

# Journal of Liberal

# HISTORY



## Elections 1910 and 2010

Ian Packer

**The 1910 general elections** Turning points in British politics?

---

John Curtice

**The 2010 election** Has the mould of British politics finally cracked?

---

Mark Pack

**The 1910 and 2010 elections** Continuity and change in election campaigning

---

Steve Belzak

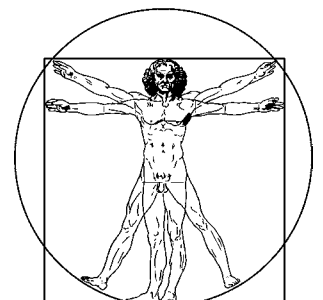
**Swinging in the '60s to the Liberals** Mary Murphy and Pontypridd UDC

---

Jonathan Calder

**Searching for Paddy Logan** Discovering Harborough's Liberal history

---



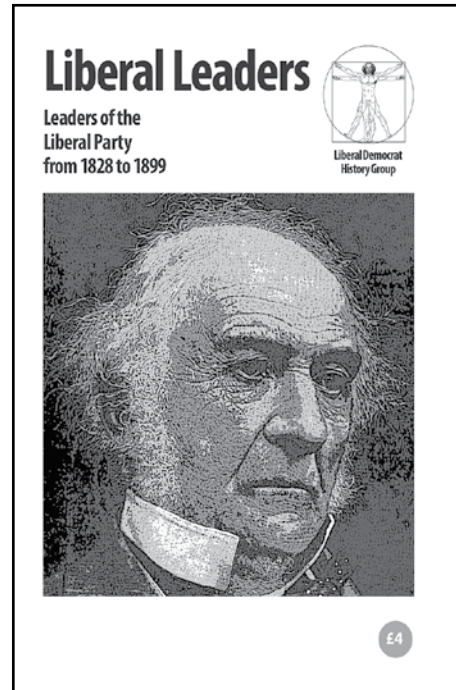
# Liberal Leaders of the Nineteenth Century

The latest publication from the Liberal Democrat History Group is *Liberal Leaders: Leaders of the Liberal Party 1828–1899*.

The forty-page booklet contains concise biographies of every Liberal leader from the Great Reform Act to the end of the nineteenth century – the heyday of the Liberal Party.

The total of eleven biographies stretches from Lord Grey to Sir William Harcourt, including such towering figures as Viscount Melbourne, Lord John Russell, Lord Palmerston and William Ewart Gladstone.

*Liberal Leaders of the Nineteenth Century* is available to *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers for the special price of £3.50 (normal price £4) with free p&p. To order, please send a cheque for £3.50 (made out to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') to LDHG, 38 Salford Road, London SW2 4BQ.

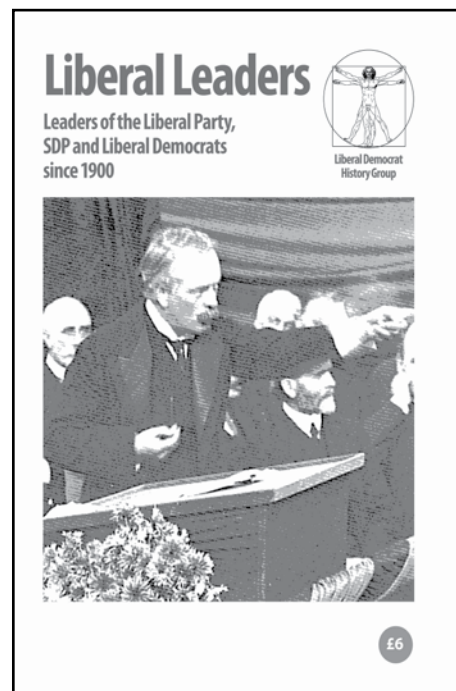


# Liberal Leaders of the Twentieth Century

The companion volume from the Liberal Democrat History Group is *Liberal Leaders: Leaders of the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats since 1900*.

The sixty-page booklet contains concise biographies of every Liberal, Social Democrat and Liberal Democrat leader since 1900. The total of sixteen biographies stretches from Henry Campbell-Bannerman to Nick Clegg, including such figures as H. H. Asquith, David Lloyd George, Jo Grimond, David Steel, David Owen and Paddy Ashdown.

*Liberal Leaders* is available to *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers for the special price of £5 (normal price £6) with free p&p. To order, please send a cheque for £5.00 (made out to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') to LDHG, 38 Salford Road, London SW2 4BQ.



## Journal of Liberal History

The *Journal of Liberal History* is published quarterly by the Liberal Democrat History Group.

ISSN 1479-9642

Editor: **Duncan Brack**

Deputy Editor: **Tom Kiehl**

Assistant Editor: **Siobhan Vitelli**

Biographies Editor: **Robert Ingham**

Reviews Editor: **Dr Eugenio Biagini**

Contributing Editors: **Graham Lippiatt, Tony Little, York Membery**

### Patrons

Dr Eugenio Biagini; Professor Michael Freeden;  
Professor John Vincent

### Editorial Board

Dr Malcolm Baines; Dr Roy Douglas; Dr Barry Doyle; Dr David Dutton; Professor David Gowland; Dr Richard Grayson; Dr Michael Hart; Peter Hellyer; Ian Hunter; Dr J. Graham Jones; Tony Little; Professor Ian Machin; Dr Mark Pack; Dr Ian Packer; Dr John Powell; Ed Randall; Jaime Reynolds; Dr Andrew Russell; Iain Sharpe

### Editorial/Correspondence

Contributions to the *Journal* – letters, articles, and book reviews – are invited. The *Journal* is a refereed publication; all articles submitted will be reviewed. Contributions should be sent to:

**Duncan Brack** (Editor)

38 Salford Road, London SW2 4BQ

email: journal@liberalhistory.org.uk

All articles copyright © *Journal of Liberal History*.

### Advertisements

Full page £100; half page £60; quarter page £35.

Discounts available for repeat ads or offers to readers (e.g. discounted book prices). To place ads, please contact the Editor.

### Subscriptions/Membership

An annual subscription to the *Journal of Liberal History* costs £20.00 (£12.50 unwaged rate). This includes membership of the History Group unless you inform us otherwise. Non-UK subscribers should add £5.00.

The institutional rate is £50.00, which includes online access. As well as printed copies, online subscribers are able to access online copies of current and all past *Journals*. Online subscriptions are also available to individuals at £40.00.

Cheques (payable to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') should be sent to:

**Patrick Mitchell**

6 Palfrey Place, London SW8 1PA;

email: subs@liberalhistory.org.uk

Payment is also possible via our website,  
[www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk).

Cover design concept: **Lynne Featherstone**

Published by the Liberal Democrat History Group, c/o  
38 Salford Road, London SW2 4BQ

Printed by **Kall-Kwik**,

18 Colville Road, London W3 8BL

September 2010

## Issue 68: Autumn 2010

### Liberal history news

4

Lloyd George book launch; Song from Francis Hirst; George Newnes: Liberal press baron

### The 1910 general elections

6

Turning points in British politics? by **Ian Packer**

### Letters to the Editor

13

Pennine Liberal representation (**Michael Steed**); Campbell-Bannerman (**Michael Meadowcroft**); George Garro-Jones (**Sandy S. Waugh**); Radical Reform Group (**William Wallace**); *Liberator* (**Mark Smulian**)

### The 2010 election

14

Has the mould of British politics finally cracked? by **John Curtice**

### The 1910 and 2010 elections

20

Continuity and change in election campaigning; by **Mark Pack**

### Swinging in the '60s to the Liberals

26

Mary Murphy and Pontypridd Urban District Council; by **Steve Belzak**

### Searching for Paddy Logan

35

**Jonathan Calder** discovers Harborough's Liberal history

### Report: Red Guard versus Old Guard? The influence of the Young Liberal movement on the Liberal Party in the 1960s and 1970s

37

with **Matt Cole**, **Michael Steed**, **William Wallace**, **George Kiloh** and **Bernard Greaves**; report by **Graham Lippiatt**

### Report: Thomas Paine and the radical liberal tradition

40

with **Edward Royle** and **Edward Vallance**; report by **Emily Robinson**

### Reviews

43

*Bayliss, Scarborough's MPs 1832 to 1906*; *Scarborough's Mayors 1836 to 1906*, reviewed by **Robert Ingham**; *Williams, Climbing the Bookshelves*, reviewed by **Tom McNally**; *Oaten, Screwing Up*, reviewed by **Tom Kiehl**; *Vaughan, Samuel Morton Peto: A Victorian Entrepreneur*, reviewed by **Robert Ingham**

---

### 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](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk).

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

# LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS

## AUTUMN 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](mailto:journal@liberalhistory.org.uk)

### Lloyd George book launch at the National Library of Wales

**W**ITH THE Liberal-Conservative coalition government in

J Graham Jones,  
Ffion Hague and  
Dafydd Wigley

Westminster and a National Assembly governing on Welsh soil, there is so much of David Lloyd George's legacy which has prevailed or is reflected in Welsh and British politics today. Dr J Graham Jones, Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales and one of the most prolific contributors to the *Journal of Liberal History*, has now produced a new book, published by the National Library, *Lloyd George and Welsh Liberalism*, to illuminate some of the more overlooked aspects of LG's life.

**Graham Lippiatt** was present at the launch.

The book was launched on Saturday 26 June 2010 at the

National Library in Aberystwyth. It was preceded by a lecture by Dr Jones on the marriage of Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson. Graham Jones is a fine speaker and at times the lecture seemed to be more of a dramatic presentation, with Dr Jones acting the voices of the key characters when quoting from diaries or letters.

The book was then launched in the company of Ffion Hague, the author of *The Pain and Privilege* (HarperPress, 2008), which itself threw new light on Lloyd George's private affairs. Mrs Hague said she had vowed to put away all her Liberal jokes now that the coalition was in office. Also present was the former



leader of Plaid Cymru and MP for Lloyd George's old seat of Caernarfon Boroughs from 1974 to 2001, Dafydd Wigley, who praised LG's radical and Welsh nationalist heritage.

Dr Jones' book will be reviewed in a future edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* by Professor K. O. Morgan.

### Song for Francis Hirst

LIBERAL DEMOCRAT History Group executive member **Geoffrey Sell** discovered the following extract from the autograph book of his grandmother, Eveline Dora Noble (1889–1971), relating to the candidacy of Francis Hirst for the Sudbury Division in the January 1910 general election.

#### Vote for Hirst

The Liberals are packing  
no energy lacking  
all bent on attacking  
the opposite party

Heads up they are pushing  
and shoving and crashing  
and striving and rushing  
this way to the prize

Our man is Hirst  
the best will be first  
So vote altogether  
For free trade forever.'

The entry was made by Frank Backler, licensee of the Bell Hotel, Haverhill, Suffolk in December 1909. The Hirst referred to was Francis Wrigley Hirst, Liberal candidate for Sudbury in the January 1910 general election. He was defending a seat captured by the Liberals in 1906 but he was unsuccessful.

Jaime Reynolds' article, 'The Last of the Liberals', in *Journal of Liberal History* 47 (summer 2005) provides a full biography of Hirst.

### George Newnes: The Liberal Press Baron

YORK MEMBERSHIP recalls the life of the Liberal-supporting press baron, who died a hundred years ago.

The name George Newnes might be all but forgotten now, but in a way he's the missing link

in the story of British popular journalism. What's more, he was that rare beast – a Liberal-supporting press baron.

Sensing a niche for a publication that would appeal to the newly-literate lower-middle classes, the minister's son in 1881 launched the weekly magazine *Tit-Bits* – 'a compendium of entertaining and amusing stories and tit-bits from all the most interesting books, periodicals and newspapers in the world', in its own words. Unable to raise the capital conventionally, the Derbyshire-born Newnes, who worked in the City after leaving school, funded his new magazine by opening a vegetarian restaurant in Manchester.

His weekly proved an instant hit, and thanks in part to his flair for publicity and quirky prize-reader competitions – one involved the chance to win a seven-bedroom house, provided the winner agreed to call the house 'Tit-Bits Villa' – it would go on to reach a circulation high of 700,000 by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, making it one of the biggest-selling publications in the land.

The title helped revolutionise popular journalism, paving the way for the launch of mass-market papers like the *Daily Mail* (founded by Alfred Harmsworth, a one-time contributor to *Tit-Bits*) and the *Daily Express* (launched by C. Arthur Pearson, who spent five years at *Tit-Bits* after winning a competition to get a job on the magazine). In 1891, Newnes went on to have further success with *Strand Magazine*, which serialised the Sherlock Holmes stories, and soon had a circulation of around half a million.

A lifelong Liberal, in 1885 he became MP for Newmarket, a seat he held until 1895, when he was defeated. However, soon afterwards he was offered the safe Liberal seat of Swansea, which he held from 1900 until his retirement in January 1910. Among his few distinctions as an MP was to be nominated as one of the best-dressed men in the House. However, he served the party in other ways and was valued by Lord Rosebery, among others, for his willingness to bankroll



Sir George Newnes, c 1905

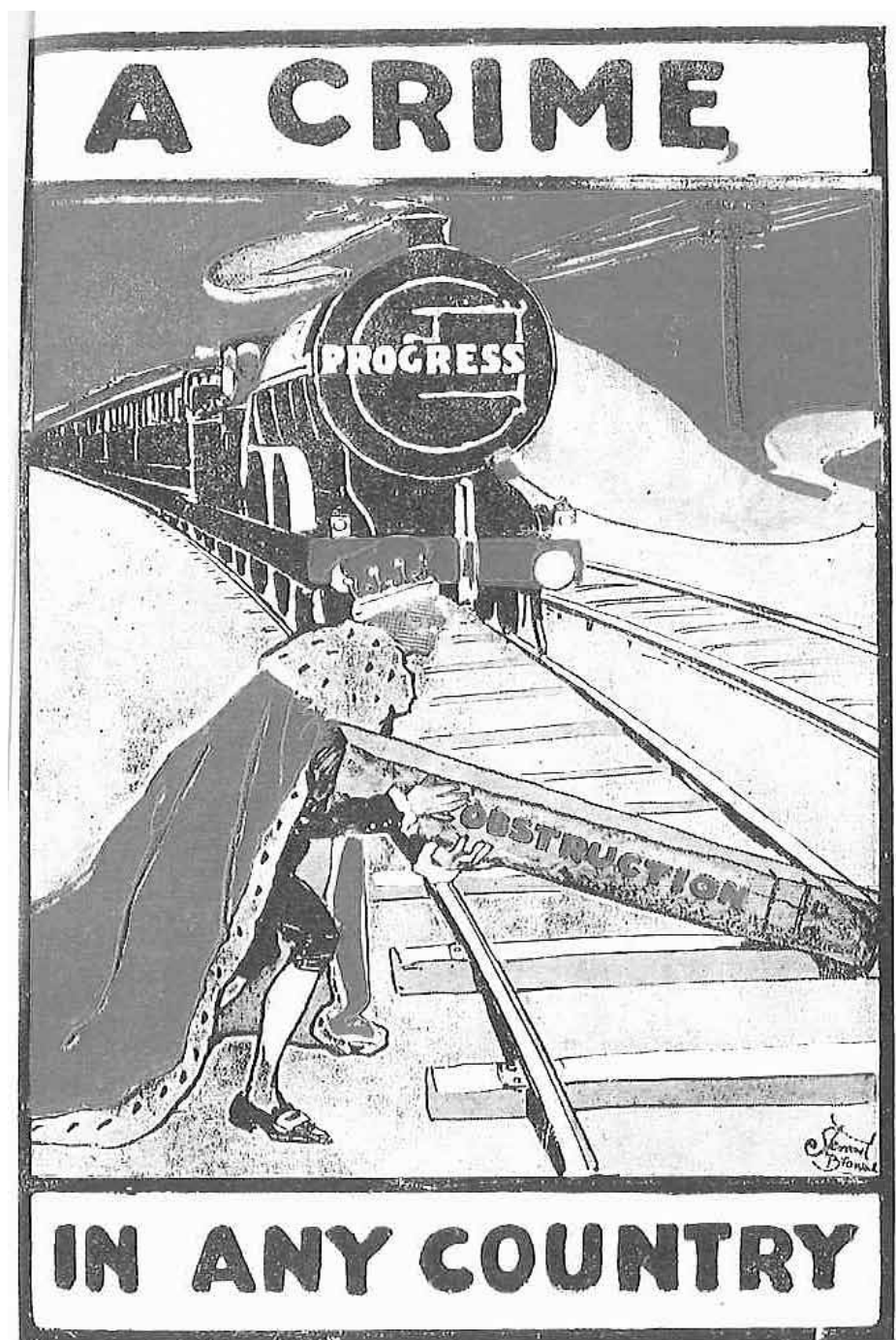
newspapers favourable to the Liberal cause.

In 1893, after W. W. Astor had bought the previously Liberal *Pall Mall Gazette*, and turned it Tory, Newnes founded a new Liberal paper, the *Westminster Gazette*. The 'pea-green incorruptible', as it was dubbed – Gladstone had personally approved its green colour – soon became the heavyweight Liberal paper of the day, even though its circulation never exceeded 25,000. Newnes also launched a 'Liberal' morning penny newspaper, the *Daily Courier*, designed to compete with Harmsworth's new, halfpenny *Daily Mail*; unfortunately it lasted less than six months. Nonetheless, he was duly rewarded for his readiness to bankroll Liberal papers with a baronetcy.

Despite being all but forgotten now, the *Encyclopaedia of the British Press* rightly observes that 'in many ways, George Newnes was the father of the New Journalism: others were to adapt it more successfully, but to him must go the credit for seeing the potential'. It's just a shame that so few press barons have shared his political views.

# THE 1910 GENERAL ELECTIONS: TURNING POINTS IN

The two general elections held in the United Kingdom in January and December 1910 were among the most closely contested, bitterly fought and significant elections of the last two centuries. At both elections, the two main parties, the Liberals and Conservatives,<sup>1</sup> gained virtually the same number of seats. Virulent debates between politicians about the constitution, trade policy, taxation, social reform and defence produced an enormous response from the voters, with turnout in January 1910 reaching a staggering 86.7 per cent.<sup>2</sup> **Ian Packer** analyses the two elections of 1910.



# GENERAL ELECTIONS IN BRITISH POLITICS?

**T**HE OUTCOME was that the Liberal government first elected in 1906 was able to narrowly retain power and push ahead with its agenda of constitutional and social reform. Even if, in some ways, the 1910 elections represented the end of an era – they were the last elections called by a Liberal government, the final contests under the terms of the Third Reform Act of 1884 and the last general elections in which women could not vote – they still pointed the way towards major transformations in the nature of the United Kingdom and its politics.

The background to the 1910 elections was an important reason for the controversies that surrounded them. The Liberal government had been elected in January 1906 with a landslide majority of 400 of the 670 seats in the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> A new election did not have to be called for another seven years, until January 1913, and the electorate could reasonably have expected they would not be required to go to the polls again until 1911 or 1912. The recent Conservative governments elected with secure majorities in 1886, 1895 and 1900 had all waited between five and six years before calling another election. However, the 1906 parliament was cut short by a dramatic constitutional crisis, occasioned by the House of Lords' reaction to the Liberal government's budget of 1909.

The budget was the work of David Lloyd George, Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1908, and embodied his political strategy

for the Liberal government.<sup>4</sup> On becoming chancellor, he had been faced with a huge deficit in the public finances, brought about both by increased naval expenditure and by the unexpectedly high cost of the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act, which had introduced state pensions for the first time. Neither item could be cut: pensions were believed to be hugely popular; and more Royal Navy ships needed to be built to keep ahead of Germany's programme of naval construction. As the Liberals were committed to free trade, Lloyd George could not introduce taxes on imports or exports. Borrowing to cover deficits (at least in peace time) was still anathema to all parties. Direct taxes on incomes and death duties would therefore have to provide a large slice of the tax rises in the 1909 budget. This was not quite as alarming a political prospect as it seemed. Most working-class voters did not earn enough to cross the threshold of £160 per annum required to pay income tax. But Lloyd George was keen to spare the vast majority of the 1.2 million or so income tax payers any pain, by concentrating his tax rises on the wealthiest amongst them – the small group of 11,500 who earned over £5,000 per annum.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, by further graduating income tax and death duties, Lloyd George could hope to produce an effective new revenue stream that would provide the basis for more social reform in the future.

Lloyd George knew this would create a huge wave of protest from the wealthiest members of society. It might also alienate the Liberal

party's own moneyed supporters, as well as flying in the face of much conventional economic wisdom that taxing the wealthy would harm the economy by reducing the amount of money available to invest in production. To counter these dangers, Lloyd George did not attempt to minimise the radicalism of his proposals or apologise for their necessity. Instead, he concentrated the government's fire by emphasising other new taxes in his 1909 budget, which hit landlords and the drink industry. The chancellor knew these groups were unpopular within his own party as close allies of the Conservatives, and could be accused of merely consuming wealth, rather than being involved in its production. In effect, Lloyd George's budget suggested that the Liberals should launch a radical campaign to justify their financial proposals and take the fight to the party's traditional enemies.

