceptance of the most vitriolic condemnations of Germany's actions. At her best, she wanted to know the truth, but some of her assertions made her seem an apologist, if not an outright propagandist, for the German position.

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1 Biographical details of Hobhouse and her family and her wanderings in 1915–16 for this paper are drawn from A. Ruth Fry, *Emily Hobhouse: A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929); John Fisher, *That Miss Hobhouse* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1971); Jennifer Hobhouse Balme, *To Love One's Enemies: The Work and Life of Emily Hobhouse Compiled from Letters and Writings, Newspaper Cuttings, and Official Documents* (Cobble Hill, Canada: Hobhouse Trust, 1994); and John Hall, *That Bloody Woman: The Turbulent Life of Emily Hobhouse* (Truro: Truran, 2008). Also see John V. Crangle and Joseph O. Baylen, 'Emily Hobhouse's Peace Mission, 1916,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14 (October 1979), pp. 731–44. Except for quotations from these sources, they are not cited below. Some of my conclusions are in David S. Patterson, *The Search for Negotiated Peace: Women's Activism and Citizen Diplomacy in World War I* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 241–55, *passim*.

2 See in particular John E. Owen, *L. T. Hobhouse: Sociologist* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1974).

3 Quoted in Fry, *Emily Hobhouse*, p. 267.

4 Quoted in Balme, *To Love One's Enemies*, p. 546.

5 Hobhouse did not publicly identify Jagow by name; but he was the 'high official' in the German government in her article, which summarised her interview with him. See Hobhouse, 'A German Official's View of Peace,' *The Nation* (London), 26 (October 21, 1916), pp. 113–14.

6 *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 17, 1914, p. 1. An Associated Press account, presumably by Roger Lewis and mostly corroborating Bennett's report, is ibid., p. 5.

Leuven was the Flemish name for the town, while the French name was Louvain. Bennett's quotation above and all subsequent ones herein used the French name, but I have changed the spelling to the Flemish Leuven, putting it in brackets to show the substitution, since Leuven is the commonly accepted name today among its residents.

7 *La Violation du Droit des Gens en Belgique* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1915). An English translation is Official Commission of the Belgian Government, *Reports on the Violation of the Rights of Nations and of the Laws and Customs of War in Belgium* (2 vols., London: Harrison [1915]).

8 *The German Army in Belgium: The White Book of May 1915*, translated by E. N. Bennett (London: Swarthmore Press [1921]), *passim* (quotations on p. xvi). The foreword to this postwar edition gives the impression that it was a rebuttal to the Bryce report. That was easily believed – and Hobhouse may have assumed that was the case too -- because the Bryce document supported many of the findings of the Belgian commission. But neither the German nor British report contained any references to the other. An abridged English version was published in the United States under the title, *The Belgian People's War: A Violation of International Law. Translations from the Official German White Book, Published by the Imperial Foreign Office* (New York: John C. Rankin [1915]).

9 The Bryce commission's careful methodology included discounting emotional witnesses who might be prone to exaggeration and distortion, interviews of presumably more objective witnesses from neutral countries, and descriptions from the diaries recovered from German soldiers.

10 *Committee on Alleged German Atrocities: Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages Appointed by His Britannic Majesty's Government* (London: Harrison [1915]). Hereafter *Bryce Report*. The appendix is titled *Evidence and Documents Laid Before the Committee on Alleged German Outrages* (London: Harrison [1915]). Hereafter *Bryce Report, Evidence and Documents*.

11 *Réponse au Livre Blanc Allemand du May 1915: 'Die Volkerrechtswidrige Führung des Belgischen Volkskriegs'* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1916).

12 Hobhouse probably received the German text of the White Book, as the abridged English version published in the United States (see footnote 8 above) was probably not yet available. She could not read German but could have had parts of it translated for her, and she may have read reports of it in the Swiss press.

13 Quotation in Fisher, *That Miss Hobhouse*, p. 248.

14 The fullest report of her Belgian visit is Emily Hobhouse, 'Belgium Today,' *The U.D.C.*, 1 (October 1916), pp. 132–34 (quotation on p. 133). *U.D.C.* was the newsletter of the Union of Democratic Control, a British group promoting neutral mediation of the war and post-war international reform. Hobhouse was probably a member and in any case knew many of its Liberal and Labour leaders. Her *U.D.C.* article did not seem to stir up public controversy, perhaps because it was read almost entirely by Britons who sympathised with her anti-war views, and it is cited here and in other footnotes below on occasion to amplify her views that were published in British newspapers.

15 *German Army in Belgium*, pp. xviii, 192–282 (quotations on p. xviii); and *Belgian People's War*, pp. 91–135.

16 *Bryce Report*, pp. 29–36; *Bryce Report, Evidence and Documents*, pp. 130–61. The report also featured German excessive actions in other Belgian towns – for example, Dinant and Tamines. Another interesting eye-witness account was that of Hugh Gibson, secretary of the American Legation in Brussels, who visited Leuven on the afternoon of August 28, 1914, or three days after the fighting and destruction began in the town. Besides recounting the continuing 'reign of terror' there and his own harrowing experiences, he suspended judgment of how the violence started, but cited several examples of the Germans' systematic destruction of parts of the town and their violent actions, which they freely admitted to him and continued long after the row started. These facts, in his view, 'would seem to place the burden of proof on them rather than on the Belgians'. His account was subsequently published in *A Journal from our Legation in Belgium* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, 1917), pp. 154–72 (quotations on p. 167).