This strategy was driven by political as well as financial imperatives. Despite its huge majority in 1906, and some significant achievements, especially the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act, the Liberal government was in deep trouble and the evidence from by-elections suggested its popularity was waning fast. In 1908, there were ten contests in seats which saw a straight fight between Liberal and Conservative candidates both at the 1906 general election and at the by-election. The swing to the Conservatives was no less than 9.61 per cent – enough to overturn the Liberal landslide victory of 1906 and produce a

A peer lays a log, labelled 'obstruction', across the path of the train of progress; Liberal election leaflet, November 1910

## THE 1910 ELECTIONS: TURNING POINTS IN BRITISH POLITICS?

Conservative government.<sup>6</sup> By the end of 1908 the Cabinet seem to have concluded that they would lose the next election.<sup>7</sup> This transformation in the party's fortunes was partly due to declining trade and rising unemployment, as the economy went into a sharp recession during 1908.<sup>8</sup> But the government also seemed unable to deliver on many of its promises. In particular, its Education Bill of 1906 and its Licensing Bill of 1908 had been blocked by the Conservative-dominated House of Lords, which still had the power to veto all legislation. Lloyd George's 1909 budget was an attempt to revive the party's fortunes by finding a way round the House of Lords. Since, by convention, all measures of taxation were solely a matter for the Commons, it could be argued convincingly that the upper house would have to pass the budget, however much they disliked its measures.<sup>9</sup>

When Lloyd George introduced his budget, in a speech of over four hours, on 29 April 1909, it transformed the political climate. While a few, more conservative Liberals were shocked by its far-reaching measures, most were delighted and enthused. The response in the country was equally heartening. In the three by-elections in 1909 that were held after the budget, and which were contested only by Liberal and Conservative candidates at the by-election and in 1906, the anti-government swing subsided to 4.6 per cent.<sup>10</sup> Lloyd George turned up the pressure in his famous speech at Limehouse on 30 July 1909, denouncing the landowners in terms that had scarcely ever been heard before from a Cabinet minister. As Lloyd George declaimed, 'Who is the landlord? The landlord is a gentleman ... who does not earn his wealth ... His sole function, his chief pride is stately consumption of wealth produced by others'.<sup>11</sup>

Lloyd George's daring initiative placed the Conservative leaders, Arthur Balfour in the Commons and Lord Lansdowne in the upper house, in a difficult situation.<sup>12</sup> They, and the whole Conservative party, loathed the budget. It was fought vociferously in committee in the House of Commons and a Budget Protest League was formed

to carry the battle to the constituencies. But the choice they had to face was whether to use the House of Lords to defeat the budget and so precipitate an early general election, as no government could be expected to carry on once its budget was defeated in parliament. The case for reluctantly agreeing to the budget was powerful. Rejecting it in the Lords might breach constitutional convention, give the Liberals a popular cause and raise the whole question of the position of the House of Lords. But ultimately the argument for using the Lords against the budget was too powerful to resist. Many interest groups in the Conservative party, especially landowners, the drink trade and the City, pressed for rejection. The Conservative organisation suggested that, at the very worst, the Liberals' majority over all other parties would be removed in an election. To allow the budget to pass would hand the Liberals a great victory and severely impair the prestige and role of the Lords as a bulwark against radical measures. Most importantly, perhaps, many leading peers made it known they would vote against the budget, whatever Balfour and Lansdowne thought. Balfour slowly moved to accept this position. By August 1909, rumours started to circulate that the Lords would veto the budget, and on 30 November they finally did so, by 350 votes to 75. After a one-day session of the Commons, organised so that Asquith, the Liberal prime minister, could denounce the Lords, parliament was prorogued on 3 December 1909 and the campaign began, though the formal dissolution did not occur until 10 January 1910.

### The issues

Polling still occurred over a two-week period at this time, with most contests occurring between 15 and 31 January (although a handful of constituencies took even longer to vote).<sup>13</sup> This meant there was nearly eight weeks of frenetic campaigning before the result of the election was finally known, with only a few days' break over Christmas. The key issues were outlined in the speeches of the party leaders, which were widely reported

(often in full) in the national and local press, and in the election manifestos which every candidate published and distributed to the voters in his constituency.<sup>14</sup> The unusual circumstances in which the election had been called naturally dominated the issues of the campaign. Of the Liberal candidates, 99 per cent mentioned the House of Lords in their election address and 82 per cent placed it first. This reflected the Liberals' intention to make the election a referendum on the role of the House of Lords. The Liberal government not only needed to defeat the Lords to continue in power but also felt 'The Peers versus the People' was the best ground on which to fight the election. When Asquith gave his opening speech of the campaign at the Albert Hall on 10 December 1909, the stage carried a huge banner asking 'Shall the People be Ruled by the Peers?'<sup>15</sup> Liberal addresses emphasised again and again that the Lords' action in rejecting the budget was an assault on democracy, and often threw in some abuse of the upper house's previous record in rejecting Liberal bills and the useless or malevolent role of landowners in society.

The Conservatives, on the other hand, had a different strategy. While 94 per cent of their candidates' addresses mentioned the House of Lords, only 15 per cent placed it first. Most thought the Lords were not the strongest part of their case, despite Balfour's claim that they had only referred the budget to the electorate for the people's verdict. Instead, 100 per cent of Conservative election addresses mentioned tariff reform and 74 per cent gave it pride of place. The Tory strategy was very simple – it was to make the election a contest between the relative merits of the Liberal policy of free trade and the Conservatives' proposal for tariffs, or taxes, on imports. The Tories felt that tariffs would give them a populist policy that would overshadow the Lords issue. They claimed that taxing imports would increase wages and preserve employment by keeping foreign goods out of the British and empire markets. This was a very risky strategy for the Conservatives. They had put tariffs at the forefront of their campaign in

**When Lloyd George introduced his budget, in a speech of over four hours, on 29 April 1909, it transformed the political climate.**



1906, only to go down to a disastrous defeat. But many in the party believed passionately in the proposal as being essentially patriotic and imperialist.<sup>16</sup> They felt that in 1910 the party was united behind tariffs (as it had not been in 1906) and could make its case effectively to the public. The Liberal response replicated their key argument of 1906 – tariffs would raise the price of basic goods, especially the price of food.

All the other issues in January 1910 were essentially subordinate to these two arguments about the Lords and tariffs. The 1909 budget was mentioned by 88 per cent of Liberal candidates and 84 per cent of Conservatives, but only 5 per cent of Liberals and 6 per cent of Conservatives thought it the most important issue. Quite simply, the budget controversy of 1909 was swallowed up in the argument about the Lords, their actions and their future role in the constitution. Liberals claimed the budget was a fair allocation of the burden of taxation and that it provided the means for social reform, while Conservatives saw it as harming the economy and embodying a vindictive, socialist approach to the wealthy. On the Liberal side, 75 per cent of candidates also mentioned old age pensions as a key achievement. The Conservatives preferred to talk about defence and Irish home rule, which appeared in 96 per cent and 82 per cent of their election addresses, respectively. The Conservative case was usually that the Liberal government had not built enough new ships to guard British naval supremacy and that in the future the Liberals would produce a measure of Irish self-government, thus threatening the integrity of the United Kingdom.

The two other parties who contested the election were mainly viewed as essentially being on the side of the Liberals. The Irish Nationalists, the party who stood for home rule, had returned eighty-three MPs in 1906, but, as they only contested one seat outside Ireland in January 1910, they were largely invisible to the British electorate.<sup>17</sup> The knowledge that removing the Lords' veto would open the way for home rule lined them up with the Liberals, even though many



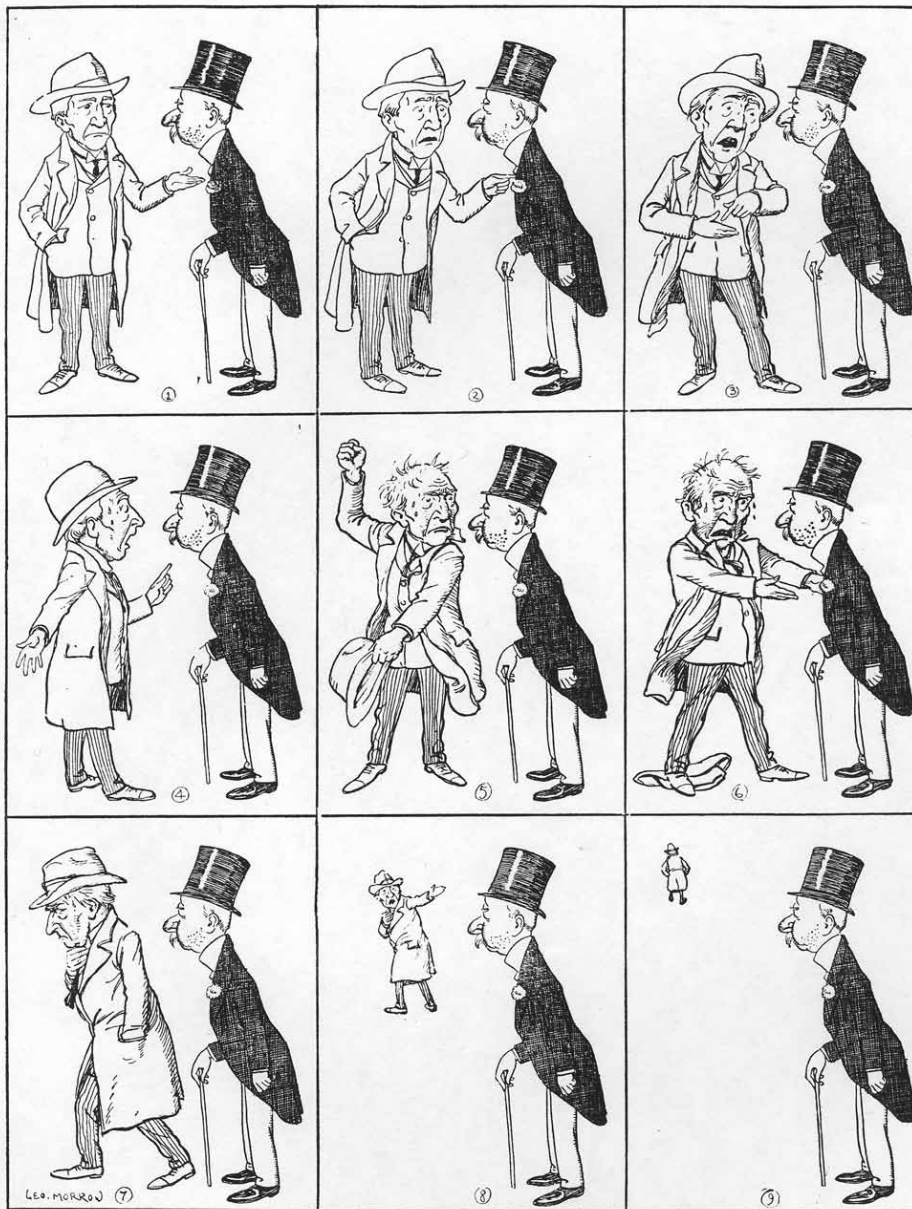
**HH Asquith (1852–1928), Liberal leader and Prime Minister in 1910**

Nationalists disliked aspects of the 1909 budget.<sup>18</sup> The Labour Party had been founded in 1900 as the Labour Representation Committee and had only forty-five MPs in 1909. While officially a completely independent party, it was actually closely linked to the Liberals. Fifty-one of its seventy-eight candidates in January 1910 were not opposed by Liberals, a legacy of the secret 'Lib-Lab' pact of 1903 to try and avoid splitting the anti-Conservative vote.<sup>19</sup> The main issues in the election also made it hard for Labour to make a distinctive impact. Like the Liberals, they were opposed to the House of Lords and tariffs and were generally favourable towards the 1909 budget, old age pensions and Irish home rule. Labour candidates tended to talk more about the need for social reform, but their voices were drowned out by the two major parties and, except in the few constituencies where they were opposing a Liberal, they usually seemed like an adjunct of the government.

#### **The result**

When the election finally drew to a close in late January 1910,

the exhausted voters at last had a chance to assess the outcome. They had gone to the polls in unprecedented numbers and the 3.6 per cent increase in turnout from 1906 seems to have benefited the Conservatives, though not enough to give them an outright victory. The key factor was the position in the House of Commons, as this would determine who could form the next government. On this basis, the Liberals had won, but only if they could rely on their Irish Nationalist and Labour allies. The Conservatives increased their seats by over a hundred from 157 in 1906 to 273 in January 1910. But, while the Liberals declined from their high-water mark of 400 in 1906 to 275, there was a clear anti-Conservative majority because of the eighty-two Irish Nationalists and forty Labour MPs. The results in Ireland were a foregone conclusion – fifty-five of the Irish Nationalist MPs were unopposed and they dominated Ireland outside Ulster and a few Dublin seats, where there were Protestant and Unionist majorities.<sup>20</sup> Labour, on the other hand, made little progress. It held five fewer seats than before the election and



THE CANVASSER AND THE UNIMPRESSIBLE VOTER.

failed to win a single constituency where it was opposed by both Conservatives and Liberals.<sup>21</sup> In Great Britain the swing to the Conservatives from the Liberals was 4.3 per cent, but this overall figure masked huge disparities. The Conservatives made very little impact in Scotland, where they won only nine out of seventy seats, and Wales, where they returned two out of thirty-four MPs. Here the swing to the Conservatives was only 1.8 per cent and 1.9 per cent, respectively.<sup>22</sup> Landowners were not popular in Scotland or Wales, especially as they were seen as 'English' figures, and free trade appealed to the great exporting industries of these countries, like coal and shipbuilding.

But England itself was starkly divided along North-South lines. The swing to the Conservatives in their heartland, the south-east, was 9.6 per cent, but in Lancashire and Cumbria it was not much over 2 per cent, and in the West Riding of Yorkshire it was as low as 1.4 per cent. Urban, industrial England proved to have little sympathy with the House of Lords and, as in 1906, not much interest in tariff reform, which it was feared would raise the prices of ordinary goods. Perhaps if the economy had been in worse shape, and voters had been more worried about unemployment, tariff reform might have had more appeal. But, instead, the economy had recovered during 1909, with unemployment

'The canvasser and the unimpressible voter'; *Punch*, 12 January 1910

falling steadily. There were, of course, exceptions to these generalisations, which showed that British voting patterns retained strong regional and local elements. Dockyard towns, which depended on orders for new naval vessels, for instance, swung heavily to the Tories.<sup>23</sup> There was also a distinct class element to voting. Predominantly middle-class seats in England swung to the Conservatives by 6.2 per cent, while mainly working-class seats saw only a 3.8 per cent swing.<sup>24</sup> Rural areas showed a 6 per cent movement in opinion, perhaps because taxing the land was not popular in agricultural areas and social pressure from landowners was effective.

**Hiatus: February–November 1910**

The Liberal government survived the January 1910 election, but it was not clear how it should proceed. The Irish Nationalists would naturally demand home rule as the price for their support and that would require an end to the Lords' veto power. But moderates in the Cabinet, like Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, disliked a strategy of depending on the Irish and anything that looked like single-chamber government.<sup>25</sup> As the Cabinet had not agreed before the election what its policy on the House of Lords would be, the January election was followed by several months of anguished debate, before a decision was finally made on 13 April to pursue the policy of replacing the Lords' veto with a power to merely delay legislation, but with reform of the second chamber's composition to take place at some unspecified date in the future. This secured the support of the Irish Nationalists and the 1909 budget was duly passed by the Commons and the Lords (who now accepted the people's verdict as delivered by the election).

But this still left open the question of *how* the Liberals would end the Lords' veto on all legislation, as the consent of the second chamber would be required for such a law. The only practical means of securing the Lords' agreement to the emasculating of their powers was to threaten them with the creation

of hundreds of new Liberal peers, to provide a Liberal majority in the House of Lords. But the king's consent would be needed for such a threat, as it was the monarch who (formally) bestowed all peerages. However, on 15 December 1909, Edward VII's private secretary had told Asquith's private secretary that the king would only agree to such a mass creation of peers after a second general election had been held, specifically on the issue of the Lords' powers.<sup>26</sup> Once the Cabinet had decided its policy on the Lords' veto this meant, therefore, that there would have to be another election in 1910. It was only delayed by the death of Edward VII on 6 May and the accession of his son, George V. The Cabinet felt that a show of reasonableness would strengthen their hand when dealing with the new monarch and were, perhaps, reluctant to make the voters go to the polls again so soon after the last election. They proposed a Constitutional Conference with the Tories, to see if an agreed solution to the Lords' powers and composition could be reached.<sup>27</sup> This dragged on until November 1910, producing a range of ingenious proposals, but no agreement. Ultimately, it proved impossible to get round the issue of home rule. The Liberals needed Irish Nationalist support to remain in government and the price was an end to the Lords' veto power. This was something the Conservatives could not accept. The Conference ended on 10 November and the Cabinet demanded George V should agree to a mass creation of peers, if they won a new general election and needed to force amendments to the Lords' powers through the upper house. Very reluctantly, on 16 November, the king agreed, though this was not made public. Parliament was dissolved on 28 November and the second general election of 1910 took place between 3 and 19 December.

### **Déjà vu: the December 1910 general election**

Considering that they were facing their second general election in a year, the electorate still voted in impressive numbers in December 1910. The turnout of 81.6 per cent was 5.2 per cent less than in

January, but rather than boredom, this reflected a rise in uncontested seats and an out-of-date electoral register.<sup>28</sup> The result was a virtual replica of that in January 1910, with 271 Liberals, 84 Irish Nationalists and 42 Labour MPs forming a bloc against 273 Conservatives. There was a miniscule swing to the Conservatives of 0.8 per cent. In December 1910, it was clear that the election was only taking place to decide the fate of the House of Lords, and the second chamber dominated the campaign. Ninety-eight per cent of Liberal candidates' election addresses put the Lords first.<sup>29</sup> Among Conservative candidates, 74 per cent agreed. This situation also reflected a major loss of faith amongst Conservatives in the electoral appeal of tariff reform, which was the front-rank issue in only 17 per cent of their addresses, compared to 74 per cent in January. Eighty-eight per cent of Conservatives also mentioned the threat of Irish home rule – something only 41 per cent of Liberals were willing to deal with. Chastened by its lack of success in January, Labour cut back its number of candidates to fifty-six and played a less significant role in the election.<sup>30</sup>

This outcome was deeply dispiriting for the Conservatives. They had done everything they could to achieve victory, including some major adaptations to their policies. Between 17 and 24 November, the Lords committed themselves to agreeing to reform their composition and that disputes with the Commons should be settled by joint sittings of the Houses or a referendum on any crucial issues. This sudden interest in the referendum on the part of the Conservatives surprised many people, as this concept had hitherto played little part in British politics and it was mainly associated with the left. But the Conservatives had defended the Lords' actions in rejecting the 1909 budget as a referral of the issue to 'the people', so they had already started down the path towards endorsing referenda. Crucially, they hoped they could win a popular vote on some issues on which the Commons and Lords would disagree, especially Irish home rule. On 29 November, in a major speech at the Albert

Hall, Balfour agreed to subject tariff reform to a referendum, too.<sup>31</sup> But none of these retreats from their position in January did the Tories much good. Very few voters had changed their mind in the ten months since the previous election.

### **Aftermath**

The consequences of the 1910 elections were momentous. Firstly, it settled the fate of the House of Lords. On 20 December 1910, Asquith had a somewhat uncomfortable interview with George V, in which it was made clear to the monarch that he would have to fulfil his pledge to create hundreds of new Liberal peers, if necessary.<sup>32</sup> Under the shadow of this possibility, the Lords agreed in August 1911 to a Parliament Act, which replaced their veto with a power to delay legislation for two years. The significance of the House of Lords in British politics was greatly diminished at a stroke and the supremacy of the Commons firmly established. The Liberal government, though, left the composition of the Lords unchanged, bequeathing a conundrum to successive generations of politicians about how to construct a second chamber that would have some democratic legitimacy, but would still be subordinate to the Commons. Much less noticed, the Parliament Act also increased the frequency of general elections, to at least once every five years.

The Parliament Act was followed in 1912, as everyone knew it would be, by an Irish home rule bill, to fulfil the government's pledges to the Irish. The Lords held the bill up for two years and the First World War intervened just as it was about to become law. But the Liberal government's determination in the years 1912–14 established that major changes would be coming to Ireland's constitutional relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. The delay in instituting home rule because of the war only produced a situation whereby Ireland moved towards full independence much more swiftly than most people had imagined possible in 1914. Rather less welcome to the Liberals and Nationalists, the scale of resistance to Irish home rule from Ulster Protestants in 1912–14 (including

**In December 1910, it was clear that the election was only taking place to decide the fate of the House of Lords, and the second chamber dominated the campaign.**

forming their own army, the Ulster Volunteer Force) also made it more or less certain that Ireland would be partitioned.<sup>33</sup> Major social reforms also flowed from the Liberal victories in 1910, perhaps most importantly the National Insurance Act of 1911, which formed the basis of the entire system of national insurance that is with us today, as well as instituting sick pay and, rather later in 1913, unemployment benefits, for the first time.<sup>34</sup>

But the elections of 1910 also had consequences for the political parties involved. The Conservatives entered a period of infighting and considerable uncertainty. Balfour was ousted as leader in 1911 and the party embarked on an increasingly embittered and dangerous flirtation with the Ulster Protestant leadership in their resistance to Irish home rule.<sup>35</sup> It was by no means certain that they could have won the election due in 1915 and another lost election might have produced disastrous consequences for the party.<sup>36</sup> The Irish Nationalists obtained the promise of home rule, only to see the prize snatched away by the arrival of World War I, during which they were increasingly outflanked and then destroyed by more extreme nationalists. Labour survived what was for them the very unfavourable climate of the 1910 elections, without making much progress. The Liberals, on the other hand, proved their great victory in 1906 was not an aberration. Why the Liberal party went into such rapid decline after 1914 could become a debate, rather than seeming like a foregone conclusion. But, ironically, their success in 1910 meant that they were in power when the First World War broke in August 1914. As a result, they had to take the responsibility for not winning the war in 1914–15 and then enter a coalition with the Conservatives, thus creating the conditions for the Lloyd George–Asquith power struggle of 1916 and the resulting division in the party and

its disastrous performance at the 1918 general election. But, of course, nobody could have foreseen that outcome in December 1910.

*Dr Ian Packer is Reader in History at the University of Lincoln. He has published widely on Edwardian politics, including Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land (2001) and Liberal Government and Politics 1905–1915 (2006).*

- 1 Officially, the Conservative side in politics was represented by an alliance of the Conservatives and the Liberal Unionists, collectively known as 'the Unionists' (the two parties did not merge until 1912). But, in practice, the much smaller Liberal Unionists had become hard to distinguish from the Conservatives by 1910 and the term 'Conservative' is used throughout for both parties.
- 2 F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885–1918* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 583. All electoral statistics are taken from this source, unless otherwise indicated.
- 3 A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: the General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973).
- 4 B. Murray, *The People's Budget 1909/10: Lloyd George and Liberal Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), especially pp. 112–47.
- 5 For some of the difficulties of equating nineteenth and twentieth century fortunes with present day monetary values, see N. Ferguson, *The World's Banker: the History of the House of Rothschild* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998), pp. 1034–6. But an income of over £5,000 per annum in 1909 would certainly be equivalent to yearly earnings of several million pounds in 2010.
- 6 I. Packer, 'Contested Ground: trends in British by-elections, 1911–1914', *Contemporary British History* (forthcoming).
- 7 British Library, Add MS 46330, John Burns diary, 9 December 1908.
- 8 N. Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The British*

- General Elections of 1910* (Macmillan, 1972), pp. 50–1.
- 9 There is no definite evidence that Lloyd George intended to create a budget that would entrap the Lords into rejecting its proposals. The possibility that the budget might be rejected only became a matter of political discussion in late summer 1909.
- 10 Mid-Derbyshire, Dumfries and High Peak. All were in July 1909. In Mid-Derbyshire the Lib–Lab miners' candidate was technically a member of the Labour party.
- 11 H. du Parcq (ed.), *Life of David Lloyd George*, 4 vols. (London: Caxton, 1912–13), vol. 4, pp. 678–96 for Lloyd George's speeches at Limehouse, and at Newcastle on 9 October 1909.
- 12 Murray, *People's Budget*, pp. 209–35; A. Adonis, *Making Aristocracy Work: the Peerage and the Political System in Britain, 1884–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 144–157.
- 13 Craig, *Parliamentary Election Results*, p. 589. The six university constituencies and Orkney and Shetland voted a week or so after the other seats, prolonging polling until 10 February 1910.
- 14 Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p. 317, Table 15.4 for candidates' election addresses in January 1910; pp. 315–325 for the arguments on both sides, more generally.
- 15 *The Times*, 11 December 1909.
- 16 E. H. H. Green, *The Crisis of Conservatism: the Politics, Economics and Ideology of the British Conservative Party, 1880–1914* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- 17 Liverpool, Scotland, a seat dominated by Irish immigrants. It returned the Irish Nationalist, T. P. O'Connor, as its MP 1885–1929.
- 18 Eleven of the Irish Nationalist MPs elected in January 1910 were opponents of John Redmond's official Nationalist party and supporters of William O'Brien's All for Ireland League. They tended to be critical of Redmond's alignment with the Liberals and the 1909 budget in particular.
- 19 Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, pp. 241, 318, Table 15.5.

- 20 B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), pp. 171–77.
- 21 Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p. 261.
- 22 Ibid, p. 396, Table 18.9 for variations in the Liberal to Conservative swing.
- 23 For instance, the astonishing 19.8 per cent swing at Portsmouth.
- 24 Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p. 400, Table 18.11.
- 25 R. Fanning, 'The Irish Policy of Asquith's Government and the Cabinet Crisis of 1910', in A. Cosgrove and D. McCartney (eds.), *Studies in Irish History: Presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin: University College, 1979), pp. 279–303.
- 26 J. A. Spender and C. Asquith, *Life of Herbert Henry Asquith, Lord Oxford and Asquith*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchinson, 1932), vol. 1, p. 261.
- 27 J. D. Fair, *British Interparty Conferences: a Study of the Procedure of Conciliation in British Politics, 1867–1921* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 77–102.
- 28 Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, pp. 379–380.
- 29 Ibid, p. 326, Table 15.7 for candidates' election addresses in December 1910.
- 30 R. McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party, 1910–24* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 51–4.
- 31 Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, pp. 172–3; *The Times*, 30 November 1910.
- 32 National Library of Scotland, Elibank papers 8802, fos. 161–2, Elibank to Lloyd George, 21 December 1910.
- 33 P. Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland: The Ulster Question in British Politics to 1914* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1980).
- 34 B. Gilbert, *The Evolution of National Insurance in Great Britain* (London: Michael Joseph, 1966).
- 35 D. Dutton, 'His Majesty's Loyal Opposition': *The Unionist Party in Opposition 1905–1915* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), pp. 211–250.
- 36 P. Clarke, 'The Electoral Position of the Liberal and Labour Parties, 1910–14', *English Historical Review*, 90 (1975), 828–36.

# LETTERS

## Pennine Liberal representation

In the Radio 4 interview reported in *Journal of Liberal History* 66 (spring 2010), Duncan Brack claimed that it was the West Country, along with Scotland and Wales, which kept Liberal representation in the House of Commons going during the bleak years.

Actually, only Wales provided continuous representation. Furthermore, the Pennine North made more of a contribution than Scotland or the South West. There were only 18 months between the loss of Bolton/Huddersfield in 1964 and the gain of Colne Valley/Cheadle in 1966; and of just over two years between the loss of Colne Valley/Cheadle in 1970 and the gain of Rochdale in 1972. That compares with well over four years for Scotland (1945–50) and a lot longer for the South West, between the defeat of Frank Byers in North Dorset (1950) and Mark Bonham Carter's victory in Torrington (1958), when no Liberal MP sat for these areas.

Any analysis of what sustained the Liberal Party in that period must encompass all four of these areas; awkward nonconformism, a distinct sense of geographical identity and a distance from the metropolis applied to all four.

Michael Steed

## Campbell-Bannerman

In the midst of an excellent issue on 'Liberals and the left' (*Journal of Liberal History* 67, summer 2010), there was one curious and unsupported epithet. In his piece 'The Liberal Party and the New Liberalism', Michael Freedon describes Henry Campbell-Bannerman as 'insipid'.

This description runs counter to just about every study of

Campbell-Bannerman, in which he is usually accepted as being a sound leader with radical views, who held together the different strands of Liberalism in the early years of the 1906 government.

In the course of my thesis on Leeds politics 1903–28, I was in touch with Douglas Crockatt, a distinguished elderly Liberal who was too frail to be interviewed. He had been a municipal candidate three times and contested York in 1929. He wrote to me as follows:

Campbell-Bannerman was the finest Liberal Premier we ever had – concise in speech, firm to principle, modest, and in policy and personal relations magnanimous. Even in 1905 with victory obviously just round the corner Asquith, Haldane and Grey (the Liberal Imperialist party) 'ganged up' against CB, insisting that he should go to the Lords and leave Asquith to lead the Commons. But, more than any other Liberal Leader, CB had *character*. He declined to be 'elevated' and the Liberal Imperialists had to climb down. Had CB had a five-year term things would have been very different. He died in about two years. He was magnanimous towards the 'Lib-Lab' candidates, and the history of the Labour Party and its dominance by the trade unions would have been very different if he had had a five years reign – or more.

Perhaps this is a more accurate description.

Michael Meadowcroft

## George Garro-Jones

In addition to the Liberals who joined the Labour Party in 1914–31, as mentioned by John Shepherd (*Journal of Liberal History* 67, summer 2010), the political career of George

Garro-Jones is also of particular interest. As a Liberal he gained South Hackney from Labour (Herbert Morrison) at the 1924 general election and served until he joined the Labour Party in 1929. He was then Labour MP for Aberdeen North in 1935–45, with Aberdeen North being the constituency for which another former Liberal, William Wedgwood Benn (later Viscount Stansgate) was Labour MP in 1928–31. After being created Lord Trefgarne in 1947, Garro-Jones resigned from the Labour Party in 1952 and rejoined the Liberals in 1958.

Dr. Sandy S. Waugh

## Radical Reform Group

Graham Lippiatt's very useful article on the Radical Reform Group (*Journal of Liberal History* 67, summer 2010) does not fully convey the confusion of the Liberal Party in the mid-1950s over its direction and purpose.

The group of free-trade Liberals that included S.W. Alexander and Oliver Smedley had drive, financial resources, and a clear sense of Liberalism in a libertarian, minimum-state interpretation. The almost anarchic structure of party assemblies allowed for such groups to exert real influence.

RRG, as I recall, provided the most coherent alternative definition of Liberalism – much closer to the radical Liberal tradition, and to the nonconformist beliefs which a high proportion of its members held. It helped enormously that Jo Grimond as leader was naturally sympathetic to the RRG perspective; but the existence and activities of RRG, and the arguments of its members on the Party Executive, made Grimond's task in reorienting the party much easier.

Joining the party in 1960, I caught only echoes of the arguments that had convulsed the then-tiny party in the 1950s. My future

father-in-law, Edward Rushworth, had for many years been both a member of RRG and of the party executive. He made little distinction between being a Liberal and being a teetotal nonconformist; his instincts were anti-authoritarian and socially egalitarian.

In the 1962 Orpington by-election Michael Steed and I stayed for a week with the Selton family while canvassing; Marjorie was an active party member, but her husband Arthur had 'left the party over free trade' and was engaged with others of that group in finding an alternative vehicle for their ideas – which became the Institute for Economic Affairs, through which free-market liberal ideas later influenced Margaret Thatcher and her advisers.

William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire)

## Liberator

James Graham's article about New Radicalism (*Journal of Liberal History* 67, summer 2010) correctly states that *Liberator* was never formally in alliance with New Radicalism. However, I think it is worth pointing out that (at least since it ceased to be a Young Liberal organ in 1978), *Liberator* has never been 'formally in alliance' with anything because it is a magazine, not a faction.

*Liberator's* extensive coverage of New Radicalism arose mainly simply because its driving force, Donnachadh McCarthy, was undertaking interesting activities in the party and was willing to write regularly on these, and the bulk of our readers were likely to be in broad sympathy with his aims. We occasionally shared sponsorship of conference fringe meetings, but there was never any suggestion of any formal link.

Mark Smulian (*Liberator Collective*)

# THE 2010

## HAS THE MOULD OF BRITISH



# ELECTION

## POLITICS FINALLY CRACKED?

Of one thing we can be sure: the 2010 election will acquire a large entry in the annals of Liberal Democrat history. The campaign came alive for the party when, following the first-ever televised prime ministerial debate in the UK, the party's poll rating reached the 30 per cent mark for the first time during the course of a general election. However, on polling day itself the party's hopes were dashed, and, instead of making a breakthrough, it actually found itself with slightly fewer seats than before. **John Curtice** analyses the 2010 election.

Nick Clegg and Vince Cable face the cameras in Bradford, 13 April 2010 – between them, David Ward, who went on to win the Bradford East seat (photo: Liberal Democrats)

**D**ESPITE DISAPPOINTMENT on the night, the overall outcome was a hung parliament, and, following largely unexpected concessions from the Conservatives on electoral reform, Liberal Democrat MPs found themselves sitting on the Treasury front bench for the first time since 1945. After more than sixty years in the political wilderness, the party acquired a role on the centre stage of British politics.

Less certain, however, is what that entry on the 2010 election will eventually say about the significance of these events. Will it state that the 2010 election was the decisive moment when the mould of Britain's two-party political system was finally cracked? Or might it record, instead, that the election was but a brief moment of apparent success that ultimately, much like the polls during the campaign, proved to be a mirage – or even a poisoned chalice? Which of these entries comes to be written will, of course, depend in part on how the electorate reacts to the record of the coalition government and of the Liberal Democrat ministers within it. Nevertheless, there is much that can already be revealed by taking a closer look at the rollercoaster ride that the 2010 election proved to be for the party.

Let us begin with that 'surge' in party support in the campaign opinion polls. Table 1 provides details of the average rating of the parties during each of the key phases of the 2010 election

campaign, beginning with the budget unveiled by Alistair Darling shortly before the election date was formally announced. Even before the first leaders' debate on 15 April there had been some sign that the party might be managing to push its support above the 20 per cent mark, a level below which it had been stuck for much of the previous five years. Even so, the impact of that first debate on the party's poll rating is clear. In the week following the first debate, the party's average rating was nine points higher than it had been the week before. With the party three points ahead of Labour and only two behind the Conservatives, it appeared that for the first time ever in polling history a UK general election was a three-horse race. Inevitably there was much talk of a Liberal Democrat 'breakthrough'.

However, there were always warning signs in the polls that this sudden surge of support might not be sustained through to polling day. More than one poll found that those who said that they were going to back the Liberal Democrats were also more likely than Conservative or Labour supporters to indicate that they might change their mind by the time they came to vote. Liberal Democrat support also appeared to be relatively high amongst those who said they did not vote last time – including many younger people – and the strength of whose commitment to vote this time might be doubted. Meanwhile fewer voters said they thought that the

## THE 2010 ELECTION: HAS THE MOULD OF BRITISH POLITICS FINALLY CRACKED?

	Con %	Lab %	LD %	Others %
Post-budget	37	30	19	14
NI/C4 debate	38	30	20	12
After Easter	39	30	19	12
Manifesto launches	37	31	21	11
Post 1st leaders' debate	32	27	30	11
Post 2nd leaders' debate	34	27	29	10
Post 3rd leaders' debate	35	27	28	10
Final polls	36	28	27	10

Chart based on all published polls, conducted wholly or mostly between the following dates: Post-budget, 25–29 March; NI/C4 debate, 29 March–2 April; after Easter, 4–10 April; manifesto launches, 10–15 April; post 1st leaders' debate, 15–22 April; post 2nd leaders' debate, 22–29 April; post 3rd leaders' debate, 29 April–3 May; final polls, 3–5 May.

First party/second party 2005	Mean change in Liberal Democrat share of vote since 2005
Conservative/Labour	+3.3
Labour/Conservative	+0.6
Conservative/Liberal Democrat	+0.5
Labour/Liberal Democrat	+0.4
Liberal Democrat/Conservative	-0.4
Liberal Democrat/Labour	-0.9
ALL SEATS	+0.8

Seats where any party other than Conservative, Labour or Liberal Democrat was first or second in 2005 are not shown separately, but are included in the calculation for 'All Seats'.

Liberal Democrats had the best policies on any particular issue than said they were going to vote for the party. In truth, the surge appeared heavily dependent on Nick Clegg's newfound personal popularity and his apparent ability to tap into the disenchantment with politics many people felt in the wake of the MPs' expenses scandal. These always looked like potentially relatively fragile foundations on which to build a breakthrough

Certainly, as polling day approached it was becoming increasingly clear that the surge was slowly receding: Nick Clegg proved unable to outshine his rivals in the second and third leaders' debates, and after each one the party's support fell by a point or so. By the time that the final opinion polls were published on polling day, it appeared that the party was at risk of losing the race for second place in votes.

And so proved to be the case. At 23.6 per cent, the party's share

of the vote cast across Great Britain represented just a one-point increase on its tally at the last election in 2005. Far from challenging for second place in votes, the party still trailed Labour by as much as six points. Meanwhile, with fifty-seven members, the parliamentary party now contained five fewer members than it did immediately after the 2005 contest. After the high expectations generated by the campaign, the eventual outcome came as a bitter blow.

Indeed, it was a blow more bitter than might reasonably have been expected even on a pessimistic reading of the opinion polls. Even if the trend of declining support had continued further in the final hours of the campaign, the party might still have expected to win at least a quarter of the vote. The extent of the discrepancy between the eventual outcome and the final polls clearly raises questions as to whether the opinion polls exaggerated the scale of the surge in the first place.

There is certainly a degree of evidence that some of the weighting of their samples undertaken by the polls to improve their accuracy may have helped contribute to their apparent overestimating of Liberal Democrat support. However, it also seems that a significant number of voters who had told the pollsters that they did not know how they were going to vote eventually swallowed their reservations and voted Labour anyway, thereby helping to open up the gap between the two parties. In any event, it seems likely that the annals will have to record that, although during the 2010 campaign the Liberal Democrats mounted what at the time appeared to be the most serious challenge yet to the dominance of the Conservative and Labour parties, in reality that challenge – built on the back of a just a single television performance – was based on support that was too soft, sudden and insubstantial.

Yet there is also a danger that the high expectations generated by the opinion polls lead us to undervalue what the Liberal Democrats' achieved in 2010. Set against the longer-term historical record, the performance still appears highly impressive. The party secured the second highest share of the vote to be won by the Liberal Democrats or any of its predecessor parties at any election since 1923 – only the Liberal/SDP Alliance vote of 26 per cent in 1983 outranks it. Similarly, although the party's tally of fifty-seven seats was five less than in 2005, it still represented the party's second highest total since 1929 (when, leaving aside two university seats, the Liberal Party also won fifty-seven seats). In short the party's performance in 2010 was one of its best since it lost its status as the principal competitor to the Conservatives in the 1920s.

That such a performance should have been greeted with an air of disappointment is in truth an indication of the significant longer-term progress that the party has made and is now regarded as part of the country's political fabric. The party has now won over fifty seats at three general elections in a row. Between 1945 and 1992 it had never managed to win as many as two dozen.



Although the first-past-the-post electoral system may still make life difficult for the party, the 2010 result confirms not only that it is able routinely to garner somewhere between a fifth and a quarter of the vote, but also that it is better able than in the past to turn those votes into seats.

Nevertheless, it might still be asked why the party ended up with fewer seats than in 2005, even though it won slightly more votes. After all, if the changes in the shares of the vote won by the different parties had been uniform across the country as a whole, the Liberal Democrats would have secured sixty-four seats, two more than in 2005, so votes were certainly not converted into seats as effectively as five years ago. Table 2 gives us an initial clue. It shows that the party's vote typically advanced most strongly in seats where it was least likely to bring the party a reward, that is in constituencies where it started off in third place. Meanwhile, the party's vote actually fell back somewhat in those seats it was attempting to defend. Such a pattern is of course the very opposite of what is needed if votes are to be turned into seats.

The party struggled above all in those seats that were not being defended by an incumbent Liberal Democrat MP. In the ten seats where this was the case (including York Outer, a new seat that it was estimated would have been won by the Liberal Democrats if it had been contested in 2005), the party's vote fell on average by no less than 4.7 points. Six of these seats were lost. In the remaining fifty-two seats that the party was defending, the party's vote increased a little on average, by 0.6 of a point. Only seven of these fifty-two seats were lost, albeit including the most spectacular defeat of all, of Lembit Opik in Montgomery, a seat that the party had previously only lost once in 130 years.

This loss of support where the incumbent MP stood down suggests that the personal local popularity of individual candidates still plays an important role in enabling the party to win and retain seats. Other evidence points to the same conclusion. The one group of Liberal Democrat MPs that did manage to increase their

support quite substantially comprised those who first captured their seat in 2005 and were thus defending it for the first time. On average their vote increased by 3.1 points – doubtless many of them had managed to use their first few years as the local MP to boost their local profile and thus their support. Only one such 'new' MP was defeated: Julia Goldsworthy in Camborne & Redruth, where a 1.6 point increase in her vote proved insufficient to stem an even stronger pro-Tory tide.

Equally, a glance at the eight seats that the party gained in partial compensation for the thirteen that it lost also indicates the importance of personal local popularity in achieving success. Two of these 'gains' were in fact achieved by existing Liberal Democrat MPs – Lorely Burt in Solihull and Sarah Teather in Brent Central – who, on account of boundary changes, found themselves fighting seats that it was estimated the party would not have won in 2005. Both secured substantial increases in their support of 3.5 and no less than 13.1 points respectively. Meanwhile five of the six remaining gains were secured by candidates who had also stood locally in 2005 (if not also earlier) and who doubtless had devoted considerable time and effort to getting themselves known locally. Strong performances by the party leader on television may help create a favourable backdrop for achieving electoral success, but it appears that the party cannot afford to forget the importance of sustained local activity if votes are to be turned into seats.

In any event, it is now clear why the party ended up with fewer seats at Westminster. Well-established sitting Liberal Democrat MPs whose personal vote was first accrued some time ago were typically able to do little more than hold their own – and not always that – while the party often lost ground where the incumbent MP stood down and his or her personal vote was lost. Meanwhile, scattered local successes elsewhere proved insufficient to compensate for the seats that were lost as a consequence.

However, apart from a tendency for the party to advance less

where it could profit most, Table 2 suggests there was another notable variation in the pattern of the Liberal Democrat performance – that the party found it easier to gain ground in areas of Conservative strength than in those where Labour was relatively strong. This was indeed the case. Apart from doing relatively poorly in those seats where Labour were weakest of all in 2005 (most of which were places where the Liberal Democrats are relatively strong) the stronger Labour were in 2005, the less likely it was that the Liberal Democrat vote increased between 2005 and 2010. Thus, in seats where Labour won between 20 and 40 per cent of the vote in 2005, the Liberal Democrat vote increased on average by just under two and a half points, while in seats where Labour won more than 40 per cent in 2005, the increase in the Liberal Democrat vote averaged just under half a percent. The party performed especially poorly in one traditional Labour stronghold in particular – Scotland. Here the party's vote actually fell back by no less than 3.7 points, while, in sharp contrast to the position in England and Wales, Labour's vote increased by 2.5 points.

This is the very reverse of what happened in the 2005 election. Then, the party advanced most strongly in areas of relative Labour strength, areas that had hitherto often been relatively barren for the party and a pattern that helped it make record gains at Labour's expense at that election. Voters in areas of Labour strength who were disaffected with Labour demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to vote Liberal Democrat – and especially so in seats with relatively large numbers of Muslims and students, as the issues of Iraq and tuition fees in particular took their toll on Labour support. While not all the party's relative advance in Muslim and student seats in 2005 was reversed, most of the relative progress secured in Labour territory was in fact lost in 2010.

As a result, although the party made five gains at Labour's expense in 2010 – more than it had done in all elections between 1945 and 2001, though less than the eleven secured in 2005 – the

**Well-established sitting Liberal Democrat MPs whose personal vote was first accrued some time ago were typically able to do little more than hold their own – and not always that – while the party often lost ground where the incumbent MP stood down and his or her personal vote was lost.**



party still finds itself fighting the Conservatives locally in more places than it fights Labour. Whereas there are now forty seats where the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives share first and second place and are within 10 per cent of each other, there are only twenty-six where Labour and the Liberal Democrats are in the same position – even though nationally Labour performed poorly in 2010. The party thus remains more vulnerable to a Conservative than to a Labour advance in the polls.

Yet it is with the Conservatives that the party now shares power, following the failure of any party to secure an overall majority for only the second time in the post-war era. It was an outcome that few had anticipated. Whatever else the two parties had in common, there appeared to be one major obstacle to the possibility of the two parties doing a deal: the Conservatives' apparently resolute defence of the first-past-the-post electoral system that the Liberal Democrats have long regarded as unfair. Labour, in contrast, had signalled a renewed interest in electoral reform, with a promise in its manifesto to hold a referendum on the introduction of the alternative vote. Meanwhile many a Labour and Liberal Democrat activist feels that the two parties have a natural affinity that some hope might eventually result in some kind of 'realignment of the left', the first stage of which might be the formation of a coalition government between the two parties.

However, the parliamentary arithmetic presented David Cameron with a dilemma. His party might be the clear 'winner' of the election, but Labour and the

Liberal Democrats between them potentially had just enough seats together with their allied parties in Northern Ireland to be able to sustain a government. Between them these parties had 319 seats, only four short of an effective majority given the failure of five Sinn Fein MPs to take their seats. True, such a government would be reliant on the support of the Scottish and Welsh nationalists, Caroline Lucas of the Greens and the Independent MP, Lady Hermon, but all of them had good reason to prefer such a government to a Conservative one – and especially so if it were to be committed to significant electoral reform.

Faced with the danger of being denied power, Mr Cameron proved unexpectedly flexible on his attitude to the electoral system. His opening offer to the Liberal Democrats – of a commission on electoral reform – may have been obviously too little to form the basis of an agreement, but it signalled an appreciation of the importance of the issue to the Liberal Democrats. Eventually, after a long weekend of negotiations, the Conservatives signed up to the Labour proposal that they had hitherto opposed: a referendum on the alternative vote, a referendum that has now been scheduled to take place at the beginning of May next year. In contrast, Labour's divisions on the subject of electoral reform were laid bare as a number of its prominent members, most notably David Blunkett and John Reid, indicated on the air waves that they felt doing a deal with the Liberal Democrats on electoral reform was a price not worth paying in order to stay in power.