17 *New York Times*, January 17, 1915, p. 4, and May 18, 1915, p. 3; London *Times*, October 3, 1916, p. 9.

18 Ibid., March 29, 1915, p. 5; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 11, 1915, p. 2; *New York Times*, June 4, 1915, p. 10.

19 For that matter, none of the later secondary sources (see footnotes 33–35 and 37 below) ventured to provide even approximate figures on the number of casualties. Part of the problem was that many of the Leuven citizens became refugees who died elsewhere in the course of their exodus from the town or were picked up by the Germans and shipped to German prison camps. And the German army was not motivated to keep an accurate tally of their Belgian victims.

20 *The Times*, October 3, 1916, p. 9.

21 In the *U.D.C.* publication, she responded: 'That the *Library* was destroyed is true; that it was wantonly destroyed is almost certainly untrue; that [Leuven] itself was destroyed is false.' 'Belgium Today,' p. 133 (emphasis Hobhouse).

22 *The Times*, October 18, 1916, p. 7. In the *U.D.C.* article, she added that 'The 6,000 absent included men serving in the Belgian Army.' And regarding worshippers in the cathedral, she effused, 'Here I drew aside and watched while Belgian citizens and German soldiers knelt side by side in prayer. I came across many similar instances of good feeling elsewhere between the German common soldiers and the Belgian peasantry. That sight bore within it the germs of the future, and I felt it would live longer in my memory than anything else I had seen in Louvain. I gathered a few jewels from the dust here also, and stole away feeling that the possibility of universal brotherhood still lives.' She also reiterated, 'One hopes there may be foundation for the rumour that some of the more precious manuscripts were put in safety.' 'Belgium Today,' p. 133.

23 *The Times*, October 18, 1916, p. 7.

24 The Leuven professor's letter had been earlier published, ibid., November 18, 1915, p. 11. In her *U.D.C.* report, Hobhouse wrote, 'Stories abound as to the origin of this fire [that destroyed the library], a disaster not at all surprising with burning houses near at hand, and a pile of tents and canvasses belonging to the booths of the market folk.' Her implication that a single fire spread to the library because of flammable materials and structures nearby spared Germany of direct responsibility. She also withheld judgment on the cause of the fire until the end of the war when 'evidence can be brought by eye-witnesses from each side.' 'Belgium Today,' p. 133.

25 *The Times*, October 20, 1916, p. 9.

26 Ibid., October 19, 1916, p. 9.

27 Ibid., October 20, 1916, p. 9.

28 Ibid., October 21, 1916, p. 11.

29 *Daily News and Leader*, September 15, 1916, p. 4. Fry, *Emily Hobhouse*, p. 274, quotes from an article by Hobhouse on Hoover's commission, which she says was published in the *Daily News* on September 4, 1916, but this earlier article was not found there.

30 *The Herald*, October 21, 1916, p. 3. Moreover, in a preface to her report in the *U.D.C.*, the editor complained that the British people were not allowed to see Germany's publication of the Belgian events and touted her 'clear and impartial narrative,' which showed that there could be 'another side' to the horror stories presented in the Bryce report.

31 For the discussion in the House of Commons, see *Parliamentary Debates*, Fifth Series, 86,

cols. 1270–71, 1493–94, 1697, 1745–47; and ibid., 87, col. 942. Generous quotations from the debate are reproduced in Fisher, *That Miss Hobhouse*, pp. 254–59.

32 *The Times*, November 13, 1916, p. 9. A biographer who was a friend of Hobhouse later wrote, however, that she had 'long determined' to visit Germany. Fry, *Emily Hobhouse*, p. 276. Lord Leonard Courtney tried to make the best of a delicate issue when he remarked in the House of Lords that 'the intention of going to Germany did not exist in her mind at all when she started for Italy. If it did exist it lay there very dormant all the winter and through the early spring months.' It is probable that she long envisioned such a visit, but did not see how it could be done until she reached Switzerland on her way back from Italy. Fisher, *That Miss Hobhouse*, pp. 257–58 (quotation on p. 257).

33 The German committee members agreed that the events in Leuven would suffice as representative of German actions in Belgium in 1914. The result was *Der Fall Löwen und das Weissbuch: Eine Kritische Untersuchung der Deutschen Dokumentation über die Vorgänge in Löwen vom 25. bis 28. August 1914* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1958), by Peter Schöller, an assistant to the German committee chairman. This history exposed the German White Book as a cover-up, and the introductory essay by another German member concluded with an apology to Leuven and its citizens. The Belgian members found the book complete and requiring no further study.

34 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Die Bibliothek von Löwen: Eine Episode aus der Zeit der Weltkriege* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1988). I am grateful to Peter van den Dungen for this reference.

35 John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 38–42, *passim* (quotation on p. 40).

36 *The Times*, October 20, 1916, p. 9.