**'The more they argue, the more they sound the same' – Nick Clegg in the first TV debate, 15 April 2010; and voters show their approval**

Two key lessons for the party can be drawn from this experience. The first is that its opportunity to exercise influence does not simply depend on how many MPs it has, but also on the balance of its opponents' forces. The party's influence is at its maximum when not only does no single party have a majority, but Conservative and Labour have roughly the same number of MPs such that a deal with either party would produce an overall majority. The outcome of the 2010 election was far from perfect in that regard – the arithmetical foundations of any Labour/Liberal Democrat government would undoubtedly have been fragile – but it was sufficiently close to give the party more leverage than it has ever had before in the post-war period.

Secondly, however, being able to exercise such leverage implies a willingness to strike a deal with either Labour or the Conservatives – and not to privilege a prior preference to do a deal with one rather than the other. In other words, the party has to accept that it is a 'hinge' party that sometimes does a deal with Labour, sometimes with the Conservatives – and does not regard coalition as the first phase in some form of realignment of either the 'right' or the 'left'.

It is with this logic in mind that the value of the deal on electoral reform with the Conservatives has to be judged. There is no doubt that, if implemented, the alternative vote would produce far from a proportional outcome, and still leave the Liberal Democrats at some considerable disadvantage in turning votes into seats. Taking into account the evidence on the second preferences of

voters collected by ComRes for *The Independent* shortly before polling day, it can be estimated that if the system had been in place in 2010, the party would still only have won some seventy-nine seats, only twenty-two more than it secured under the current system, and just 12 per cent of the total seats in the Commons.

Even so, the potential impact of the alternative vote on the party's bargaining power is considerable. If we look further at what might have happened if that system had been in place in 2010, the Conservatives, with 281 seats, would not have been far ahead of Labour on 262. On these figures the Liberal Democrats would have been able to form a majority government in collaboration with either of its two bigger rivals. So introducing the alternative vote could well have a bigger impact on the Liberal Democrats' future prospects than immediately meets the eye.

This perhaps is even more clearly the case if we consider what the Liberal Democrats might do with such bargaining power. One obvious option would be to press for yet further electoral reform to something more clearly proportional than the alternative vote. That suggests that switching to the alternative vote may be no more than a staging post in a move towards a more proportional system. Viewed in that light the outcome of the referendum vote next May would certainly seem to be crucial.

Yet curiously this may not be the case after all. For we also have to consider why first past the post failed to deliver David Cameron his majority in the first place. Was it simply an accident that is unlikely to be repeated any time soon? Or did it signal a more profound change in British politics, whereby hung parliaments are likely to be more common even if first past the post remains in place?

We have already noted the long-term growth in Liberal Democrat representation in the House of Commons. The party is not alone in its challenge to the Conservative and Labour domination of the Commons. Before the 1970s, typically only two or three independent or minor party MPs were elected. At each of the last four elections, there have been

between twenty-eight and thirty. So, together with the representation secured by the Liberal Democrats, it has become the norm for the Commons to contain some eighty to ninety MPs belonging to parties other than Conservative or Labour. That in itself has made hung parliaments more likely.

However, the ability of first past the post to generate an overall majority for either Conservative or Labour also depends on there being a plentiful supply of seats that are marginal between those two parties. If a small lead for one of those parties in votes is to be transformed into a lead in seats that is big enough to give it an overall majority, then many a seat needs to change hands between those parties as a result of the swing of the national pendulum. However, the number of such seats fell markedly in the 1970s, primarily because the northern and more urban half of Britain became increasingly Labour and the southern and more rural half more Conservative, leaving fewer and fewer seats potentially representative of the national mood. The trend was reversed somewhat when New Labour had some success in the 1990s in chasing southern voters, but after the 2010 election the number of marginal seats has fallen once more to around half the level it was in the 1950s and 1960s.

The combination of fewer marginal seats and more third-party MPs has profoundly undermined the ability of first past the post to generate overall majorities. This can be seen by looking at the range of results that would produce a hung parliament if we assume that support for the Liberal Democrats and other smaller parties remains as it was in 2010, and then investigate what the outcome in seats would be as a result of various uniform national swings from the 2010 result between Labour and the Conservatives. Such an exercise reveals that any outcome between an 11.2-point lead for the Conservatives and a 2.7-point lead for Labour would produce a hung parliament.

This range is, of course, asymmetrical. It is currently harder for the Conservatives to secure a majority than Labour. This reflects a 'bias' in the system that arises for

a number of reasons – the average electorate in seats won by the Conservatives is higher than in those won by Labour, as is the turnout, while the Conservatives are also somewhat less successful than Labour at winning seats by small majorities. This bias may be reduced somewhat at the next election if the new government is successful in implementing its aim of reducing the disparity in the size of constituencies. But while such action may make it somewhat easier for the Conservatives to win an overall majority in future, equally it will become more difficult for Labour to do so. The overall width of the range of results that would produce a hung parliament is unlikely to be affected – and would encompass more or less any reasonably narrow Conservative or Labour lead in votes.

So the hung parliament in 2010 was not a one-off accident. It was the product of long-term and now well-established changes in the electoral geography of Britain. As a result, even if the alternative vote were not to be introduced, hung parliaments could well still be quite common in future – potentially giving the Liberal Democrats new opportunities to exercise leverage to have the system changed even if the vote next May is lost.

The 2010 election undoubtedly contained its disappointments and setbacks for the Liberal Democrats. It was a salutary reminder of the limitations of what can be achieved with a successful national election campaign and of the continued importance of long-term activity by popular candidates and MPs in their constituencies. The party still finds it harder to mount a challenge in Labour territory than in Conservative seats. But at the same time it was an election that demonstrated how the first-past-the-post system has now become significantly less effective at denying the party leverage. Meanwhile, limited though the reform might at first appear, introducing the alternative vote would increase that leverage yet further. There does indeed now seem to be a substantial crack in the mould of British politics.

*John Curtice is Professor of Politics at Strathclyde University.*

**So the hung parliament in 2010 was not a one-off accident. It was the product of long-term and now well-established changes in the electoral geography of Britain.**

# THE 1910 AND 2010 CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

This year marks the centenary of the last occasion on which a Liberal government went into a general election. As Ian Packer's article in this issue describes, not only did a Liberal government go into a general election, but one also came out of it too – and not just once but twice, with elections in both January and December 1910. A hundred years later, Liberals Democrats entered the election in opposition and emerged to hold the balance of power in a hung parliament. **Dr Mark Pack** looks back at the 1910 campaigns from the perspective of the techniques used in 2010.

**D**ESPITE THE Liberal government's double victory in 1910, in reality the electoral results were rather more ambiguous. The Liberals went into the January 1910 election with a majority of 130 (and, in practice, a working majority of more like 350 on most issues, given the small number of Conservative MPs, who comprised the main opposition party). Yet they came out of the January election without any majority, and indeed were sixty seats short of one. Just as the 1945 Labour landslide disappeared at the general election that followed it, so too did the 1906 Liberal landslide.

However, unlike the in 1950s, in the early twentieth century there was a sufficient number of MPs from other parties – principally Labour and Nationalists – for the results in 1910 to keep the Liberals firmly in power, with the party winning on both occasions (on most counts) a tiny handful of seats more than the Conservatives. The Liberal grip on power was assisted by the lack of a concept of a 'popular mandate' based on who won the most votes overall. The Conservatives topped the popular vote both times, but, unlike more recent times, that was not a significant factor in post-election manoeuvrings.

The ambiguity inherent in both results helps feed the debate about whether or not the Liberal Party had entered a period of terminal decline before the outbreak of the First World War. There are

signs in the results both of continued Liberal dominance yet also of a changing balance of electoral forces, particularly with forty, and then forty-two, Labour MPs being elected in 1910.

The conflicting signs of continuity and change are also present when comparing the campaign techniques used by candidates in 1910 with those of 2010. Superficially, the two worlds of electioneering are very different, with 2010 having universal suffrage, including women, mass media coverage through the TV and radio, and the increasing use of the internet and marketing, publicity and PR professions which have evolved new languages, approaches and techniques in the intervening century. Scratch under the surface, however, and many signs of continuity emerge.

## Campaign finance

The costs of politics are much talked about in 2010 and they imposed a heavy financial burden in 1910, albeit that elections were often more profitable than in the twenty-first century. Years after the 1906 Liberal landslide, Herbert Gladstone boasted how he had made a profit for the Liberal party on the campaign. And not just a small profit: the campaign had cost £100,000 but he had raised £275,000 – a profit of £175,000. In modern money that is a cost of around £8.5 million and a profit of nearly £15 million.<sup>1</sup> In an echo of modern times, both 1906 Liberal victor

# 2010 ELECTIONS

## IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNING

Campbell-Bannerman and the Conservative Prime Minister Balfour before him were accused of using honours to reward those who had donated to party funds.

One use of central funds was to support key local contests. Although the terminology of target or marginal seats was not centre stage for early-twentieth-century election planning, the methods were frequently similar. For example, for the 1906 election in London the Liberal Chief Whip (it was Chief Whips who organised party election campaigns and elections funds) divided the sixty-one London seats into three groups – twenty-eight it could win, ten it might just possibly win and twenty-three it was unlikely to win – and then concentrated financial help and party agents on those first twenty-eight. The money came with strings – it had to be matched locally and was only given where candidates were in place. That combination of segmenting and setting conditions is very similar to what has been done in the run-up to the 2010 general election by all parties.<sup>2</sup>

### Large scale leafleting

Whilst the financial pictures in 1910 and 2010 bear striking similarities, the length of campaign was typically different. For many candidates and campaigners, polling day in 2010 was the culmination of a local campaign that had seen several years of intense effort; but in the early twentieth century

there was far less campaigning all year round.<sup>3</sup>

In 1910, events also conspired to encourage such pauses in campaigning for, as the National Liberal Federation reported in its 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report, ‘There is always a natural tendency to lethargy in the early months following a General Election. But to this have been added the exceptional conditions brought about by the death of King Edward [in May 1910]’.

When campaigning did pick up, it featured large quantities of written literature. The broad picture of twentieth-century electioneering is of the heavy use of leaflets in the early parts of the century, which falls away in later years as mass media start to dominate but then rises again in the last quarter of the century.

The volume of literature in the early twentieth century was impressive. In 1906 the Liberal Publication Department centrally issued no fewer than 25 million leaflets and books – for an electorate of just over seven million. That is equivalent to more than three items for every elector in the country, without including any literature produced outside of the LPD.

The 1910 elections were similarly paper intensive:

Beforehand it was hardly expected that the figures of 1906 could or would be exceeded, but as a fact the number of separate publications put into circulation during the General Election

period was more than half as great again in [January] 1910 as in 1906. As the [Liberal Publication] Department does not distribute literature broadcast, but sells it to the various localities, this increased volume of business in the best possible proof that the publications are deemed attractive and useful ... Over forty-one millions of separate publications were sent out from 42, Parliament Street in two months.<sup>4</sup>

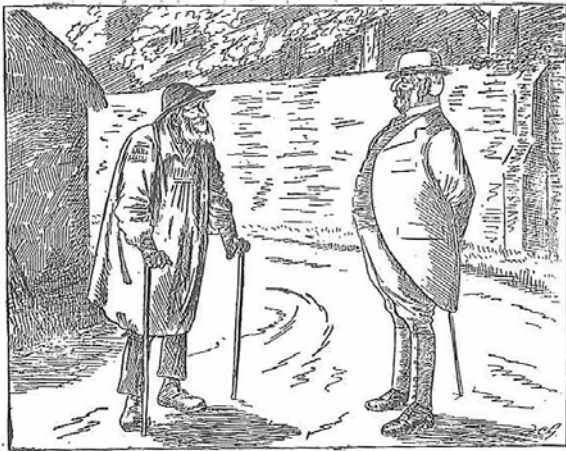
This material included 104 different leaflets, four booklets, five sets of campaign notes, draft posters and printed pictures and posters.

Although the nature of the printed election material in 2010 was different in many ways from 1910, including the widespread use of full colour printing and of direct mail, in terms of volume and the value attached to distributing pieces of paper, a campaigner from 1910 would have felt at home in 2010 and vice versa. Two aspects would, however, have struck them as different: the role of music and the content of the literature.

### Music

Political songs were a common feature of elections in the early twentieth century and there were ‘nearly a million Liberal song sheets’ distributed for the January 1910 election. These songs typically took well-known tunes and replaced the words with a political message. For example, *The*

THE NEST EGG.



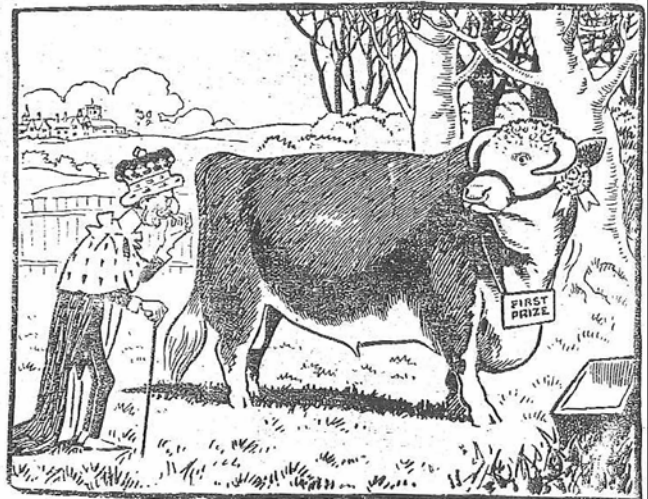
[From the "WESTMINSTER GAZETTE"]

**The Squire:** *I don't approve of these Old Age Pensions—people who have saved nothing should get nothing.*

**Old Labourer:** *Beggin' your pardon, squire, but what's been the use of the likes o' we trying to save when we knew we never couldn't save enough to live on? Now, these yur Old Age Pensions 'll be a zort o' nest egg as 'll put a little 'cart into folk an' make it worth while trying to put aside a bit.*

[The Tories pretend to be afraid that the result of Old Age Pensions to old people of 70 and over will be to get rid of thrift altogether.]

THE TRUE PRINCIPLES OF HEREDITY.



**NOBLE LORD**—"By jove, you're a fine fellow there's no doubt about that!"

**THE BULL**—"Yes my lord, so would you be had your ancestors been selected as carefully as mine have been."

VOTE FOR

**D. A. THOMAS**

AND

**Abolition of the Lords' Veto.**

Printed and Published by S. Glossop & Sons, New Street Works, Cardiff.

*Times* of 4 January 1904 reported on a by-election in Ashburton, Devon,<sup>5</sup> giving the words of the Liberal Working Men song, to be sung to the tune of Auld Lang Syne:

Let Newton Abbot lead the way  
And Teignmouth follow on  
Bovey, Dawlish and Moreton too,  
Chagford and Ashburton.

The once again in freedom's fight  
United we'll combine,  
Send Mr Eve to Parliament  
And lick the Tories fine.

For Harry Trelawney Eve, my boys,  
With him we all agree,  
We'll fight for him and work for him  
And make him our MP

Political singing has not completely died away, whether in the

Labour Party with its renditions of the Red Flag at party conferences continuing well in to the late twentieth century or with the Liberator Song Book still produced by a group of liberal and Liberal Democrat activists. However, such singing is now primarily aimed at an internal audience at internal events, rather than being part of public campaigning.<sup>6</sup>

Public music in the 2010 election was mostly confined to theme tunes, played during TV broadcasts, or after speeches and the like. Whether or not the tunes had words with them, this was music to be listened to rather than, as in 1910, songs to be sung by supporters.

**Content of literature**

It was not only the role of music which varied between 1910 and 2010. Looking at a political leaflet from either year, it is immediately clear which year it is from, and not only because of different printing

Liberal election leaflets from 1910

technologies and typographical fashions but also because of the style and form of the content.

In 2010 election literature was usually A3 or A4, with some newspapers that were approximately the equivalent of eight sides of A4, plus longer, but largely unread, national election manifestos. By contrast, in 1910 long items of literature and associated pamphlets were extremely common.

For the January 1910 election 900,000 copies of two election editions of the *Liberal Monthly* were distributed. Pamphlets of twenty or more closely printed pages were also common. In 1910 these frequently included lengthy constitutional arguments – a reflection of the fact that the major political issue of the moment was the constitutional role of the House of Lords. Those arguments were often bolstered, and the literature lengthened, by detailed recitations of evidence from history.

# THE STORY OF OLD AGE PENSIONS

## I.—UNDER THE TORIES

1895.—Tory Government returned to power pledged to give Old Age Pensions. The promise of Old Age Pensions was the most attractive item in the "Social Programme" put forward by Mr. Chamberlain in 1894 and "fully approved" by the Tory leader (the late Lord Salisbury) before the General Election of 1895.

1895–1905.—Tories in power for a period of ten years. **Nothing done**, except the appointment of one Commission and three Committees to inquire into the question. Subject suddenly discovered to be not in Mr. Chamberlain's Department!

## II.—UNDER THE LIBERALS

1906 (Jan.).—Liberal Government returned to power unpledged to give Old Age Pensions.

1906 (Nov.).—"The matter will be dealt with as soon as time and money permit." (SIR H. CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN.)

1907.—A definite sum set aside as a "nest egg" for Old Age Pensions. "It is our intention, before the close of the next Session of this Parliament to lay firm the foundations of this Reform." (MR. ASQUITH.)

1908.—**Old Age Pensions Act Passed.**

1909.—Pensions paid from New Year's Day to pensioners of over 70, the number on October 1st being 682,000, nearly all getting 5s. a week.

**Study these Two Records and you will easily decide which is the Better of the Two.**

# THE TWO LOAVES

(BOTH ARE FOUR-POUND LOAVES.)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE GERMAN LOAF</b> <u>UNDER PROTECTION.</u></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>RYE</b> <b>6 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d</b></p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>TAXED LOAF.</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THE BRITISH LOAF</b> <u>UNDER FREE TRADE.</u></p> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>WHEAT</b> <b>5 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>d</b></p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>UNTAXED LOAF.</b></p>
--	--

(The prices are the average prices for 1908 in Berlin and London as given in an Official Blue Book, No. 4954 of 1909, page 193.)

## STICK TO FREE TRADE AND AN UNTAXED LOAF.

In many respects, party pamphlets did what think tanks and bloggers now do for political parties. For example, *The House of Lords: who they are and what they have done* by Harold Spender came out in a revised edition in 1909 with fifty-six pages of detailed argument, much of which went through the history of past Lords votes. Partly the length was a necessary result of the argument being made, namely that the Lords had consistently blocked many worthy measures. But it also reflected a willingness by many people to read lengthy political pieces.<sup>7</sup> An advert on the inside back cover of Spender's work gives an indication of the scale on which these pamphlets were consumed, with a sliding scale of prices ranging from six copies through to 1,000.

These lengthy pamphlets typically read like a cross between a political argument and a history book. J. M. Robertson MP's pamphlet of 1910, *The Great Budget*,

justifies the Liberal government's approach to taxation with a line of argument that starts with the medieval city state of Florence, passes through Charles I and the Long Parliament with a nod in the direction of Pitt the Younger, before getting to the late nineteenth century and the financial policies of William Gladstone. But it soon diverts back to sixteenth-century Holland, ancient Athens and a host of other historical stops before commencing a contemporary argument. Such detailed justification and extensive context for a political case would now far more commonly be found online or in a think tank's publication than in a party's election literature.

Literature in 1910 was inclined to be text heavy and printed in black only, with the occasional use of other colours such as red. Even items intended to be posted up on walls, in a form of political fly-posting, often contained a fair amount of text. Picture (or, more

accurately, cartoon) posters were much more common in 1910 than in previous elections, but text heavy posters were still common. Despite the importance attached to promoting individual candidates, posters were frequently political messages and not the modern-style name-recognition type posters.

The Conservatives tended to favour large posters, whereas the Liberals more often used a number of different small posters covering a range of issues to take up an equivalent amount of space.

With text-heavy designs, graphical variation either came from the inclusion of cartoons or from the imaginative use of blank space. One cartoon showed a peer putting an obstacle on the track in front of a train marked 'Progress', while a Liberal leaflet from 1910 had a front page asking: 'Is the House of Lords a fair and impartial second chamber? Turn over the page if you wish to find some facts that will help you to

answer this question.’ Inside are two pages each headed as containing the bills ‘rejected, wrecked or mutilated by the Lords’ during the last Tory and Liberal governments respectively. The Liberal page is packed with bills while the Tory page has a large blank space with ‘None’ printed in the middle.

Helped by 1909 being the centenary of William Gladstone’s birth, he featured in many Liberal publications. But the overriding content in 1910 in centrally produced Liberal literature was the Lords, with a touch of naval armament, pensions, free trade and food prices,<sup>8</sup> and a smattering of other issues getting a mention now and again. A similar pattern was present in local literature, with a little more emphasis perhaps on the budget, social reform more generally, the government’s record and, in December 1910, home rule.

The House of Lords issue mixed both principled and pragmatic arguments. The pragmatic were along the lines of the leaflet mentioned above, highlighting measures the House of Lords had blocked. Typical of the principled arguments was a one-sided leaflet/poster with simply the one slogan, ‘Give the LAST WORD in legislation to The House of Commons which you YOURSELVES elect.’ These arguments and slogans echoed that used on the banner about Prime Minister Asquith when he launched the first 1910 general election campaign with a speech at the Albert Hall: ‘Shall the People be Ruled by the Peers?’

Just as campaign songs of the time often used popular tunes and caricatured popular lyrics in order to provide a common frame of reference for the audience, so in literature there was the use of parables and faux fairy tales. The Liberal leaflet ‘A little parable’, for example, used this format to make the case for free trade, reproducing a story that first appeared in the *Westminster Gazette* of a housewife going into a shop. In discussion with the shopkeeper, it turns out that all the goods have gone up in price thanks to tariff reform, even though the shopkeeper himself is clearly doing well, judging by the affluent clothes he is wearing in the accompanying cartoon.

A new development in 1910 was the use of large newspaper advertisements. Their popularity has waxed and waned in elections during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but their use really started in December 1910.

### Other aspects of campaigning

In addition to the literature put out by the party’s central publication department, there was locally produced literature, including local newspapers and pamphlets from local figures. The mix of canvassing, public meetings or lectures (the prevalence of the latter showing the didactic emphasis of campaigns which saw a need to educate as well as to persuade), pamphlets, leaflets and local newspapers made up a long-standing staple of local campaigning.<sup>9</sup>

The volume of this campaigning was assisted by voting taking place on different days in different constituencies. As a result, although campaigns were more decentralised in 1910 than in 2010, there was scope to move effort about as polling finished in some seats and started in others. In January 1910, this included a wave of Liberal ministers going to make speeches in the West Country in January in response to poor initial election results in the region. Winston Churchill was amongst those despatched to try to turn the tide in those West Country seats which had not yet voted. Austen Chamberlain blamed this incursion for the failure of the Conservatives to make expected gains in several Devon county seats: ‘we were overwhelmed at the last moment by the weight of oratory on the government side’.<sup>10</sup>

The physical distances many voters had to travel to vote, combined with the paucity or expense of public and private transport options for many, meant candidates put significant efforts into transporting voters. The election of 1906 had been the first motorcar election with the then still new technology making its first big impact. Almost half the country’s cars were used for electioneering in 1906, and in 1910 the motorcar continued to play an important role. A bonus for the

Conservatives was the support of motorcar manufacturing firms Rover, Swift and Daimler who provided vehicles for the 1910 campaigns. Across both parties in the January election perhaps as many as four million voters were taken to and from the polls.<sup>11</sup>

Less glamorous, but effective in its own way, was the bicycle. As late as the inter-war years, the Liberal election manual *The Conduct and Management of Parliamentary Elections* was extolling the virtues of having, ‘a corps of cyclists, formed from those who ride and who display no eagerness for house-to-house canvassing’<sup>12</sup> whose role would be to distribute literature and to trace electors who have moved.

Another aspect of campaigning was the exercise of influence – together with, particularly in rural areas, older forms of campaigning such as intimidation and the exercise of power by landlords over others still lingering.

Partly in response to the January 1910 election the Liberal Party created the Gladstone League both to campaign on free trade and land reform and also to battle voter intimidation:

The Gladstone League sought to organise rural villagers into small, self-governing groups of men and women who would read newspapers together, discuss political questions, and be ready to work, at the next election, ‘to preserve the independence of electors, to secure the supremacy of the House of Commons, to oppose taxes on food of the people, and to establish the people’s rights in regard to the land.’<sup>13</sup>

Despite the franchise being greatly restricted in 1910 compared to 2010, public participation in elections ran high. Amongst voters turnout was consistently far higher; but elections themselves were also in part entertainment for the public, as one witness recalled from 1906 in Bath:

At election times one of the sights was to see these brothers [one Tory, one Radical] driving round Bath with harness, whip, horses, dogcarts and themselves decorated in party

**Almost half the country’s cars were used for electioneering in 1906, and in 1910 the motorcar continued to play an important role.**



colours. It looked like a competition for the best-dressed dogcart.

And also:

I was outside the Old Herald Office watching the results of the polling come in. There was an immense crowd reaching from St Michael's, Bridge Street, to the top of New Bond Street; excited, pushing and swaying.<sup>14</sup>

### Primaries: not such a new idea

There is one footnote which intriguingly suggests the public may have been involved in other ways too: it comes from the Gower.<sup>15</sup> During the 2005–10 parliament, the question of using open primaries has been debated in British politics, and have been used on a limited scale by the Conservative Party, as an innovation based on importing American practices. However, the Liberal Party got there a century earlier with an open primary.

Held on 22 November 1905, the Gower primary was open to any 'loyal' Liberal voter, with provision for anyone voting in the primary to have to make a public declaration of loyalty to the Liberal Party if challenged before casting their ballot. The contest between T. J. Williams and J. Williams saw 5,062 votes cast out of a total electorate (including non-Liberals) of 13,212.<sup>16</sup> T. J. Williams won, but went on to lose to a different J. Williams in the 1906 election.

The primary appears to have gone unremarked other than in contemporary local newspaper reports, which, combined with the lack of any clear reason why Gower should have used a novel and unique system, suggests this may well not have been the only primary of the time.

### Conclusion

The little puzzle that the Gower's primary leaves behind illustrates a wider point. Despite the growth of the political science profession, the detail of how campaigns are organised and run is very rarely documented in public. Even those outside observers who are

**There is an essential similarity in many of the aspects of campaigning which would make a local helper from 2010 feel rather at home in a 1910 election.**

interested are held back by the shrouds of secrecy around what is a competitive profession in what is largely a zero-sum endeavour: if one party wins a seat, by necessity that means the other parties lose it. As a result, many of the questions that this comparison of campaigning in 1910 and 2010 may provoke are not readily answerable.

In addition, this article has not looked at the 'national campaign' where, due to the rise of mass media, presidential-style politics and the grip of national party HQs, the 2010 campaign looks very different from that of 1910.

Nonetheless, we can see many similarities, especially in the fields of finance and the emphasis on the large-scale use of literature. There is an essential similarity in many of the aspects of campaigning which would make a local helper from 2010 feel rather at home in a 1910 election.

*Mark Pack completed a PhD in nineteenth-century elections before working in the higher education and IT sectors. He was the Liberal Democrats' Head of Innovations until last year and is now Head of Digital at Mandate Communications. He also co-edits Liberal Democrat Voice (www.LibDemVoice.org).*

- 1 Although the central costs were low compared to current expenditure, at a local level the situation was very different with a candidate in a 1910 contested election typically declaring election expenses of around £85,000 in modern money.
- 2 The Liberal Party's machine did not just look after its own candidates. As a result of the close relations and electoral deals with the Labour Party, in some seats it was the Liberal organisation which ran campaigns for Labour candidates.
- 3 There were some exceptions, and the Liberal defeat in the 1908 Mid-Devon by-election was blamed by some Liberals partly on the fact that the Tory candidate had 'assiduously and lavishly nursed the constituency ... [the sitting Liberal] had been conspicuous by his absence': Neil Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The General Elections of 1910* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 45.
- 4 National Liberal Federation, 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report.
- 5 Thanks to Graham Lippiatt for

highlighting this report.

- 6 Will.i.am's 'Yes We Can' song for the Barack Obama 2008 US presidential campaign is a rare exception to this.
- 7 This wordiness was also reflected in candidates' election addresses, which averaged around 1,000 words each in 1910: Blewett, *Peers, Parties and People*, p. 315.
- 8 Possibly a defensive reaction by Liberals to rising food prices in rural areas. See P. Lynch, *The Liberal Party in Rural England 1885–1910: Radicalism and Community* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), Chapter 6. Thanks to Graham Lippiatt for drawing my attention to this source.
- 9 For example, see Lynch, *Liberal Party in Rural England*, p. 141.
- 10 Quoted in Blewett, *Peers, Parties and People*, p. 104.
- 11 Blewett, *Peers, Parties and People*, pp. 293–4. Candidates without cars found themselves needing to remind voters of the secrecy of the ballot while encouraging them to get lifts from their rivals, as with the Labour candidate in Cocker-mouth whose January 1910 placards read, 'Ride to the poll in Tory and Liberal motor cars, but vote Whitehead.'
- 12 William Woodings, *The Conduct and Management of Parliamentary Elections: A Practical Manual*, 9th edn., eds. H. F. Oldman and J. Manus (London: Liberal Publication Department, 1933), p. 2.
- 13 Lynch, *Liberal Party in Rural England*, p. 205. In addition to the intimidation of individual voters, the use of physical violence to attempt to break up meetings of opponents and intimidate speakers was not unknown, both in rural and urban areas. For several examples see Blewett, *Peers, Parties and People*, pp. 103–4.
- 14 Quoted in Stephen Tollyfield, 'Battling Bath Liberal', *Journal of Liberal History*, 48, Autumn 2005, p. 23.
- 15 Thanks to Steve Belzak of the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff who both first drew my attention to this primary and shared with me his research findings.
- 16 That 38 per cent turnout compares with a 24 per cent turnout in the Conservative Party's all-postal primary in Totnes in 2009. Votes were used to elect delegates who in turn selected the candidate.

# SWINGING IN THE '60s

## MARY MURPHY AND PONTYPRIDD

At the beginning of the 1960s, the Pontypridd parliamentary constituency in south Wales was dominated by the Labour Party and the coalmining industry, although in some respects it was a disparate cluster of communities from Pontypridd in the north to Llantrisant further south, and including Cowbridge and Bonvilston in the Vale of Glamorgan.

**Steve Belzak**

examines the story of how a small group of Liberal activists, led by the redoubtable Mary Murphy, set out to challenge Labour's hegemony.



# 1960s TO THE LIBERALS

## PONTYPRIDD URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

**I**N TERMS of local government, Pontypridd's constituent municipalities made up a patchwork of different areas, including Pontypridd Urban District Council, Llantrisant and Llantwit Fardre Rural District Council, and also parts of Cardiff Rural District Council and Cowbridge Rural District Council.

The constituency came into existence in 1918 and was held until 1922 by a coalition Liberal, Mr T. A. Lewis, who lost it in a by-election to Labour in 1922, who have held it ever since. Between 1922 and 1970 it was contested by the Liberals only at the 1931 and 1938 by-elections (and in the latter case it was by a National Liberal), and in the 1931 and 1945 general elections.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Liberal situation in England and Wales at the dawn of the 1960s**

The sensational by-election result at Orpington in 1962 gave an enormous boost to the fortunes of the Liberal Party.<sup>2</sup> However, the sort of voters that the Liberals in southern England were appealing to at this stage were not the sort to be found in the South Wales industrial mining communities. The latter were, in the main, the kind of working-class voters who lived in terraced houses and tended to vote Labour at parliamentary elections. In any event, Cook argues that the 1963 local election results showed that

Liberal support was dropping.<sup>3</sup> It is true that the 1964 general election enabled the party to 'break into new ground' with a share of the poll, at 11.2 per cent, that was double its 1959 level, and nine MPs.<sup>4</sup> However, the closeness of the result brought with it fresh problems, with a national squeeze from the two main parties, and, with the exception of Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles, a crop of disappointing by-election results in the subsequent parliament.

In Wales, the fortunes of Liberalism in the 1950s seemed to be going in the opposite direction to those of Liberalism in England. Just as the latter was showing signs of new life, the former suffered the catastrophic loss of the Carmarthen by-election to Labour. However, as David Roberts points out, the new tide *did*, as the 1960s dawned, lap against Wales, with successes in the local government elections that year in Cardiff, Neath and Llanelli.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, as J. Graham Jones notes, the Liberal position in Wales in the early 1960s remained 'precarious' as the party prepared for the coming Westminster election, and 'ultimately there was no Liberal recovery in Wales in 1964.'<sup>6</sup>

### **Pontypridd Urban District Council (PUDC)**

At the beginning of the 1960s, the council was overwhelmingly dominated by the Labour Party, which held more than

twenty of the twenty-seven seats, with just one Liberal (two from 1962 onwards), and a handful of Independents. The Council was divided into seven multi-member wards with elections every year for a third of its membership for three-year terms.

Liberal membership of the council in the early 1960s was concentrated in one four-member ward, Trallwn, which lies between Pontypridd town centre and the mining village of Cilfynydd. It was, and still is, predominantly comprised of terraced houses built around the end of the nineteenth century, although some houses on Pontypridd Common, on the eastern side of the ward, might be considered home to a wealthier professional group.

Until 1948 the ward was entirely Labour, but one seat was won by a Liberal, Eddie Williams, in a by-election in November 1948, and held by him until 1954. The by-election was caused by the death of a Labour councillor. The ward Labour Party nominated a Mrs Milton, a longstanding member of the party, to be its candidate, but her nomination was rejected by the constituency party because, at sixty-five years of age, she was considered too old.<sup>7</sup> The campaign of Eddie Williams, a deacon and treasurer of a local chapel, seized on this in a hard-fought campaign in which he was described as 'a firm friend of the old age pensioners, whose fight he

Cllr Mary Murphy  
as Mayor of  
Pontypridd in  
the mid 1960s  
(photo by kind  
permission of  
Rhondda Cynon  
Taf Libraries)

supports.<sup>8</sup> Williams won against the Labour candidate by 1,381 votes to 986 in what was described as 'one of the heaviest polls known in a by-election.'<sup>9</sup> It was a campaign which had seen both the local Labour MP and the Labour MP for Hartlepool (whose home was in the ward) out canvassing, but to no avail. Councillor Williams' agent described the result as conclusive proof 'that the Trallwn ward is Liberal', while the Labour agent branded it as a victory for 'the combined forces of Liberals and Tories in the ward.'<sup>10</sup> Eddie Williams served as a councillor for five and a half years until he unexpectedly lost his seat in 1954 in what was described by the local newspaper as a 'sensational election result.'<sup>11</sup>

The ward was then bereft of Liberal representation until 1960 when another Liberal, W. L. Simmons, defeated a Labour candidate.<sup>12</sup> Simmons was joined two years later by Reg Price, and when Simmons announced that he was resigning from the council in early 1963, because he had moved to Bideford, Price expressed his deep regrets. Within a fortnight, the local Liberal Association, meeting in Pontypridd YMCA, had decided to adopt two new candidates – 'two prominent local residents', in the words of the local newspaper – for the May elections: Mr Cyril Morgan for Rhydyfelin, and Miss Mary Edwards for the vacant Trallwn seat.<sup>13</sup>

Mr Morgan explained his outlook: 'The tragedy of Pontypridd is that it is in the grip of a monopoly factor in the guise of the Labour Party that seems to have the impression that the council is the exclusive right of the Labour Party.'<sup>14</sup> Derek Lewis amplifies this by explaining that, while there were Liberals, like himself, who became active for ideological reasons, there were many who disliked the 'one-party totalitarian style' of Labour in the Welsh valleys and passionately believed in the merits of opposition and political competition. Not that ideology excluded an oppositional stance; the two often went hand-in-hand.<sup>15</sup> It seems safe to conclude that national phenomena, like Orpington and Jo Grimond, had much less of a role to play than purely local factors.

Mary Edwards, later to become Mary Murphy, was a Pontypridd woman, the daughter of Mr Richard Edwards and Mrs Annie Edwards of Taff Villa, Berw Road. She attended Pontypridd Girls' Grammar School and Bangor Teacher Training College where she studied physical education. A fluent Welsh speaker, she was a member of Sardis Congregational Church, Pontypridd, and returned to her native town, teaching first at Mill Street Secondary School and then at Ysgol Uwchradd, Rhydyfelin. She also travelled widely, lived for a year in the United States and visited, among other places, the Soviet Union (in 1958) although she told the *Pontypridd Observer* that it was Israel that impressed her most.<sup>16</sup>

In the May 1963 elections, Cyril Morgan failed by a considerable margin to win a seat in Rhydyfelin, but Mary Edwards won her seat in Trallwn by 1,183 votes to Labour's 846.<sup>17</sup> Labour also gained a seat from the Independents that year, two of whom had represented the Town ward.

Liberal activity in the local press began to pick up, with articles and letters on issues such as how the Liberals would run the town's buses, and the party's policy on housing. In April 1964, it was announced that, for the first time in many years, the Liberals would contest the Town ward, the candidate being a fifty-six year old who had been a Liberal member since the age of eighteen.<sup>18</sup> In the event, Labour won in the Town ward, unseating the remaining Independent, and attributing this to the development of a large council housing estate at Glyncoch which provided solid backing for socialism.<sup>19</sup> It is worth noting that Labour were returned unopposed in the Cilfynydd, Graig, Rhydyfelin and Trallwn wards.

However, it was not just the PUDC wards mentioned above in which candidates were returned without an election. This was true to an even greater extent of the Glamorgan County Council. Elections were held every three years, in April, and the record of competition was abysmal. The Liberals decided not to contest any county seats in 1964, but there was one contest in the Rhondda ward

between the official Labour candidate and an Independent Labour candidate. Although the official Labour nominee was returned comfortably by 1,682 votes to 754, the result was described by the local press as a 'jolt for Labour.'<sup>20</sup> At least the Labour candidate in the October 1964 general election was not returned unopposed, but his competition was provided by a Conservative only – there was no Liberal challenger.

The 1965 round of elections was to produce no real advance. After the elections there were twenty-three Labour councillors, two Liberals in the Trallwn ward, and two Independents in the Treforest ward. Pontypridd was, in the words of the local newspaper, 'a Labour citadel.'<sup>21</sup>

### On the attack

An interesting change appears to have taken place between the early and mid-1960s in respect of press coverage of PUDC meetings. Reports in the earlier period had all the quality of the old *Soviet Weekly*. No doubt this was due not to the local press currying favour with the Labour administration, but because of the general lack of opposition within the council.

The new style of Liberal opposition was exemplified by the Liberal attack on the all-Labour composition of the Pontypridd Burial Board. They argued that not all members of the Board were entitled to be on it since they were not ratepayers, as laid down by the Pontypridd Burial Board Act of 1892. This attack was given added weight by the Pontypridd Liberals seeking advice from Michael Meadowcroft, local government officer at the party's London HQ. Meadowcroft in consequence wrote to Welsh Secretary, Jim Griffiths, asking him to investigate the matter.<sup>22</sup> While this was going on, the Liberals gained a third member, in a by-election caused by the death of a Labour councillor representing Rhydyfelin. Leslie Broom was elected on 11 February 1966 following an energetic campaign in which he said that candidates should contest their seats – 'Allowing candidates to be elected unopposed can lead to apathy and complacency ... Councillors should be seen in

**'The tragedy of Pontypridd is that it is in the grip of a monopoly factor in the guise of the Labour Party that seems to have the impression that the council is the exclusive right of the Labour Party.'**

and around the ward concerning themselves with people's problems, and there are a great many ward matters that need attention.<sup>23</sup> Mr Broom instanced derelict houses, culverts, allotments and the need for a reduction in rent and rates.

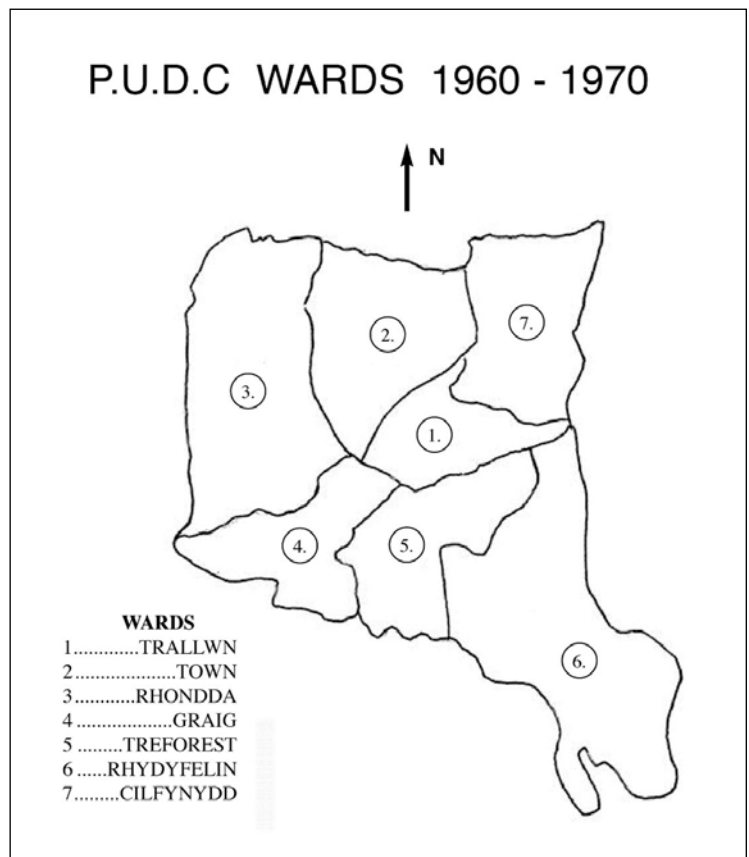
Meanwhile, the two main parties were gearing up for the general election. Sitting MP Arthur Pearson argued that 'people like both the pace, content and extent of Labour's policies',<sup>24</sup> while the Conservatives' Kenneth Green-Wanstall argued that 'there is only one job for us to do during this election campaign, and this is to bring home to the electorate the gravity of the economic situation.'<sup>25</sup> In contrast, the local Liberals met and decided not to put up a candidate for the parliamentary election on 31 March. But they were in no way downcast – they decided that they would contest a PUDC by-election in the Rhondda ward on 7 April. Moreover, the 'meeting closed with a feeling that Liberalism in the area was now becoming really alive and energetic and was becoming the counter balance to the one party domination from which the town had suffered so far.'<sup>26</sup>

In the event, Labour retained their seat in the by-election,<sup>27</sup> but the *Pontypridd Observer* was excited about the approaching May elections. Before nominations closed, the paper talked in its 22 April 1966 edition of 'Sensational Election Prospects – Four of the Seven Wards to be Contested'.<sup>28</sup> The following week it found its expectations exceeded as its headline proclaimed; 'Contests in Seven Wards – Liberals and Independents Present Arms'.<sup>29</sup>

The front page of the *Pontypridd Observer* on 13 May told the story of the polling the day before: 'Shocks for Labour Party – Two Seats Lost, Others Held only Narrowly'. Labour had lost one seat to Liberal W. J. Griffiths in the Rhydyfelin ward, and another to the Independents in Treforest. The Town ward they retained by just eighty-seven votes against Derek G. Lewis, and Mary Edwards was returned with an increased majority in Trallwn, despite an all-out effort by the Labour Party.<sup>30</sup>

With the elections barely over, Miss Edwards returned to the

Pontypridd  
Urban District  
Council wards

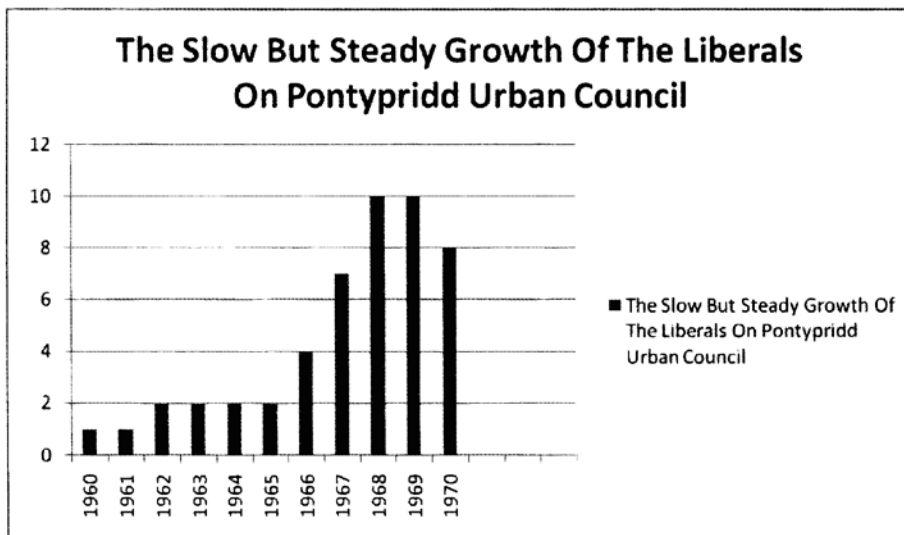


offensive. The following Tuesday, the council's treasurer asked for a resolution to be passed which would permit him and his deputy to audit the accounts of the Burial Board. A resolution ought to be passed each year, he said, but it had been many years since such a resolution had been made, and they were asking for this to be done now. The council agreed to put the item on a future agenda, but Miss Edwards intervened, saying that it seemed that discussion of the Burial Board in recent months had brought to light many 'customs', and this request to overturn a custom and return to the letter of the law would seem to indicate that there had been some 'irregularity' in the past. There was immediate uproar in the chamber, with Labour members rising to their feet, and Miss Edwards withdrew the word 'irregularity' unconditionally.<sup>31</sup>