37 Marika Ceunen and Piet Veldeman, eds., *Aan Onze Helden en Martelaren: Belden van de Brand van Leuven (Augustus 1914)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), which contains much illustrative material (posters, documents, photographs); and Jeff Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), which offers some revisions of the Horne-Kramer interpretations. Interestingly, none of these post-World War II books mentioned Hobhouse's descriptions of Belgium in 1916 or the controversy surrounding them.

38 In the officer's account, a rocket was fired as a Belgian signal to begin firing on the German troops. During the ensuing fighting, the library caught fire and the Germans, upon entering the building, could find no fire extinguishers or the custodian. In consequence, '[t]he books caught quickly and nothing could be done,' she concluded. And from his recounting, she continued, 'Unfortunately as the flames streamed into the sky the wind blew the sparks across to the roof of the Cathedral, which also caught.' She also accepted his explanation that he ordered a few adjacent houses blown up to prevent the fire spreading to the town hall and personally rescued a valuable painting from the cathedral. Fry, *Emily Hobhouse*, pp. 272–73.

39 In her *U.D.C.* article, Hobhouse had written in a parenthetical aside, as if only hearsay: '(Strenuous efforts were made to subdue the flames, in which Belgians and Germans worked together.)' 'Belgium Today,' p. 133.

40 Only in her *U.D.C.* article (ibid., p. 132) did she mention her 'escort' and then without further identification. In her writings about her trip, she reported two conversations she was able to have with Belgian residents. One was with a verger in a church in Malines (Mecherin) about the fate of a Rubens painting displayed there before the war. Ibid., p. 133. Another was with a manager of a soup kitchen in Brussels when she was accompanied by another German guide who was not fluent in English and did not enforce the prohibition. London *Daily News*, September 15, 1916, p. 4 (recounted with additional details in Fry, *Emily Hobhouse*, pp. 274–75). She apparently never made public the restrictions on her speech, which were first revealed after her death in Ruth Fry's biography of her.

41 See footnote 38 above.

REVIEWS

The man who sold the honours

Andrew Cook, *Cash for Honours: The Story of Maundy Gregory* (The History Press, 2008)
Reviewed by **Duncan Brack**

Who was Maundy Gregory? Most *Journal* readers probably know little more than the fact that he was the man who sold the honours that raised the money for the Lloyd George Fund. Now Andrew Cook, a historian and author of, among other books, *Ace of Spies: The True Story of Sidney Reilly*, has written his biography, drawing on newly available sources including family papers.

Cook has done a thorough job. Arthur John Maundy Gregory was born in 1877, the second son of an Anglican vicar in Southampton. After school he began to study theology at Oxford, but his real love lay in the theatre, and after his father's death in 1899 he gave up university for a precarious career as drawing-room entertainer, actor and stage and theatre manager. By 1909, however, he had abandoned it, leaving his backers to meet substantial losses. After disappearing for a year, he resurfaced as editor of a weekly society magazine called *Mayfair and Town Topics*, which generated revenue largely from fees from nouveau-riche industrialists seeking to make their way into society and keen to see 'man of the day' pieces appear about themselves.

This proved not only a more successful financial venture than the theatre, it also gave Gregory the opportunity to make connections. Building up a network of contacts among hotel managers and staff, well aware of social indiscretions, he started a sideline career as a private investigator and – possibly – blackmailer.

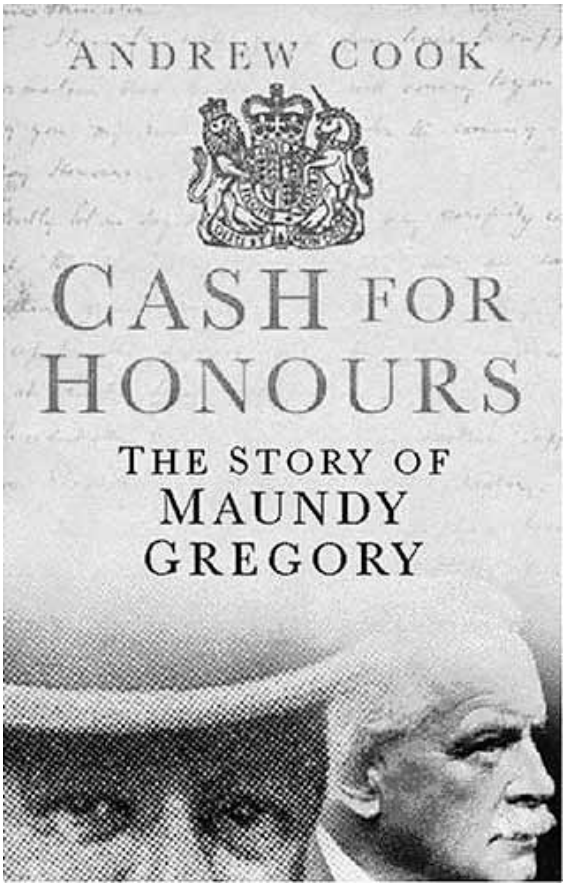
Cook also claims – though without providing any sources – that Gregory started to sell honours on behalf of the Liberal Whip Percy Illingworth. The cash-for-honours system was by then well established, but Cook argues that Asquith's government exploited it so blatantly that 'it threatened to bring the ruling class into disrepute' (p. 27). He implies on the same page that this was connected with the list of names Asquith drew up in 1910 in the expectation that he would have to create enough new Liberal peers to overcome the Tory opposition first to the 'People's Budget' and then to the Parliament Bill – again without providing any evidence. In fact Asquith's government did raise substantial sums in sales of honours, largely because of the expenses of the two 1910 elections, but this was not regarded at the time as especially unusual.

After the outbreak of war in 1914, Gregory offered his information to Special Branch, probably in the hope of payment, and in 1917 he applied for a job with MI5, in the hope of avoiding being called up. Cook repeats one MI5 officer's rather splendid assessment: 'I was very unfavourably impressed by him … He is not a "Sahib", and he is evidently talkative, boastful etc. …' (p. 47). In the end he joined the Irish Guards, but does not seem to have seen active service.

After the war Gregory was approached by Alick Murray (otherwise known as the Master of Elibank, Liberal Chief Whip 1910–12 and something of a kindred spirit, with a love of intrigue and a taste for wealthy and slightly raffish company) to act as an intermediary in the sale of honours for Lloyd George's Coalition Liberal party; in exchange he was to be paid a retainer plus a percentage of the purchase price for the honours. Operating ostensibly as the editor of a new paper, the *Whitehall Gazette and St James' Review*, he set up an office in Parliament Street, from which he operated the trade in honours. As usual, hard evidence of Gregory's precise role in individual sales is largely lacking, so the author supplies a fictional account of how he operated, and repeats what is known about the activity, and the general political background.

What is known is certainly dramatic. The Lloyd George Fund was ultimately to top £4 million, equivalent to about £130 million today. Going rates were £10,000 for a knighthood £30,000 for a baronetcy, and £50,000–100,000 for a peerage (multiply by 33 for today's prices). Gregory used his commission to subsidise a lavish lifestyle, buy properties including the Ambassador Club in Soho and Deepdene Hotel in Surrey (which he allegedly used for gathering gossip about the sex lives of contemporary celebrities) and throw parties for prominent members of society.

The end began to come in sight when Lloyd George



annoyed his coalition partners by retaining control of the Fund personally and by using the award (or the sale) of honours to poach Unionist supporters, and annoyed the King because of the character of many of those ennobled. Despite mounting parliamentary and press criticism, Lloyd George and the Unionist leader Austen Chamberlain doggedly refused to establish a public enquiry. This contributed to the political crisis of October 1922, when the Unionists decided to withdraw from the Coalition, overthrowing both Lloyd George and Chamberlain in the process.

The following year, under a new government, the Royal Commission on Honours reported, recommending that all names included on an honours list should be accompanied by a statement from the Prime Minister 'that no payment to a political fund was associated with the recommendation' (p. 111). Such a complete end to the old system was not particularly welcome to the new Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, and legislation was delayed for two years. And in the end the 1925 Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act left a number of loopholes and made the person who had paid money in the expectation of an honour liable to prosecution along with the official or middleman who had sold the honour. As Cook observes, this provision effectively deterred recipients from ever admitting what had happened.

Although Gregory's role diminished substantially after Lloyd George's departure from office, he continued to take payments, often in advance of honours that were never in the end awarded. In 1932, however, he tried to sell Lieutenant Commander Billyard-Leake a knighthood, or baronetcy, for £12,000. Leake was not interested but strung him along and informed the authorities. In February 1933 Gregory was charged under the Honours Act. After some initial blustering, he eventually pleaded guilty, possibly being persuaded to do so by the Conservative Party to avoid revealing embarrassing details in court, or possibly as a plea bargain in order to avoid a long prison sentence. In the end he was fined £50 plus 50 guineas costs, and gaoled for two months. He remains the only person ever to have been convicted under the 1925 Act.

Maundy Gregory remains the only person ever to have been convicted under the 1925 Honours (Prevention of Abuses) Act.

Gregory faced the possibility of a further enquiry over the death of Edith Rosse, an actress and friend who had altered her will in his favour a few days before her death. The enquiry was delayed, however, until after his release from gaol and flight to France, and in the end, although Rosse's body was exhumed on suspicion of poisoning, nothing could be proved. Cook hints that Gregory was being protected, but, as usual, fails to supply any evidence.

Gregory lived the rest of his life in France, receiving a pension, probably from the Conservative Party, on condition that he revealed nothing about his past. He kept his side of the bargain, and eventually died in September 1941 after being interned after the German invasion.

The main problem with *Cash for Honours* is that there is simply not enough known about Gregory – or not enough of interest, at any rate – to fill a decent-sized book, and too many details – such as the names of those who paid for honours – have never been revealed. The author is therefore forced repeatedly to revert to speculation about what might have happened. Worse, he speculates at considerable length about things that Gregory might have been involved in, but almost certainly was not, including the forging of Roger Casement's diaries in order to discredit him as a closet homosexual, the still unexplained disappearance of the one-time Independent Labour Party MP and suspected Soviet spy Victor Grayson in 1920 (to which an entire chapter is devoted), and the forged Zinoviev Letter of 1924, used to discredit the first Labour government.