The bitterness of the Labour Party was demonstrated by their decision soon afterwards to exclude all Independent and Liberal councillors from every committee and sub-committee at the council's annual meeting, leading Derek Lewis to state in a letter to the *Pontypridd Observer* that

'had I not seen this fiasco from the public gallery, I would not have believed it possible ... Would any thinking man agree that every Labour councillor is better suited for a committee than any Liberal or Independent councillor?'<sup>32</sup> It seems that every Labour councillor *was* considered better than Liberals or Independents when the council decided to send three of its Labour members to Pontypridd's German twin town of Nurtlingen. Councillors W. J. Griffiths and Mary Edwards did not suggest sending members of other parties instead, but questioned the value of sending councillors at all. Representatives of local organisations would be much better, argued Miss Edwards.<sup>33</sup>

But for Labour councillors used to their officers being politically on side there was worse to come. On 9 July 1966, Mary Edwards married Bernard Murphy, the Clerk to Pontypridd Urban District Council. The couple tied the knot at St Dyfrig's Roman Catholic Church, with a short service attended only by family members and intimate friends. The bride wore a light blue suit with white hat, and best man was Bernard's brother, Gerald. After the



ceremony the couple departed for Dover en route to a month-long honeymoon touring Europe and Morocco.<sup>34</sup>

Back in Britain, the new Mrs Murphy was present in Llanidloes on 10 September for the formation of the new Welsh Liberal Party, created out of the merger of the old North Wales and South Wales Liberal Federations. This was a necessary move because, as Emlyn Hooson has pointed out, ‘the Liberal organization in Wales was a recipe for disaster,’<sup>35</sup> although Russell Deacon reminds us that the new arrangements were not popular in South Wales.<sup>36</sup>

Elected to the post of chair of the new party, Mrs Murphy told the Llanidloes gathering of plans for a spring offensive in the council elections. ‘Wales has 33 yes-men in the Government,’ she said, referring to the tendency of Welsh Labour MPs to support the Labour Government whatever the circumstances. ‘It was,’ she went on, ‘about time [the Welsh people] were freed from them.’ The Liberals, she said, aimed to shape the destiny of Wales and beyond that, Britain and Europe.<sup>37</sup>

And then it was back to the attack in Pontypridd. Mrs Murphy had been criticised by the Labour Party for what they said were her backward-looking views on council tenants who didn’t pay rates. This, according to one county councillor, John Howell-Davies, was what lay behind her attack on the composition of the Pontypridd Burial Board – councillors who were also tenants were

not ratepayers in the traditional sense of the word. ‘Labour councillors are endeavouring to be just and acting by modern-day standards in their determination that all classes of people, whether property owners, Council or private house tenants, be allowed to serve on this board.’<sup>38</sup> The criticism was vehemently denied by the then Miss Edwards, who pointed out that every member of the Burial Board could be a council tenant as long as he was a member of the local authority and the Board complied with the provisions of the 1933 Local Government Act, permitting its financial affairs to be subject to audit by a government auditor, which was not the case.<sup>39</sup>

The PUDC Housing Committee had met and recommended that 536 houses built by the council at Glyntaff be offered for sale. Mrs Murphy argued that they should be offered for rent and that this would clear the council’s housing waiting list. ‘After meeting the needs of the people of Pontypridd then, and only then, should we think in terms of attracting people from outside the area.’ Developing her point, Mrs Murphy argued that by offering a form of rent differential, the council could attract all types of people into the area, ‘I reject this idea of concentrating one class of people in one housing estate, the so-called exec-admin professional type, and relegating people of lower incomes to another area. I believe in a mixed society ... mixed from every point of

view ... income, education, background ... anything you care to name.’<sup>40</sup>

Mrs Murphy was supported by Reg Price, who pointed out that for many years the council had denied council tenants the opportunity to buy their own homes. This was an anomaly and moreover, the economy’s temperature was dropping, with colliery closures and the like. ‘To have an integrated society is precisely what we are here for.’ Labour obviously did not agree because Mrs Murphy’s motion was defeated by twenty-one votes to two.<sup>41</sup>

**The national picture and 1967**

The deteriorating state of the national economy had local ramifications. Welsh Secretary Cledwyn Hughes, on a visit to the Rhondda, adjacent to Pontypridd, found himself confronted by anti-unemployment demonstrators.<sup>42</sup> The local newspaper itself, in an editorial, came out in favour of the location of the new Royal Mint in Llantrisant.<sup>43</sup> The council, meanwhile, passed a motion calling for a joint meeting between itself and adjoining local authorities, with the prime minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Wales and the president of the Board of Trade.

Mrs Murphy described this resolution as ‘the most shattering indictment of the Member of Parliament for this area.’ She went on to say that she could not ‘recall any particular push or activity on his part for the crying need for new industries ... for something like the Royal Mint.’ Referring to the MP’s canvassing in a local election the previous May, she said, ‘But a year ago he was devoting his energies to prevent another Liberal from returning to this council chamber. I think it would have been more to the point if he was invited to the meeting tonight. It would have been personal testimony to his complete and utter ineffectiveness as a representative of this area.’<sup>44</sup> The MP, Arthur Pearson, reacted angrily, saying that the attack was ‘mere political spleen. I am sure that “Murphyised” buckets of political muck will not assist in bringing either a

new Royal Mint or other industries into the area.<sup>45</sup> A few weeks later it was announced that the Mint would go to Llantrisant.<sup>46</sup>

The local Liberals meanwhile were proceeding with their plans for the continuing assault on Labour. The press announced that the Liberals' annual dinner was to be held at the Gourmet Restaurant on 16 February 1967, with Welsh Liberal President Edward Davies as the guest speaker. At the same time, Mrs Murphy's public profile was to receive a further boost from appearing on television twice in four days: on the BBC Wales programme *Disgwyl Cwmni* (Expecting Company) in which she talked about the role of magistrates courts; and then on the same channel's *Llwyfan* (Platform) in which invited representatives of political parties debated and answered questions from the public.<sup>47</sup>

And another front was to be opened up. Referring to the fact that Labour nominees to the Glamorgan County Council were regularly returned unopposed in the area, Mrs Murphy said, 'I feel that the County Council affects the lives of ordinary people more directly even than the government on a national level. There are so many things which are causing me concern, particularly in the field of education and planning. I seriously think it is high time that some opposition was registered on the County Council, rather than the situation at present whereby more than 80 members seem to have to kow-tow to the dictates of a small caucus who have been in power for far too long.'<sup>48</sup>

In April the Liberals fought two of the four county seats. Derek Lewis polled well in the Town-Graig division but was beaten by Labour by 1,515 votes to 1,125. In Cilfynydd & Trallwn, Labour beat Mrs Murphy by 1,821 to 1,544, but the victor, W. Edryd Lewis, was reappointed as an alderman and this necessitated a by-election six weeks later.<sup>49</sup> Mrs Murphy stood again, but the margin of victory of the locally popular Labour candidate, Emrys Peck, was greater than on the previous occasion: 1,999 votes to 1,409.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the overall Liberal performance in the county contests was impressive,

and was certainly better than the result obtained by Plaid Cymru in its first outing on the Pontypridd electoral scene. Their candidate in the Rhondda ward had been beaten by 1,350 to 708, a margin of nearly two to one.<sup>51</sup>

But the real battle was for Pontypridd, and the local press was excited. 'It has been a case of alert status on the local political front this week in preparation for next Thursday's battle in the urban district council elections,' the *Pontypridd Observer* declared on its front page the first week of May.<sup>52</sup> 'And make no mistake, the Labour Party is leaving nothing to chance. Their opponents are at the gates of the socialist citadel.'

The following week the newspaper headline said: 'Jolt for Labour – Three Liberal Gains'. Reg Green had won in Trallwn to take a third Liberal seat in that ward, by 1,065 to 868. In the Rhydyfelin ward two seats were up for grabs, and the Liberal Arthur Davies came second to take a seat. The top-placed Labour candidate received 1,857 votes to the Liberal's 1,565, while the second Labour candidate polled just 1,399. And in the Town ward, Derek Lewis won at his second attempt, ousting Labour by 974 votes to 794.<sup>53</sup> Labour were not happy and shortly afterwards the constituency party asked Transport House for advice on 'the unsatisfactory relationship between Mrs Murphy and the Town Clerk.' Mrs Murphy was phlegmatic, waving the matter aside with her observation that 'if I were a member of the Labour Party there would be no criticism.'<sup>54</sup>

#### High tide

1968 was not a good year for the Labour Party at a national level. The recent devaluation, the credit squeeze, the balance of payments, and the incomes policy all acted to severely dent the government's popularity. Local MP Arthur Pearson spoke at the Trallwn Labour hall of 'the long and hard road to national solvency.'<sup>55</sup> And Mrs Murphy was not slow to take advantage of Labour's discomfiture. She accused the council's housing committee of dilatoriness in considering the matter of a tender for the construction of 505

houses at Glyncoch.<sup>56</sup> She raised the question of whether there was any benefit to be gained from the expense of sending councillors – Labour ones – to national and other conferences.<sup>57</sup> The front page headline of the 15 February edition of the *Pontypridd Observer* announced: '£32,000 Loss on Buses Expected', and Mrs Murphy declared the situation 'horrific', while Derek Lewis called for independent consultants to be brought in to tackle the situation.<sup>58</sup> Mrs Murphy was not slow to attack the increase in local taxation. 'Up Go the Rates – County Mainly to Blame', said the *Pontypridd Observer* on its front page a few weeks later, adding 'Figures Excessive Declares Mrs Murphy'.<sup>59</sup>

The *Pontypridd Observer* described the May polls as 'the most exciting elections for many years.'<sup>60</sup> Cilfynydd was to be contested by newcomer Colin Purcell, the ward having been subject to the unopposed returns of Labour candidates for many years. In the event, Labour's George Paget beat the Liberal in that ward, by 855 to 472, but elsewhere there was victory, causing the *Pontypridd Observer* to headline its front page 'Sensational Liberal Hat Trick'.<sup>61</sup>

The Liberals won a fourth seat in Trallwn; a second seat in Town – 789 to Labour's 551 and Plaid Cymru's 403; and a seat in the Graig ward, where two seats were being contested. The top Labour candidate gained 722 votes, while the Liberal, Carrick A. Rees came second with 684, and the bottom-placed Labour candidate got 513. In addition, Leslie Broom, the by-election victor, held on in Rhydyfelin.

This was a significant result because, with an Independent winning a third seat in Treforest, the Labour majority on the council had been shaved to just one vote; fourteen Labour councillors to ten Liberals and three Independents, the latter two groups seeing eye to eye on many issues.<sup>62</sup> How far this was due to local campaigning, and how much to national factors, is matter of conjecture. Certainly the Liberals campaigned hard, but Labour in 1968 was incredibly unpopular and performed badly across the UK, losing such towns as Sheffield

**'And make no mistake, the Labour Party is leaving nothing to chance. Their opponents are at the gates of the socialist citadel.'**

and Sunderland for the first time since the war.<sup>63</sup> In Wales, the *South Wales Echo* missed the events in Pontypridd, talking instead of the Labour Party fighting a double challenge from the Conservatives and Plaid Cymru, with 600 candidates contesting 328 seats in borough and urban council seats across the principality.<sup>64</sup>

This was, of course, in the days before the Liberal Party had embraced community politics at its 1970 Assembly, but the Liberal campaigns in Pontypridd were certainly vigorous, and involved being seen around the ward, knocking on doors, dealing with case work, attending public meetings, visiting pubs and clubs, and even breaking the convention of distributing just one leaflet during an election campaign. In fact, Derek Lewis recalls being criticised by a Labour opponent for putting out *two* leaflets during a campaign.<sup>65</sup> And of course, the detailed accounts of the Liberal–Labour confrontations in the council chamber that were carried by the *Pontypridd Observer*, which was widely read, carried the implicit message that ‘the Liberals work all year round, not just at election time.’

Derek Lewis was press officer for the Pontypridd Liberals, and also held the position of chairman of the Young Liberals. As such, he contributed regularly to the letters pages of the *Pontypridd Observer*, sallying forth on topics such as Plaid Cymru’s unrealistic notions of an independent Wales, and the Vietnam war. On this latter issue Lewis criticised an anti-war petition circulating in the town because, he said, it avoided any mention of North Vietnamese aggression and was, in effect, an invitation to back a Communist dictatorship.<sup>66</sup>

Under his direction the Young Liberals engaged in a number of activities such as sailing a raft down the River Taff as part of a publicity and fundraising exercise; taking photographs of the coal tips above Cilfynydd, which many residents were worried about after the Aberfan disaster; and hiring a bus in the summer of 1968 for a YL delegation to deliver a letter to 10 Downing Street, an act that enraged the local Labour Party.<sup>67</sup> Lewis’s fondest memory, though,

is of taking young activists in cars to campaign for Wallace Lawler in the successful Birmingham Ladywood parliamentary by-election in June 1969.

1969 dawned with Labour still unpopular, and Arthur Pearson declaring his intention to not seek re-election to parliament. The Liberal offensive continued, with the Liberals opposing a plan to replace a Welsh place name with an English one. Despite speaking the language Mary Murphy was often accused of being anti-Welsh, and felt it necessary to explain her position in the council chamber: ‘I am totally against stuffing the Welsh language down peoples’ throats,’ she said, ‘but here we have a perfectly good place name like Graigwen, and to change it to White Rock is certainly not conforming to the traditions of Pontypridd, since this is part of the district and a well-known place name here.’ Labour member George Paget disagreed on the basis that ‘90 per cent of the population of the town do not speak Welsh.’<sup>68</sup>

The Liberal campaign in the council chamber included ‘bread-and-butter’ ward issues such as unmade roads – ‘blots on the landscape’<sup>69</sup> – as well as drains in the Town ward.<sup>70</sup> There were also issues of wider import, such as the plans for a new bus station, which the Liberals opposed at that particular time<sup>71</sup> and battles over Labour’s exclusion of the press from council meetings.<sup>72</sup>

One particular action of the Liberal leader nearly provoked a strike, or so it was alleged by Labour councillor George Paget. Mrs Murphy explained it thus in the council chamber: ‘I was disturbed to see an employee in council uniform come out of a public house, go into a betting shop, and re-enter the public house. I approached him and asked him courteously if he was on duty.’ Labour councillor Sam Davies responded to this by labelling Mrs Murphy’s actions as ‘Gestapo Tactics’.<sup>73</sup>

The Liberal line-up of candidates for the May elections included a number of young people. Colin Purcell, standing once more in Cilfynydd was only twenty-eight years of age, as was the party’s candidate in the

Rhondda ward. In Rhydyfelin, Miss Pat Troman was just thirty; and the youngest candidate was aiming to win the third seat in the Town ward – Miss Elizabeth For-est being just twenty-three.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the hyperbole of the local press – ‘The Most Exciting Election for Decades’<sup>75</sup> – the result was a disappointment. There were no gains, and the Liberals failed to win the third Town ward seat by just seven votes. Labour polled 707 to the Liberal’s 700 votes, while a Plaid candidate received 473.<sup>76</sup>

### The tide goes out

1970 witnessed three sets of elections in Pontypridd, and the first set was for Glamorgan County Council. As in 1967, the Liberals decided to contest two of the four county seats within the PUDC area. Mary Murphy stood in a different ward, the Town-Graig division, and was beaten by Labour by 1,626 to 1,402, while in Treforest & Rhydyfelin Labour beat Liberal W. J. Griffiths by 1,692 to 1,354. The party claimed not to be disappointed, pointing to the increase of 200 votes in the Town-Graig contest. Mrs Murphy declared that organisational problems had been identified and that these would be rectified for the forthcoming PUDC elections.<sup>77</sup>

And then there was a bombshell – Derek Lewis announced that he would not be standing again in the Town ward. His decision had been taken on the basis of medical advice and in order to keep his business going, but he hoped, he said, to return as a Liberal in the future.<sup>78</sup> The Town ward was one of two losses suffered by the Liberals in May, as Labour regained the seat with 792 votes to the Liberal tally of 704, with Plaid bringing up the rear with 348. In Rhydyfelin, two seats were at stake and both Labour candidates finished well ahead of the Liberals – 1,440 and 1,405 as opposed to 983 and 928.<sup>79</sup>

There was one more campaign ahead, and that was for the general election on 18 June, which the Liberals decided to contest, with Mary Murphy as the candidate. ‘Liberals think the election ought to be about the quality of life in this country, and looking after

**The Liberal campaign in the council chamber included ‘bread-and-butter’ ward issues such as unmade roads – ‘blots on the landscape’ – as well as drains in the Town ward.**



those who are getting the rough end of the stick,' declared Mrs Murphy.<sup>80</sup> The candidate was her usual hyperactive self. The *Pontypridd Observer* reported that she had 'been canvassing energetically in the vale [of Glamorgan] and during the final week spent more time in the Pontypridd urban area.'<sup>81</sup>

The result was a clear victory for Labour's new candidate Brynmor John, with 28,814 votes, and the Conservatives came second with 8,205. But Mrs Murphy had scored a creditable 6,871 at her first attempt, with Plaid Cymru in fourth place on 5,059.<sup>82</sup>

### Conclusions

The most obvious lesson to be drawn from the unique (at least in terms of industrial South Wales) experience of the Liberals in Pontypridd during the latter part of the 1960s is that campaigning reaps rewards in terms of electoral success. Admittedly, some of the gains could be put down to national factors such as Labour's unpopularity, but it is clear that hard-working candidates, together with a high profile in the local media, combined to deliver a crop of council seats to the party in the town. It might be argued that the high point of 1968 and 1969, followed by a fallback in 1970 indicates the predominant role of national factors, and that, with the election of a Conservative government, voters would turn again to Labour. But the experience of the Liberal party elsewhere in the UK, as evidenced from strong by-election performances at Rochdale and at Chester-le-Street in County Durham<sup>83</sup> suggests that it was not impossible to win against Labour even under the circumstances of the 1970–74 Heath government.

Another factor that could be adduced to explain the increasing difficulties for the Liberals in Pontypridd was the organisation of and fielding of candidates by Plaid Cymru from 1967 onwards, slowly at first and then at an increasing pace. However, the presence of nationalist candidates need not have caused insuperable problems for the Liberals in Pontypridd. After all, in many parts of England, three-cornered contests

**The most obvious lesson to be drawn from the unique (at least in terms of industrial South Wales) experience of the Liberals in Pontypridd during the latter part of the 1960s is that campaigning reaps rewards in terms of electoral success.**

were common, with the Conservatives being the third party, and that did not rule out Liberal success. And, of course, the Conservatives themselves were never very strong in Pontypridd and only contested elections at the parliamentary level.

Local government reorganisation after 1972 seems to have acted to prevent the Liberals ever coming close to controlling the new Taff-Ely authority, which was an enlarged district council created as a result of Pontypridd being amalgamated with other local authorities. However, there was nothing inevitable about the Liberals' lack of local government success in the locality during the new decade. The Liberals simply failed to organise and campaign outside the old Pontypridd Urban District area, and this was a matter of choices, conscious or unconscious. The leadership demonstrated by Mary Murphy in the late 1960s was a two-edged sword; lack of leadership can be blamed for the party's failure to organise properly in the areas formerly covered by the old Llantrisant and Llantwit Fardre Rural District Council, and leadership of the anti-Labour forces went de facto to Plaid Cymru and rate-payers' groups, who *did* organise in these areas. It is clear that the Liberal Party in Pontypridd at this time was less of an institution and more of a personal coterie centred around Mary Murphy. Derek Lewis, for example, does not recall ever paying a membership subscription or possessing a membership card.<sup>84</sup> The lesson to be learned is that the Liberal successes in Pontypridd in the 1960s, and the failure to build on them after 1970, were both the result of choices by local party activists, and not the outcome of inevitable historical forces.

Mary Murphy continued in local government as member of both the new borough and county councils, and stood for parliament again in the two 1974 general elections. She stood down from the county in 1985 and from the borough the following year, and moved to the south coast of England.

*Steve Belzak is a university lecturer. He represented Cilfynydd, the ward*

*the Liberals failed to win in the 1960s, at various levels of local government between 1983 and 2008, first as SDP and then as Liberal Democrat.*

- 1 F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1918–1948* (Glasgow: FWS Craig & Political Reference Publications, 1969)
- 2 Ken Young, 'Orpington and the Liberal Revival', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *By-elections in British Politics* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 176.
- 3 Chris Cook, *A Short History of the Liberal Party, 1900–2001* (6th edn., Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 142.
- 4 Harry Cowie, 'The Liberal Party in the General Election of 1964', in Jorgen S. Rasmussen, *The Liberal Party: A Study of Retrenchment and Survival* (London: Constable, 1965), p. 275.
- 5 David Roberts, 'The Strange Death of Liberal Wales', in John Osmond (ed.), *The National Question Again* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1985), p. 87.
- 6 J. Graham Jones, 'The Liberal Party and Wales, 1945–79', *The Welsh History Review*, vol. 16, July 1993.
- 7 *Pontypridd Observer*, 20 November 1948.
- 8 *Pontypridd Observer*, 27 November 1948.
- 9 *Pontypridd Observer*, 4 December 1948.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 *Pontypridd Observer*, 15 May 1954.
- 12 *Pontypridd Observer*, 9 February 1963.
- 13 *Pontypridd Observer*, 23 February 1963.
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 Author's interview with Derek G. Lewis, March 2008.
- 16 *Pontypridd Observer*, 15 July 1966.
- 17 *Pontypridd Observer*, 18 May 1963.
- 18 *Pontypridd Observer*, 4 April 1964.
- 19 *Pontypridd Observer*, 16 May 1964.
- 20 *Pontypridd Observer*, 18 April 1964.
- 21 *Pontypridd Observer*, 14 May 1965.
- 22 *Pontypridd Observer*, 21 January 1966.
- 23 *Pontypridd Observer*, 4 February 1966.
- 24 *Pontypridd Observer*, 11 March 1966.
- 25 *Pontypridd Observer*, 18 March 1966.
- 26 *Pontypridd Observer*, 25 March 1966.
- 27 *Pontypridd Observer*, 15 April 1966.
- 28 *Pontypridd Observer*, 22 April 1966.
- 29 *Pontypridd Observer*, 29 April 1966.
- 30 *Pontypridd Observer*, 13 May 1966.
- 31 *Pontypridd Observer*, 20 May 1966.
- 32 *Pontypridd Observer*, 27 May 1966.