Similarly, extensive but often essentially irrelevant details are provided about Gregory's acquaintances and contemporaries and general political developments; an awful lot of the text is basically padding. Combined with the author's prolix style this makes the book an uphill struggle to read. But for anyone wanting to find out what is known about Maundy Gregory, his life and career and involvement with the honours scandal behind the Lloyd George Fund, it is a highly useful source.

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

Northern Liberal

Alan Beith, *A View from the North* (Northumbria University Press, 2008)

Reviewed by **Michael Meadowcroft**

I HAVE AN immense personal regard for Alan Beith and for his long years of service to the cause of Liberalism. Following the miseries of the merger negotiations and vote, I believed that the only chance for the Liberal cause to be safeguarded was for Alan to become the leader of the new party. It needed someone who not only was an instinctive Liberal but who also knew Liberal history and had the intellectual depth, plus the tactical skills, to keep the party relatively sound, despite its social democratic component. Consequently, in the summer of 1988 I campaigned for him to become leader of the new party. Had he succeeded it would have been impossible to have remained outside the party. That didn't happen, alas, and it has taken a somewhat long and winding road to be back in the same party.

His chapter on Liberal philosophy and beliefs, included deliberately to give positive reasons why Liberals and Liberal Democrats continue to put such time and energy into a cause

which provides so little political return but which is so fundamentally important to the kind of society that is in harmony with human talents and aspirations, is an excellent exposition. Russell Johnston's perorations made the same points in magical language that sent one out to continue the unequal struggle with renewed vigour; Alan Beith chooses to set out the case in measured terms that are equally needed and no less persuasive.

Not least from his decade as Chief Whip Alan knows more than most where the bodies are buried and has been privy to many of the internal party torments. I therefore grabbed his autobiography hot from the press, so to speak, pausing only to check the letter M in the index, in order to delve into the key passages. Alas, most of my hopes that this would be a key work of autobiographical political reference remain unfulfilled. There are certainly some valuable expositions but in most cases Alan remains too polite and skates over important issues. In that sense this is only a partial contribution to Liberal history.

I suspect that Alan himself did not intend it to be primarily a political work. It is much more the story of a personal voyage, illustrated from his political life, written for a wide circle of friends, and, as such it very much succeeds. He writes well and his recounting of the deaths of his wife, Barbara, and then his son, Chris, are movingly done with no mawkish sentiment but with an open heart and a willingness to share on the page feelings which Alan understandably largely kept to himself whilst having to maintain a public presence.

As it happens, whilst I was Alan's deputy whip, I had evidence of the decency of John Major, who was then a government whip, on this matter. Major and I were whipping an environment bill on the floor of the House – report stage, I think – and John approached me: 'I understand that Alan's son is rather ill.' 'That's right,' I responded. 'Well, let us adjourn the House early so that he can go home.' The whole parliamentary process came to a halt so that a single Member could go home to a sick child. It wouldn't happen often but even one example deserves recognition.

Alan also writes very directly of his Christian beliefs and the simple linking of that faith with his personal tragedies contributes to the whole picture of him as an individual. No one, on any side of politics, could be other than delighted with his recent relationship and marriage to Diana Maddock. He also mentions his musical background – trumpet-playing – and his linguistic skills – Norwegian and Welsh!

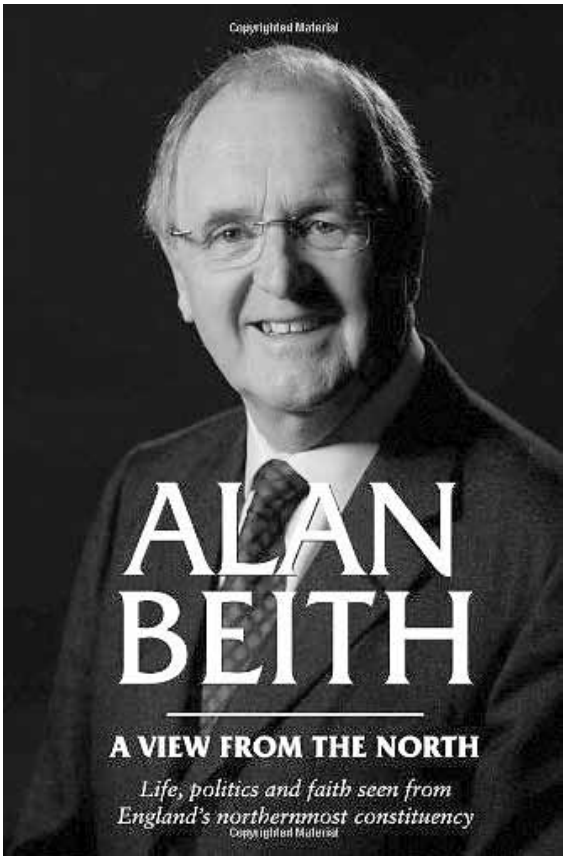
There are some tantalising political tidbits. I do not recall seeing before the detail of the Parliamentary Party vote in favour of Jeremy Thorpe resigning the party leadership after the Scott allegations becoming public. Incidentally, Alan is wrong in saying that 'Richard Wainwright made public his insistence that Jeremy should go.' That certainly was the message between the lines of Richard's BBC Radio Leeds interview but his actual statement was that Thorpe must sue for libel or face the implications of not doing.

On the Lib-Lab Pact Beith writes that 'with a confidence motion coming up, Callaghan approached the Liberals', whereas the received truth has always been that Cyril Smith made the initial approach to Callaghan and that Cledwyn Hughes followed it up with Steel. Beith makes no comment on the background to David Steel's failure to make Callaghan insist on a whipped Labour vote on proportional representation for the European elections on 1979. Both David Owen and Chris Mayhew believed that Labour's determination to retain power would have made them accept a whipped vote had Steel insisted on it.

Beith's account of the Alliance includes no comment on the background to the Liberal by-election victory in October 1981 at Croydon North West where David Steel's crass attempt to bounce Shirley Williams into the nomination there highlighted his failure to woo Bill Pitt and the Liberal Party into giving way – a course of action that might have been achieved with the right tactics. He does, however, hint that he was in favour of Steel formally taking over from Jenkins as leader of the Alliance campaign at the Ettrick Bridge meeting in the middle of the 1983 general election campaign.

Beith's account of the facts relating to David Steel's purported 'sabbatical' at the start of the 1983 parliament are, I think, put on the record for the first time. Only a few of us, mainly those of us in the Whips' Office, knew that Steel had formally resigned as leader. Beith states that he still has the resignation letter 'which I retrieved from the Party President, John Griffiths'. I'll bet John kept a photocopy. Amazingly the press never cottoned on to this story – yet another 'what if' occasion.

Commenting on David Penhaligon's tragic death in a car accident just before Christmas 1986, Beith tells of his closeness with Penhaligon and of the eventual problem of how, if at all, they could both compete for the party leadership. I was unaware that the two of them were so close and completely oblivious to the fact that they were both already making their



dispositions on a future leadership contest. It would have been yet another case of the need for a combination of the diverse and very different talents of two key protagonists!

Beith's treatment of the 1986 defence debate at the Liberal Party's Eastbourne Assembly is unsatisfactory. It is a longer story than can be dealt with in a book review and, fortunately, there are two accounts available: mine in *Journal of Liberal History*, No 18, spring 1998 (and on my website http://www.bramley.demon.co.uk/liberal.html 'Alliance – Parties and Leaders') and in *Radical Quarterly*, No 5, autumn 1987. Suffice to say here that Beith's implication that the political debacle was caused by 'the presence within the Liberal Party of a substantial minority of unilateralist views' is incorrect. The eventual post-Assembly fudge, which I introduced into a Commons debate in December 1986, was almost identical in its essence to a draft Assembly motion put to the Policy Committee in advance by William Wallace and rejected by David Steel who wanted, fatally, to go for the high-wire act.

Beith regards the account of the merger negotiations in Rachael Pitchford's and Tony Greaves' book, *Merger – The Inside Story*, as 'fairly accurate.' By and large Alan Beith's role within the negotiations was as a solid and dependable Liberal colleague, and was an important antidote to Steel's wayward and undependable role, but he fails to mention that at the key moment when John Grant resigned from the SDP team and then Bob Maclennan walked out saying he couldn't go on – to the surprise of his own colleagues, who were forced to follow him rather sheepishly – it was Alan who asked the Liberal team, 'What can we give them to get them back to the table?' It was a moment when the Liberal team could have ensured that there was a formula that would have retained party unity, and it muffed it. Ironically Beith approvingly quotes Willie Goodhart, a key SDP team member, as saying that 'the SDP team's more effective negotiating skill enabled [it] to win battles which it would have been better for [them] to lose'.

His chapter on Liberal philosophy and beliefs, included deliberately to give positive reasons why Liberals and Liberal Democrats continue to put such time and energy into a cause which provides so little political return but which is so fundamentally important to the kind of society that is in harmony with human talents and aspirations, is an excellent exposition.

Beith's comments on the subsequent leadership contest are interesting: 'There was no way David Steel could win Liberal support to lead the new party … [H]e had acquired far too much unwelcome baggage in the merger negotiations, and his mishandling over the policy document was the last straw, *particularly for many of his parliamentary colleagues*' [my italics]. Those of us who had been conscious of similar political weaknesses in our esteemed leader for many years, and who had struggled to keep the party united in the face of much provocation, would have welcomed parliamentary party action much earlier.

He is very loyal to Paddy Ashdown as leader, and recognises his later leadership skills, but makes the accurate comment that 'he might not have won the leadership under the old system, in which only the MPs had votes'. Alan makes it clear that, as Deputy Leader, he knew of the Ashdown 'project' with Blair and that he was relaxed about it, not least because he 'thought that the coalition was never going to happen'.

All in all, this is a biography worth reading for its humanity and for its occasional political *aperçus*, but it is not for those who expect to find the insider view on the past thirty years of Liberal history.

Michael Meadowcroft joined the Liberal Party in 1958. He has been a full-time party official and a national officer. He was a Leeds City Councillor, a West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Councillor and, from 1983–87, MP for Leeds West. He has written extensively on Liberal philosophy and history.