## SWINGING IN THE '60s TO THE LIBERALS: MARY MURPHY AND PONTYPRIDD URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL

- 33 *Pontypridd Observer*, 8 July 1966. 1967. 59 *Pontypridd Observer*, 7 March February 1969.
- 34 *Pontypridd Observer*, 15 July 1966. 45 *ibid.* 73 *Pontypridd Observer*, 20 March 1969.
- 35 Emlyn Hooson, *Liberalism in Wales in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century: Rebirth or Death?* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1994), p. 7. 46 *Pontypridd Observer*, 26 April 1967. 74 *Pontypridd Observer*, 27 March 1969.
- 36 Russell Deacon, 'The Steady Tapping Breaks the Rock: Liberalism in Wales', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, 22, Spring 1999. 47 *Pontypridd Observer*, 3 February 1967. 75 *Pontypridd Observer*, 1 May 1969.
- 37 *Pontypridd Observer*, 16 September 1966. 48 *Pontypridd Observer*, 10 March 1967. 76 *Pontypridd Observer*, 15 May 1969.
- 38 *Pontypridd Observer*, 27 May 1966. 49 *Pontypridd Observer*, 14 April 1967. 77 *Pontypridd Observer*, 16 April 1970.
- 39 *Pontypridd Observer*, 3 June 1966. 50 *Pontypridd Observer*, 2 June 1967. 78 *ibid.*
- 40 *Pontypridd Observer*, 23 September 1966. 51 *Pontypridd Observer*, 14 April 1967. 79 *Pontypridd Observer*, 14 May 1970.
- 41 *ibid.* 52 *Pontypridd Observer*, 5 May 1967. 80 *Pontypridd Observer*, 12 June 1970.
- 42 *Pontypridd Observer*, 20 January 1967. 53 *Pontypridd Observer*, 12 May 1967. 81 *Pontypridd Observer*, 19 June 1970.
- 43 *Pontypridd Observer*, 10 February 1967. 54 *Pontypridd Observer*, 19 May 1967. 82 *ibid.*
- 44 *Pontypridd Observer*, 7 April 1967. 55 *Pontypridd Observer*, 12 January 1968. 83 Richard Jay, 'Lincoln and the Liberal Surge', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds.), *By-elections in British Politics* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- 56 *ibid.* 57 *Pontypridd Observer*, 8 February 1968. 84 Author's interview with Derek G. Lewis, March 2008.
- 58 *Pontypridd Observer*, 15 February 1968. 59 *Pontypridd Observer*, 20 February 1968. 60 *Pontypridd Observer*, 2 May 1968. 61 *Pontypridd Observer*, 16 May 1968. 62 Author's interview with Derek G. Lewis, March 2008.
- 63 Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat* (London: Abacus, 2006), p. 641. 64 *South Wales Echo*, 9 May 1968. 65 Author's interview with Derek G. Lewis, March 2008.
- 66 *Pontypridd Observer*, 8 February 1968. 67 *Pontypridd Observer*, 20 February 1969. 68 *Pontypridd Observer*, 30 January 1969.
- 69 *Pontypridd Observer*, 16 January 1969. 70 *Pontypridd Observer*, 6 March 1970. 71 *Pontypridd Observer*, 9 January 1969.
- 72 *Pontypridd Observer*, 20

## 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](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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 Messleka-Boyer, 12 bis chemin Vaysse, 81150 Terssac, France; +33 6 10 09 72 46; [cynthia.boyer@univ-jfc.fr](mailto: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](mailto: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 College, Birmingham; [i.cawood@newman.ac.uk](mailto: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](mailto:neil.fisher81@ntlworld.com).

### Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 1906–1935

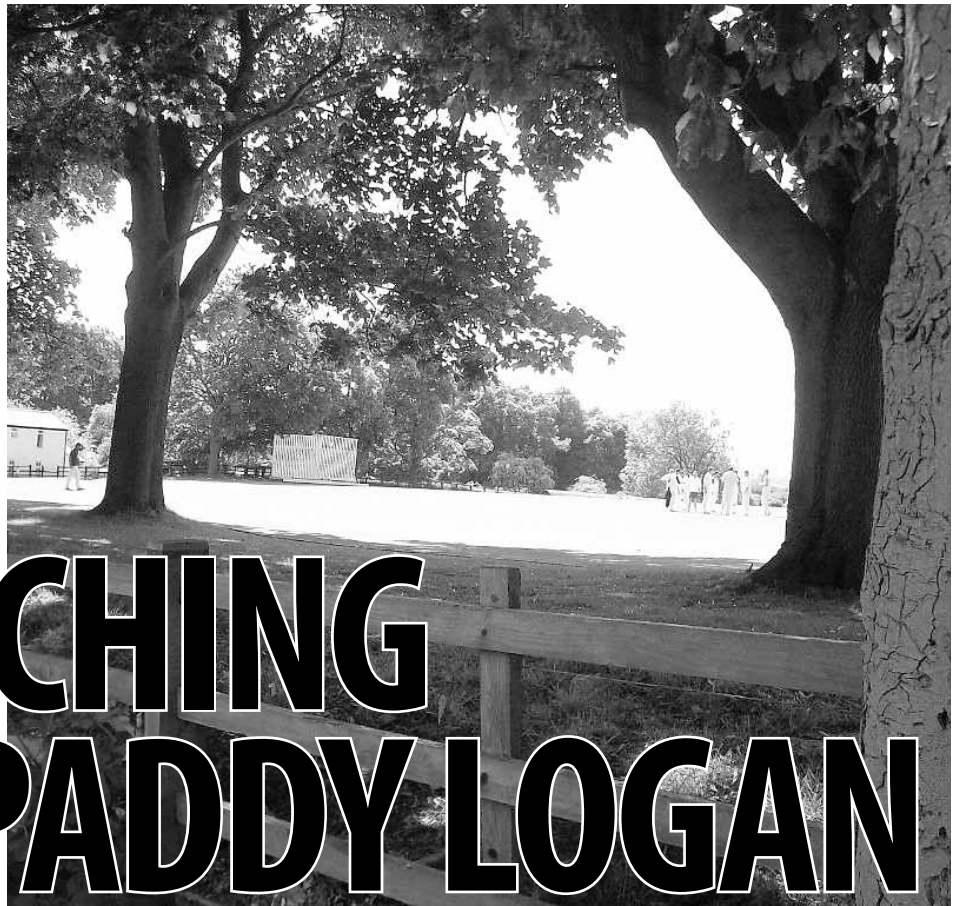
Aims to suggest reasons for defections of individuals and develop an understanding of changes in electoral alignment. Sources include personal papers and newspapers; suggestions about how to get hold of the papers of more obscure Liberal defectors welcome. Cllr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; [N.M.Cott@ncl.ac.uk](mailto: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](mailto:brian63@inbox.com)

## Liberal Heritage

**Jonathan Calder** begins a new series for the *Journal of Liberal History*, in which well-known Liberal Democrats take a look at the Liberal heritage of their home town.



# SEARCHING FOR PADDY LOGAN

## DISCOVERING HARBOROUGH'S LIBERAL HISTORY

**I** MOVED TO Market Harborough at the age of 13. My father had left us the previous year, just as my political consciousness had begun to dawn, and coming across such phenomena as free school dinners and social security inspectors had left me in no doubt that I was not a Conservative. At the same time, the Liberal Party was enjoying a of run by-election victories – including two on the same day in Ripon and the Isle of Ely – that made it seem terribly exciting. I can date my intellectual conversion to Liberalism to reading Mill and Popper<sup>1</sup> some five years later, but my party loyalty is rooted in this earlier period.

The road that cut across the one into which we had moved was called Logan Street, and I soon found there was a plaque at the town's swimming pool recording that it had been opened by a J. W. Logan MP. From odd paragraphs in local history books, I discovered that Logan had largely paid

for the pool himself and had also given the town the recreation ground that was near to my new home – his wealth had come from his success as a railway contractor. From local tradition I also learned that he was known as 'Paddy' Logan, had once started a fight on the floor of the Commons and, best of all, he had been a Liberal.

My knowledge of Paddy Logan remained at this level until, having been to university and worked in Birmingham and London, I found myself back in Market Harborough and with a job in Leicester. Behind my workplace stood the county record office, and I soon discovered that it held all sorts of Harborough Liberal treasures from the Victorian and Edwardian periods. With these and the library at the University of Leicester, I was able to expand my knowledge of Logan's career and of the golden age of Harborough Liberalism. For it turned out that the Liberals had held Harborough continuously from 1891 to 1918.

I even took myself off to Dewsbury reference library, which holds a manuscript history of the firm of Logan & Hemingway, the railway contractors in which Logan was a partner. It turned out that his own father had been a Scottish navy who had begun contracting in a small way and built up the business from there. Logan & Hemingway were one of the major railway contractors of the late nineteenth century and built part of Great Central's London Extension.

I also discovered a remarkable pamphlet in the country record office which described Logan's conversion to radical Liberalism after seeing poverty in Ireland; one day I shall return to it as it deserves to be more widely known. In the mean time, I suggest that Logan's pro-Irish sympathies may provide the origins his nickname of 'Paddy'.

More recently, having acquired a digital camera and a blog where I can use the

East Langton  
cricket ground

## SEARCHING FOR PADDY LOGAN: DISCOVERING HARBOROUGH'S LIBERAL HISTORY

photographs, I have set out some of the places associated with the names I came across in that era. For instance, I found the grave of Thomas Tertius Paget, who enjoyed two brief spells as MP for the South Leicestershire constituency that existed until 1885, at the Unitarian church in Leicester. This congregation contained so many prominent Liberals in the nineteenth century, when the city was known as 'Radical Leicester', that it was called 'the Mayor's nest'.

I also went to East Langton, where Logan lived in the Grange. He gave the village a hall and also a cricket ground that was recently described by the blogger Down at Third Man<sup>2</sup> (2010) as 'the mythic cricket ground that all lovers of the game believe one day they will stumble on' – you can read a little of its history in a recent book on Logan and two other notables from the Langtons.<sup>3</sup> I also found the village hall he had provided (now converted to private accommodation) and his cottage home for the children of men killed on his works.

This last discovery reminds me that the period in which I started researching Logan's career is also the period in which I conceived of Lord Bonkers and began to write his diaries for *Liberator*. It sounds improbable now, but I am convinced that I invented the Bonkers' Home for Well-Behaved Orphans before I discovered that Logan had founded a similar establishment.

No account of Paddy Logan's career is complete without an account of the fight in which he was involved on the floor of the Commons, but before we turn to that there is time to consider a few other Harborough Liberal personalities.

Logan resigned his Harborough seat twice for health reasons, thus giving him the unique distinction of having held the Stewardship of both the Manor of Northcliffe and the Chiltern Hundreds – the two offices for profit under the Crown that MPs conventionally take up when they wish to leave the Commons between elections. When Logan first resigned, in 1904, the

resultant by-election was fought and won for the Liberals by Philip Stanhope, a veteran radical who had lost his previous seat in Burnley over his outspoken opposition to the Boer War. Students of the period will not be surprised to learn that he managed to reconcile this radicalism with the ownership of a 145-room mansion in Kent.

At the 1906 general election Harborough was won for the Liberals by Rudolph Lehmann, better remembered today as the father of the writers John and Rosamond Lehmann and the of the actress Beatrix. He combined orthodox Liberal views of the day (I have a copy of a leaflet of his that has strong things to say about Chinese Labour) with membership of the committee of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage.

Logan returned as MP for Harborough at the second election of 1910, only to stand down again in 1916, thus landing the Liberals with a difficult by-election. Although there was a wartime truce with the Conservatives, the young Liberal candidate Percy Harris faced a strong challenge from an Independent with considerable press backing. He won, but lost the seat to the Conservatives in 1918 when, although a radical, he sided with Asquith and was thus refused the 'coupon' from the Lloyd George coalition. Harris went on to be an MP in the East End of London and a stalwart of the declining Parliamentary Liberal Party until 1945. He was recently revealed to be the great-grandfather of the recently retired Liberal Democrat MP Matthew Taylor – a fact that surprised everyone except, I suspect, Lord Bonkers.

Harris's defeat did not quite spell the end of Liberal success in Harborough. John Wycliffe Black, a prosperous businessman (it seems Percy Harris had turned his back on the seat because of the financial contribution he was asked to make), won the seat back at the 1923 general election, only to lose it the following year. I have a poster, incidentally, which suggests that Logan endorsed the Labour candidate ('No Tory–Liberal Coalition') at the 1924 general election.

Paddy Logan's cottage home





Water tower at East Langton Grange

However, you will be wondering about Logan and his fight in the Commons. It happened on the evening of 27 July 1893 as a division was taking place on Gladstone's second Home Rule bill. Contemporary accounts say that arguments continued on the floor of the House and, as he waited for the throng to clear, Logan crossed the chamber and sat down truculently beside Carson on the Conservative front bench. Hayes Fisher, a Tory MP, pushed him away. Logan elbowed back and was grabbed by more Tories, whereupon the Irish Nationalists waded in to support him. For the next twenty minutes elderly, frock-coated MPs belaboured one another. Hats were flattened, coats torn and faces bruised until the Serjeant-at-Arms was able to restore order. A later Leicestershire politician, the Conservative Guy Paget, described Logan as 'a man of dominant character with a violent temper over which he exercised little control'. I am sure this is unfair, although another contemporary account suggests that he was quite happy to settle a dispute with a recalcitrant workman with his fists.

Whatever the truth of this, Logan is not forgotten in Market Harborough. The town now has

a Logan Ward and if you visit its new swimming pool – I seconded the motion that got it built – you will find the stone commemorating Logan set up outside it. I hope the old boy would have approved.

*Jonathan Calder has been a district councillor in Market Harborough and has written for Liberator, Liberal Democrat News, The Guardian and the New Statesman. He blogs at Liberal England.*

1 Only after writing the entry on Popper for the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* – J. Calder, 'Karl Popper', in D. Brack and E. Randall

(eds.), *Dictionary of Liberal Thought* (London: Politico's, 2007) – did I discover that Bryan Magee, the great populariser of Popper's work in Britain had been evacuated to Market Harborough as a schoolboy and lived literally around the corner from where I used to live – in Logan Street: see B. Magee, *Growing up in a War* (London: Pimlico, 2007).

2 Down at Third Man, 'A Vision of Perfection'. Retrieved 20 April 2010 from <http://downatthirdman.wordpress.com/2010/04/01/a-vision-of-perfection>.

3 D. Lewin, *Parson, Politician and Gentleman: Three Men of the Langtons* (Arnesby: Derek Lewin, 2009).

## REPORTS

### Red Guard versus Old Guard? The influence of the Young Liberal movement on the Liberal Party in the 1960s and 1970s

Fringe meeting, 12 March 2010, with Matt Cole, Michael Steed, William Wallace, George Kiloh, and Bernard Greaves.  
Chair: Tony Greaves.

Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

IN THE 1960s the press coined the phrase 'Red Guard' to describe the radical politics of the youth wing of the Liberal Party. At the 1966 Assembly in Brighton, the Red Guard sponsored an anti-NATO resolution, and the Young Liberals were soon at the forefront of the opposition to apartheid and the Vietnam war. They took a leading role in the 'Stop the Seventy Tour' of South African cricket and rugby teams and their actions brought them into conflict with the party leadership under Jeremy Thorpe.

To bring these exciting times back to life, our spring conference fringe meeting took the form of a witness seminar of party activists

from those years. The event was chaired by (Lord) Tony Greaves, sometime chair of the Manchester University Liberal Society and the University of Liberal Students (ULS), and in 1970, Chairman of the Young Liberals.

To introduce the topic we heard Dr Matt Cole, who lectures at the LSE for the Hansard Society and is the author of a forthcoming book about Richard Wainwright, the Liberal MP for Colne Valley. Dr Cole set out three main functions for youth movements in political parties and examined the record of the YLs to see how effectively they followed the model. First, the nursery function: the

preparation and training of the next generation of Parliamentarians, candidates and officials of the party. In the 1950s this was centred particularly on the Oxford, Cambridge and other university Liberal organisations. Tommy Nudds, the secretary of the Liberal Central Association, regularly visited these clubs and associations to identify and recruit potential hopefuls and about 16 per cent of Parliamentary candidates in these years had a background in the University or Young Liberals.

The second function, mobilisation, is the recruitment of new members and their involvement in political activity for the party. The YLs undertook this role in the 1950s with partial success. The 1959 records indicate fewer than 3,000 youth members but these numbers grew dramatically over the 1960s. By 1963 the figure had jumped to 15,000 and by the end of 1966 22,000.

The third function of a party youth wing is the policy function: to encourage debate on policy, to come up with new ideas and to challenge the mainstream party to justify its approaches on the issues of the day. This was not effectively pursued by the YLs in the 1950s, when the agendas of their conferences closely resembled those of the senior party. Where there was a challenge at this time it was to oppose electoral pacts at Parliamentary or local government level, particularly arrangements with the Conservatives. Things changed in the late 1950s under Jo Grimond's leadership of the party. Grimond encouraged the development of initiatives from the party's youth organisations, creating great interest in policy and a culture of challenging the party's mainstream agenda. As the 1960s wore on, the YLs developed a radical approach to contemporary issues with resonance for young people, such as racial equality, anti-apartheid and other international concerns. As these questions were promoted with increasing effectiveness and publicity by the YLs, senior party concern about the youth movement grew, particularly over the willingness of key players to collaborate with members of other political movements,

**Dr Cole concluded that the YLs of the 1960s and 1970s were successful in all three functions of a party youth wing.**

including far left organisations. If the party leadership approach was generally encouraging and relaxed under Grimond, the atmosphere was transformed with the election of Jeremy Thorpe as party leader. An era of investigation into and confrontation with the YLs was initiated, culminating with the Terrell Report which accused some YLs of being communists.

Dr Cole concluded that the YLs of the 1960s and 1970s were successful in all three functions of a party youth wing, least effectively with the nursery function, more strongly in terms of mobilisation and most successfully with policy, challenging the leadership and crucially – after 1970 – with the development and implementation of community politics.

Our first witness was Michael Steed. When Michael first joined the Liberal Party in 1958 he did not realise there was any distinction between the senior and youth sections of the party, and knew nothing about the youth bodies within the party. Despite being active at constituency level and at university he remained unaware of the existence and activities of the youth organisations. Attending an event in Denmark organised by the World Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth (WLFY), Michael discovered that the organisers thought he was there as the representative of the National League of Young Liberals (NLYL). He contacted NLYL to ask if he could be their representative at a further meeting in Germany and was referred to the New Orbits Group, originally the joint political committee of the NLYL and ULS. One effect of New Orbits had been to suck away from the YLs the element of political surge which they had been developing in the late 1950s and turning it into a think-tank, leaving the NLYL bereft of political ideas.

Another reason for NLYL's less radical approach at this time was that its leading members were older than the later generation of YLs; for instance, when Gruyff Evans ceased to be Chairman of NLYL in 1961 he was thirty-three years old. Through WLFY the connection to university Liberalism was made and within six

months Michael found himself Chairman of ULS. A greater sense of cohesion and political purpose among the different university groups was engendered, and Oxford and Cambridge, which had formerly stood outside the main group, were brought in. There followed a growth in membership and influence of the youth organisations at party conferences. A crucial meeting took place at Sutton Coldfield in mid-1966 when the ULS and NLYL came together to launch the Young Liberal movement as a single coherent force with a sense of political purpose. The first impact of the new movement came at the Brighton Assembly of 1966 and in particular with the motion on NATO. In conclusion Michael listed the following reasons why YL activity and publicity surged in the mid-sixties: the fact that the YLs got their act together structurally and rejuvenated their leadership; Jo Grimond's encouragement of young people to think about politics and public policy; great international issues which inspired action – the Vietnam war, South Africa and the white rebellion in Rhodesia; and finally the sea-change in youth culture and behaviour which took place in the early 1960s as a spur to political activity in general and the YLs in particular.

The next witness was William Wallace, who Tony Greaves identified as a sympathetic party radical rather than a YL. William began by setting the context of politics in the early 1960s: optimistic, youthful (inspired by the election of John F Kennedy as US President), with a loosening up of society and a falling away of deference. During the 1960s a gradual disenchantment with conventional politics set in, starting with Kennedy's assassination and the build-up of the war in Vietnam. Alternative political movements developed, influenced by events in America, but 1968 was also the year of student rebellion throughout Europe, including sit-ins at British universities. The optimism of the Kennedy-Grimond era gave way to disillusion with the Labour government, and the fading of hopes for a Liberal breakthrough post-Orgington and of implementing

Grimond's realignment of the left strategy. Jeremy Thorpe became leader in 1967 and was a much more conventional politician. He saw the YLs as a threat rather than an opportunity. Thorpe also had a court of followers who surrounded and protected him and if you weren't part of that group, you were regarded with suspicion as outsiders – however useful or original your contribution. To many the party under Thorpe seemed uncongenial and unwelcoming; it was regressing to an earlier and more traditional role. So the YLs were faced with choices: engage on the long march to elected office through community politics, withdraw from party politics and take up single-issue campaigning through organisations such as Shelter, or leave the Liberal Party and join other groups.

Our next witness was George Kiloh, who was elected Chair of the YLs at the Colwyn Bay conference of 1966. George focused on the international causes which were particularly important as rallying points for YL activism and highlighted the wariness of many on the left of the role of the US in world affairs and its influence in NATO. In 1966 he, Terry Lacey and Tony Bunyon, the youth officer in the Liberal Party Organisation, developed a strategy of using the party assembly as the vehicle for radicalising the Liberal youth movement and, hopefully, the mainstream party itself. They chose international issues as the most fruitful for militancy and with the greatest radical appeal. The Vietnam war, even for friends of the US, was increasingly seen as a useless, wasteful and inhumane conflict. In 1967 the YLs put forward a resolution at assembly supporting the political aims of the Viet Cong, the National Liberation Front. Later in the year at Party Council a motion was tabled to support those Americans who were trying to escape the draft and at one point George called publicly for US soldiers to desert, which meant he was barred from entering the US for some time.