Eight case studies of notorious political rivals

John Campbell, *Pistols at Dawn: Two Hundred Year of Political Rivalry, from Pitt and Fox to Blair and Brown* (Jonathan Cape, 2009)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

John Campbell first made his (indelible) mark as the author of *Lloyd George: the Goat in the Wilderness, 1922–31* (1977), a groundbreaking study of Lloyd George's declining years which has well stood the test of time. Subsequently he has published a masterly, well-received clutch of political biographies, of Lord Birkenhead (1983), Roy Jenkins (1983), Aneurin Bevan (1986), the award-winning study of Ted Heath (1993), and Margaret Thatcher (two volumes, 2000 and 2003). His most recent work, *If Love Were All: the Story of Frances Stevenson and David Lloyd George* (2006) (reviewed in *Journal* 52, autumn 2006), was the ultimate detailed account of Lloyd George's intense relationship with his mistress of thirty years' standing. As a full-time writer, the author is especially well-placed to produce these magisterial tomes.

For the present book Campbell presents his readership with eight notorious case studies of political rivalry – from Charles James Fox and William Pitt the Younger in the late eighteenth century to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown in very recent years. In this last chapter he comes close to writing the 'instant history' so beloved of many contemporary historians. Whereas in *If Love Were All* the author went to enormous lengths to quarry all the relevant primary source materials, in this book he relies mainly on secondary works. He makes good use of his own biographies and has read

exhaustively through the rich haul of other sources available. It is notable that in the last chapter on Blair and Brown the range of available source materials is much narrower – at least for the moment.

To the *cognoscenti*, there is little here that is new or highly original; much of the material is familiar, the stories and anecdotes, though gripping, often rehearsed many times previously. But the author's sure-footed, seemingly effortless mastery of the course of British political history over a long period is surely impressive.

Readers of this *Journal* will probably savour most the competent, thorough review of the relationship between Asquith and Lloyd George, the two Liberal Prime Ministers throughout the First World War, a brilliant account which is scrupulously fair to both parties. In spite of their dramatically contrasting backgrounds, it is striking how much they had in common in terms of their political ideas and aspirations. There emerges interesting material on their early lives and political careers, and Asquith's staunch support for his Chancellor's more radical enactments, notably the framing and introduction of the famous 'People's Budget' of 1909 (which could actually be pressed even more). There is also much fascinating material on their roles during the war and their later careers.

Gladstone devotees will also appreciate the chapter on his rivalry with his arch-enemy Benjamin Disraeli. In this section, Campbell follows fairly closely the line of argument advanced by Richard Aldous in his substantial study *The Lion and the Unicorn: Gladstone vs Disraeli* (London, 2006) (reviewed in *Journal* 58, spring 2008). Fascinating material is advanced on their duel over the 1852 Budget (p. 98 ff), when their long-running feud really began, and on Gladstone's record as a reforming Chancellor of the Exchequer, when he introduced a run of no fewer than nine budgets (a record broken only by Gordon Brown between 1997 and 2006), and earned his reputation as a financial reformer.

There are interesting thoughts in this chapter, too, on the Balkan atrocities of the 1870s. The author has an eye for the telling quotation to enliven his writing. Here he quotes Disraeli's private opinion of Gladstone expressed to Lord Derby in October 1876 as 'that unprincipled maniac … [an] extraordinary mixture of envy, vindictiveness, hypocrisy and superstition … never a gentleman' (p. 133). Gladstone and Disraeli probably loathed one another more than any other pairing in the book, and the latter generally had the best lines.

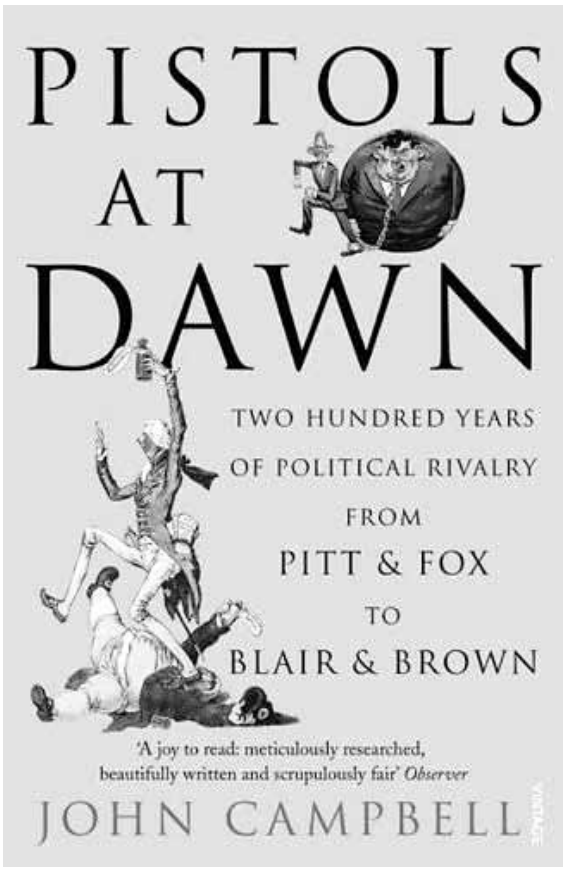
Other readers, especially those interested in eighteenth-century history, will appreciate the material on Charles James Fox, arguably our greatest ever Liberal. Fox, Campbell tells us was nothing but 'an ugly little man – short, swarthy, unkempt and often unwashed [who] drank, gambled and womanised harder than anyone in London, piling up enormous debts which he never paid' (p. 11). On the other hand, in his long-going 'duel' with William Pitt, Fox (although inevitably always destined to lose) proved himself 'a wonderful orator – witty, rhetorical, hyperbolic, capable when roused of whipping up a magnificent storm of indignation' (p. 18).

By far the most striking scene in the book is the account of the actual physical duel fought on 21 September 1809 by two senior cabinet ministers on Putney Heath at 6 a.m. – Lord Castlereagh and George Canning, the Secretary of State for War and Foreign Secretary, both rising stars of the Tory party and key figures in running the war against Napoleon. Four shots were fired and one of the protagonists was hit in the thigh. Here the pair actually tried to kill each other, the high point of a physical rivalry which lasted the whole of their political lives. Years later, their political careers resumed and they sat together around the same cabinet table.

There is much else of interest here too. Perhaps most original is the account of Harold Macmillan's positively ruthless treatment of his arch-rival, the eminently civilised, urbane R. A. Butler whom Macmillan defeated for the premiership in succession to Anthony Eden in 1957. Six years later, 'Supermac' took pains to ensure that Douglas-Home, although not really suited for the position, should succeed him as Premier, rather than Butler, when his health failed and his government had conspicuously run out of steam. Campbell makes especially good use of Macmillan's detailed political diaries between 1959 and 1966, due to be published by Peter Catterall this autumn.

The material on Ted Heath's long-running rivalry with Margaret Thatcher is rather more familiar. Here the author is generally sympathetic to the often luckless Heath, portraying Thatcher's 'successes' as often a continuation of his policies by different means, and pointing up his seminal role in taking Britain into the EEC in 1973, an achievement that may in the long run prove to be more enduring than hers (p. 345).

On the relationship between Blair and Brown, the author is genuinely insightful, even prophetic. Much of what Campbell predicts in his closing paragraphs has come true since he completed his manuscript (pp. 404–05). Evidence has indeed multiplied



A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

THOMAS PAINE AND THE RADICAL LIBERAL TRADITION

To coincide with the publication of the special issue of the *Journal of Liberal History* on 'Liberalism and the Left' (summer 2010), we are delighted to welcome Prof Edward Royle and Dr Edward Vallance to the History Group for an evening focusing on the life, works and influence of Thomas Paine.

In the two centuries since Paine's death, his works and reputation have been both vilified and appropriated by individuals and movements from across the political spectrum. His name has become a touchstone of left-wing and liberal thought, celebrated for the courage of his political vision, even as the specific context of his writings has too often been disregarded. We invite our speakers to consider the continued resonance of Paine's thought and to assess his relevance for radical and liberal activists today.

Speakers: **Edward Royle**, Emeritus Professor, University of York and author of many works on 18th and 19th century history including *Revolutionary Britannia? Reflections on the Threats of Revolution in Britain, 1789–1848* and *Robert Owen and the Commencement of the Millennium: A Study of the Harmony Community*; **Dr Edward Vallance**, University of Roehampton and author of *A Radical History of Britain: Visionaries, Rebels and Revolutionaries – the Men and Women who fought for our Freedom* and The *Glorious Revolution: 1688 – Britain's Fight for Liberty*. Chair: **Dr Richard Grayson**, Head of Politics, Goldsmiths College, guest editor of the 'Liberalism and the Left' special issue of the *Journal* and co-editor of *After the Crash: Reinventing the Left in Britain* and *Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21st Century*.

6.30pm, Monday 12 July 2010
David Lloyd George Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London, SW1A 2HE

of Brown's 'well-intentioned clumsiness, the same leaden inability to communicate' as Ted Heath famously displayed in the 1970s, his fate, too, to be 'an unlucky Prime Minister', possibly 'a 'tail-end' Prime Minister' (ibid.). What Campbell has provided here rather resembles a précis of two authorised biographies. The deal which Blair and Brown made in advance to share the spoils was really a pact with the devil. With less personal ambition they could have made a great team, but for ten years they obstructed each other and wasted the opportunity that a huge majority offered them.

At the end of each chapter, the author summarises his views on the winner of each political contest. He thinks, for example, that Aneurin Bevan lost out to Hugh Gaitskell in the short run, but has won posthumously because he has a monument in the NHS. Especially helpful are the parallel pieces of information often provided in asterisked footnotes which are genuinely helpful as an addendum to the main test. The book is a joy to read: meticulously researched, and scrupulously fair. These eight studies are lively, penetrating, intelligent and, like all Campbell's work, exceptionally well written. At the moment, John Campbell is penning the authorised biography of Roy Jenkins. Like all his books, it is certain to prove an exceptionally rewarding read. One eagerly awaits publication.

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