By the time of the Grosvenor Square demonstration in 1968, however, some of the sting was being drawn. Key YL players

were moving on. The US itself was drawing back militarily and President Johnson decided not to run for office again. George maintained that the YL position on Vietnam had been the right one, morally and politically, but the Parliamentary party resisted the popular mood. A key problem for the YLs on the issues they espoused e.g. those around sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa, support for liberation movements in Rhodesia or even protest action at home, was the argument that one could not create a liberal society through the use or condoning of violence. In addition Liberals had no concept of class (or, by implication, a Marxist analysis of society and politics) and saw their role as conciliators. By the late 1960s, therefore, some on the left of the YL movement saw no future in using the party to achieve the radicalisation of British politics and could not support its wider programme. Some, like George and, eventually, Peter Hain, chose to leave.

Picking up George's final point, Tony Greaves introduced our last witness as one of those prominent YLs like Gordon Lishman and Peter Hellyer who opted to stay in the party. Bernard Greaves, perhaps best known as the co-author, with Gordon Lishman, of *The Theory and Practice of Community Politics*, began by admitting that he was not a product of the Grimond generation, having come from a public-school Conservative background. Bernard eventually rebelled against this orthodoxy but felt no sympathy for Labour, regarding it as authoritarian and autocratic. A lonely Liberal in his last year at school, Bernard found at Cambridge many others who shared his rejection of the two main political parties and their philosophies. As a YL, the key moment for Bernard was the YL conference at Weston-super-Mare in 1965, when a new, younger leadership led by Garth Pratt (later to go Labour) and George Kiloh emerged to oust the 'geriatric' YLs then running the organisation. Inspired by their militancy, Bernard went on to organise the Scarborough YL conference of 1968 which, with an attendance of over 1,000 was bigger than

some mainstream party assemblies of the day and which was able to draw on the cultural revolution of freedom and radicalism among young people to attract delegates. On policy, while the great international questions of Vietnam, Southern Africa and Eastern Europe undoubtedly had significant resonance for young people, the importance of co-ownership and industrial democracy also had a place high on the YL agenda and has often been overlooked.

When the YL leadership fragmented in 1968, the great jewel left behind was community politics. This emerged as the unifying theme for those radicals who remained in the Liberal Party and some who might otherwise have departed chose to stay to promote it. Community politics provided a practical means of implementing that 'revolution' which the different factions in the YLs (anarchist, Trotskyist, socialist, communist – even Liberal) had been seeking. Through community politics Liberals could achieve the transformation of society through action inside and outside the political process – the dual approach. In parallel, community politics could provide active campaigning on the ground, building up a grassroots movement to run communities wherever they were. That activist movement, which emerged from YL thinking and its creative energy, was to be put to use to save the Liberal Party in the 1970s when it was in danger of declining as a political force.

In his conclusions, Tony Greaves drew attention to the Israeli-Arab dispute as a crucial factor around which YLs coalesced after 1967, generally taking a pro-Palestinian line. This in turn led to clashes with Jeremy Thorpe, who judged this approach as damaging the party, losing votes and donations. He tried to instruct Tony Greaves, as Chairman of the YLs, to engineer its reversal. It was this issue that led to the Terrell Commission which took up a disproportionate amount of time and energy and created a poisonous atmosphere in the party. Little emerged from the investigation and the only result was a minor constitutional

**Inspired by their militancy, Bernard went on to organise the Scarborough YL conference of 1968 which, with an attendance of over 1,000 was bigger than some mainstream party assemblies of the day.**

amendment which allowed local parties to reject the membership of individual YLs if they so desired, whereas previously they had been obliged to accept them.

Matt Cole, in summarising the points arising from the testimony, identified some repeating themes. First, why did the YL movement change so dramatically and become so much more successful in the mid-1960s? The answer clearly had much to do with the cultural changes mentioned by the witnesses: the decline of deference, disillusion with conventional politics and politicians, greater freedom of thought and behaviour. But why were the other parties unable to profit from this culture change? The membership of the Conservative and Labour youth organisations was in decline at this time. They were the parties of government and disillusion with them partially explains their inability to capitalise on the new atmosphere. The Conservatives were also associated with the old world that was passing.

Another reason for YL success compared with old-party decline was structural, and that was the second main theme to emerge from the testimony. There were key organisational changes in the mid-1960s which enabled the YL movement to accommodate a wider range of political opinions than before. While many individuals moved on, what emerged in that period were novel and effective ideas and policies which gave coherence to activism and provided a legacy for future campaigning. Another decisive point from the testimony was the role of the party leadership, and how the change of party leader appears to have been pivotal to the fate of the YL movement. Thorpe's challenge to the YLs was a clear factor in changes to the YL leadership in 1968 and a cause of some activists quitting the party.

Michael Meadowcroft later intervened to say that the difference between Jo Grimond and Jeremy Thorpe was that Jo wasn't frightened of ideas whereas Jeremy was. Therein is a message for the leadership of all political parties. Leaders must understand that party youth movements do not behave like the rest of the

**Why did the YL movement change so dramatically and become so much more successful in the mid-1960s? The answer clearly had much to do with the cultural changes mentioned by the witnesses: the decline of deference, disillusion with conventional politics and politicians, greater freedom of thought and behaviour.**

party. They do not have the same interests or functions and they do not even have the same language. Different language can scare the mainstream party; the term 'Red Guard' is a case in point. Although this was not coined by the YLs but the media, it carried with it the notion of militancy and challenge to authority, so it was perhaps unsurprising that the party leadership was worried

by it. George Kiloh had declared that the YLs were 'going to put a bomb under the Liberal Party'. This kind of language could have led the party leadership to overestimate the threat of the YLs and underestimate the potential for creativity, innovation and support the YLs could attract to the party.

*Graham Lippiatt is the Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.*

---

## Thomas Paine and the Radical Liberal Tradition

Evening meeting, 12 July 2010, with Professor Edward Royle and Dr Edward Vallance. Chair: Dr Richard Grayson  
Report by Dr Emily Robinson

ON MONDAY 12 July, the *Journal of Liberal History* marked the publication of a special issue on 'Liberals and the Left' with a seminar at the National Liberal Club. Richard Grayson, Head of Politics at Goldsmiths College and guest editor of the special issue, opened proceedings by praising the *Journal* for reaching sixty-seven issues and noting that the focus of the special issue on Liberals and the Left had particular resonance following the 2010 general election. He went on to welcome the two speakers – both Edwards – who would be addressing one particular part of the left Liberal tradition: the legacy of Thomas Paine.

Professor Edward Royle, author of many works on the history of radicalism and free thought and of the article on Paine in the special issue, began the seminar with an excellent paper on Thomas (emphatically not Tom!) Paine. He noted that Paine had been a controversial character for two hundred years. In his lifetime he was both the champion of radical revolutionaries and the bugbear of the propertied classes. By the early twentieth century, however, views on Paine had been moderated – if largely as a result of ignorance and apathy rather than tolerance. Professor Royle wondered how we could

understand the legacy of a figure embraced by both Ronald Reagan and Tony Benn.

Royle outlined some competing approaches to the history of political thought. The traditional, whiggish approach tended to see ideas marching forward from text to text, but more recent scholars have encouraged their students to place political ideas in context. By this reading, Locke should not be seen as the first liberal individualist simply because later liberal individualists see their ideas reflected in his words. Instead Locke's own understanding of man as master of a household, rather than as an isolated individual should be emphasised. It is the context of the author which gives meaning to the text. This was the orthodox approach until the onset of postmodernism, which instead stressed the instrumental role of the reader in constructing the context of the text, effectively re-authoring it. As Royle noted, this approach is both plainly true and profoundly flawed.

In the case of Paine, it is clear that interpretations of his works reveal more about the interpreters' politics than about those of Paine himself. He has been seen as a champion of radical liberalism but could also be used as a champion of conservatism or of socialism. Careful historical



reading is needed in order to reassess Paine's meaning and to place his thought in the context of its time. A good example of this is the tendency to expect Paine to address issues of class. He was not writing from the perspective of the 1840s, the world known by Engels. Instead, Paine was writing from his own experience, before the Industrial Revolution, from the perspective of neither the labouring poor nor the privileged rich. It is also in the circumstances of Paine's life that we can find the explanation for his particular writing style. Untrained in classical rhetoric, he used the common English language to great effect. While this would have made his works appear barbaric to contemporaries, it also makes them particularly accessible to the modern sensibility.

Royle went on to detail other ways in which Paine's life experience marked his thought and writing. His experience of working in Customs and Excise gave him both his antipathy to intrusive state administration and his sympathy for Americans. Similarly, his role as a small shopkeeper alerted him to the problems associated with a lack of coinage and with extended credit, which he saw as the rich borrowing forcibly from the poor. This cemented his lifelong hostility to the rich and to paper money. Moreover, as a vestryman Paine was involved with administering the Poor Law and was made intensely aware of the great gulf between rich and poor. Thus, by the time Paine emigrated in 1784, we can see that his ideas were already formed. His thought should therefore be understood to have been rooted in his experience in England.

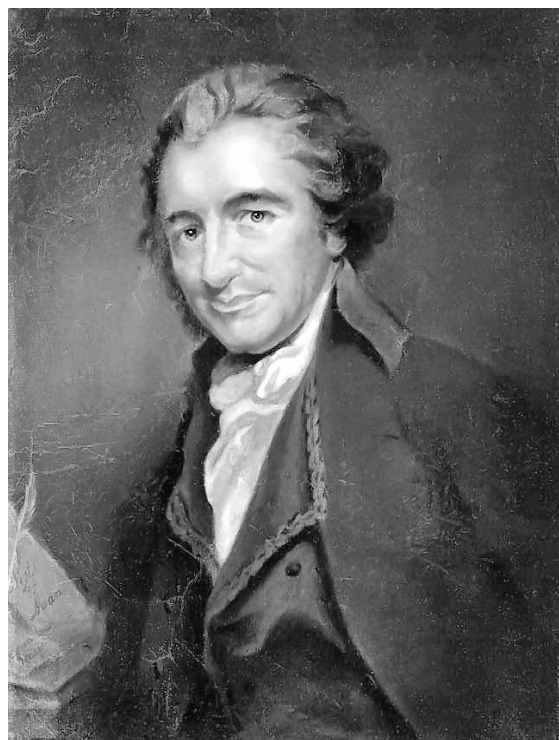
While he did not use the language of class, Paine did see himself as the champion of the people – of citizens against the parasitic aristocracy. He wanted to abolish both the poor and the privileged. As an instinctive republican and democrat, he was as uneasy among the patricians in America as among the aristocracy in England. Both *Common Sense* and *Rights of Man* are criticisms of British politics and sketches of the ideal society. *Common*

*Sense* rejected the monarchy and insisted on the status of citizens rather than subjects. But it also advocated a minimalist state; government was a necessary evil. This view was developed but not changed in *Rights of Man*. Property was seen to lead to independence, the first condition of democracy, and security meant safeguarding civil rights. According to the social contract, civil rights replaced natural rights but had to be renewed generation by generation. Paine's vision was of a small state of property owners, with the role of government extending only to protecting civil rights. He did not confront the problem of democratic dictatorship.

Paine's thought was fundamentally different from socialism as his focus was primarily political, with economics following from his political positions. Royle suggested that Paine's economics were rather similar to those of Adam Smith, emphasising equality of opportunity, private property, the free market and laissez-faire approaches. He saw economic and political inequality as deriving from inherited property, to which his solution was redistributive taxation. Moreover, Paine distinguished between the original value of land and the value added to it by work and talent, which could not be equal and therefore justified a new approach to private property.

Throughout his life, Paine retained his aversion to paper money, which led to inflation and therefore ate away at rich men's debts and poor men's savings. He developed an ethos of sound money which resonated with extreme radicals throughout the nineteenth century. By the 1870s and 1880s, however, this had developed into the moderate liberalism of Bradlaugh and Gladstone. A hundred years later, it was in the rhetoric of Margaret Thatcher, rooted in the sensibility of the shopkeeper, that Paineite language could most easily be found.

Royle concluded with a consideration of Paine's religious views. They were significant in his day because they were used to discredit him and his followers;



Thomas Paine  
(1737–1809)

yet in the nineteenth century his deist views were seen as too moderate by republican atheists. Today, however, this is less important. Politicians no longer 'do God'.

While Paine's ideas cannot be crudely transplanted into contemporary politics, his ideas remain current: equality of opportunity, abolition of privilege, freedom of expression and a state which protects but does not usurp the freedom of individuals.

The next speaker was Dr Edward Vallance of Roehampton University and author of *A Radical History of Britain*. He opened with a quotation from Bob Dylan's 1963 letter of apology to the American Emergency Civil Liberties Committee for his controversial acceptance speech for the group's Tom Paine Award – given yearly to an individual seen to have championed the cause of civil liberties. Dylan had lambasted the ECLC as bunch of balding, conservative old fogies, criticised the travel ban to Cuba and, most controversially, expressed sympathy for Lee Harvey Oswald. Dylan also sang about Paine four years later on the track 'As I went out one morning', which Vallance suggested may represent a coded reference to the ECLC debacle.

The prominence of Paine in contemporary popular culture is

clear. He is, perhaps the only British political philosopher whose works are read at the bar stool or immortalised in song. In 2009, Barack Obama used the words of Paine's *The American Crisis* in his inaugural address. In Britain, the bicentenary of his death saw major festivals in his birthplace of Thetford, Norfolk and in his home town of Lewes, Sussex, and a new statue was unveiled in Lewes this summer.

As Vallance noted, this adulation is in marked contrast to Paine's pariah status both during his lifetime and immediately after his death. While *Rights of Man* was undoubtedly a best-seller, its overt republicanism and Francophile rhetoric made Paine a prime target for the loyalist press, eager to tar more moderate British reformers with the same extremist brush. The campaign against Paine was vast – the historian Frank O'Gorman has estimated that some half a million people attended the hundred of burnings of Paine's effigy that took place in 1792, making them the most witnessed British public events of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, Paine remained a useful political bogeyman, invoked by opponents of even moderate reform.

Paine fared no better in early nineteenth-century America. His deism and attack on organised religion in *The Age of Reason* did not chime with the climate of zealous religiosity driving the Second Great Awakening. On his return to the USA in 1802, Paine was variously derided as 'a drunken atheist', a 'loathsome reptile' and 'the infamous scavenger of all the filth which could be trodden by all the revilers of Christianity.' One hostile biographer, William Cobbett, anticipated Paine's death, saying that this would 'excite neither sorrow nor compassion; no friendly hand will close his eyes, not a groan will be uttered, not a tear will be shed.' As Vallance noted, Cobbett's prediction was not far off. Paine's funeral was attended by only six people, whereas his old patron and friend Benjamin Franklin had been mourned by 20,000. Paine's gravestone was regularly vandalised by locals and, following a failed attempt

to repatriate Paine's bones to a planned British mausoleum, his remains were dispersed to the four corners of the earth. The skull is now reputedly in Australia.

However, as Vallance explained, there is a paradox here. It was largely on account of the loyalist attacks on Paine in the 1790s that we remember him today in Britain. And in America, the rehabilitation of Paine's reputation took place because of his religious position. By the mid-nineteenth century, freethinking societies set up by German immigrants were celebrating the author of *The Age of Reason* as a staunch defender of religious freedom. Paine's first serious modern biographer, Moncure D. Conway, was a Unitarian minister, rational theist and abolitionist who saw in Paine a kindred spirit: an earlier freethinker who had also denounced slavery.

In Britain, Paine was most powerfully embraced by so-called ultra-radicals or dyed-in-the-wool republicans such as the printer Richard Carlile and the bookseller James Watson. But Vallance cautioned that this should not lead us to judge Paine's appeal too narrowly. While it remained dangerous to sell Paine's works or to express support for his principles, the Painite style, acerbic, demagogic and irreverent, characterised much nineteenth-century radical writing – from Thomas Wooler's *Black Dwarf* to the speeches of Feargus O'Connor. Moreover, Paine was also incorporated into alternative radical (as opposed to whiggish) histories of the British Isles. The view of history taken by many popular radicals emphasised moments of 'people power' such as the Peasants' Revolt, rather than revering constitutional documents such as the Bill of Rights, and eulogised popular champions such as Thomas Paine rather than elite politicians. These histories were, in turn, following Paine's own characterisation of British history, portraying 'revolutions' such as that of 1688–89 as 'fixes' by the political elite and seeing true change as only coming via violent upheaval, as in either 1381 or 1649. Vallance emphasised that it is a mistake to see Paine as simply

**Paine is still predominantly the idol of the left and far-left, but that also seems to be changing, with the recent festivals and commemorations in Thetford and Lewes suggesting a broader re-evaluation of Paine.**

rejecting an appeal to the past. Rather, in *Rights of Man* he displayed a desire to rewrite history along these lines.

This process of historical revision continues to this day with the memorialisation of Paine himself. In the United States, 'Painites' range from the late ultra-conservative Republican Senator Jesse Helms to the imprisoned Black Panther activist, Mumia Abu Jamal, and nine state legislatures now observe Thomas Paine days. In Britain, where republicanism remains a marginal political creed, Paine is still predominantly the idol of the left and far-left, but that also seems to be changing, with the recent festivals and commemorations in Thetford and Lewes suggesting a broader re-evaluation of Paine.

Vallance noted that this wider appreciation of Paine is, perhaps, inevitable, given the ways in which 'radicalism' has now been reappropriated by the political centre and the right. However, he also cautioned that we must be wary of historical anachronism – Paine was no more a 'red Tory' than he was a proto-socialist. He was a figure of his times and must be understood within that historical context. Ultimately, though, he felt that it is completely fitting to rediscover Paine as a historical figure of national importance. His republicanism and his political thought owed much more to his formative years in England than is usually appreciated. Moreover, we are still reading his works – in pubs as well as libraries – precisely because they remain so startlingly relevant.

Vallance ended with a quotation from *The Decline and Fall of the British System of Finance* (1796): 'It will not be from the inability of procuring loans that the system will break up. On the contrary, it is the facility with which loans can be procured that hastens the event'. If only, he noted, the modern readers of Paine had included Gordon Brown and Mervyn King.

Much of the discussion after the papers focused on Paine's legacy and the lessons we should draw from his works for our politics today. Ed Randall questioned whether Paine would want to

be at the centre of a tradition or whether he would be urging us to face the problems of our own world. He noted that Paine's ideas on property are unable to take account of the damage we are doing to the environment. Similarly, the modern world revolves around paper money; rather than inveighing against that we need to focus on the question of who controls that money. Both speakers agreed that Paine would relish the challenges of the modern world.

In answer to a question from Duncan Brack, Vallance explained that however much they refer to his legacy, none of the present political parties could be seen to have been directly influenced by Paine's politics. Royle agreed with this but also noted that the last vestiges of Paine's policies could be seen in Liberal ideas on Land Value Taxation. Richard Grayson also commented that it is the Labour Party which makes the most explicit use of Paine's legacy; however, he felt that this was T-shirt politics and that the party had lost the tradition of referring to the political thought of figures like Paine. Grayson then pushed this point further, asking both of the speakers how plausibly Liberal Democrats could claim the legacy of Paine and also seventeenth century thinkers like Gerard Winstanley. Vallance was absolutely clear that Lib Dems have little common ground with Winstanley. Even by the standards of the seventeenth century, Winstanley was against the separation of political and religious life. His view of a highly interventionist state is also very problematic for Liberals. He did feel however, that Paine's legacy sits more easily within the Liberal than the Socialist tradition, being based on a negative rather than a positive conception of freedom. Professor Royle agreed with this analysis and added that all the political parties search for legitimating ancestors and will attempt to annexe figures like Paine to their political cause.

*Dr Emily Robinson is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Political, Social and International Studies at the University of East Anglia.*

**The last vestiges of Paine's politics could be seen in Liberal ideas on Land Value Taxation.**

# REVIEWS

## Scarborough politicians

Anne and Paul Bayliss, *Scarborough's MPs 1832 to 1906; Scarborough's Mayors 1836 to 1906; A Biographical Dictionary* (A. M. Bayliss, 2008)

Reviewed by Robert Ingham

**T**HIS SHORT book (114 A5 pages) consists of introductory essays on Scarborough's parliamentary and municipal politics in the nineteenth century, lists of election results and mayors, and biographical essays on each MP and mayor during the period.

Scarborough was a fascinating constituency to which Pelling devotes a page in his *Social Geography of British Elections*. Despite what Pelling describes as the town's 'comfort and respectability' it was a marginal seat, which often bucked the national trend.

Two Whigs were elected in 1832, but in 1835 a Tory, Sir Frederick Trench, topped the poll. An opponent of the 'rash and revolutionary' Great Reform Act, Trench had been first elected as a Cornish MP in 1806. His electioneering included 'bribes, often liquid, dinners and theatres, and he was especially attentive to fishermen and sailors'. Trench remained a Scarborough MP until his retirement in 1847.

The incumbent Whig, Earl Mulgrave, lost a by-election in 1851, necessitated by his appointment as Comptroller of the Household, because he was a supporter of free trade, an unpopular cause in the town. The election was the cause of riots and Mulgrave lost to George Young, a Tory ship-owner with no prior connection with the town. Young, who was defeated by Mulgrave in the 1852 general election, was described by Dickens as a 'prodigious bore' in the House.

One of the most prominent political families in the town was the Johnstone family. Sir John Johnstone served as Whig, and

later Liberal, MP for Scarborough for thirty-three years before retiring in 1874. His place was taken by his son, Sir Harcourt Johnstone, later to become first Baron Derwent. He was, presumably, grandfather of the Harcourt Johnstone who served as a Liberal MP in the 1930s and 1940s, although this is not noted by the authors.

Scarborough became a single-member constituency in 1885, when the seat was surprisingly gained by the Conservative Sir George Sitwell. Described by Pelling as an 'eccentric baronet', Sitwell contrived to lose in 1886, regained it in 1892, but lost again in 1895 and 1900, years when the Conservatives prevailed over the Liberals elsewhere. The Liberal victor in 1886 was Joshua Rowntree, the mayor of the town and a member of the famous Quaker family. Another prominent Liberal MP for Scarborough was Walter Rea, who sat from 1906–18, and was later a minister in the National Government of 1931.

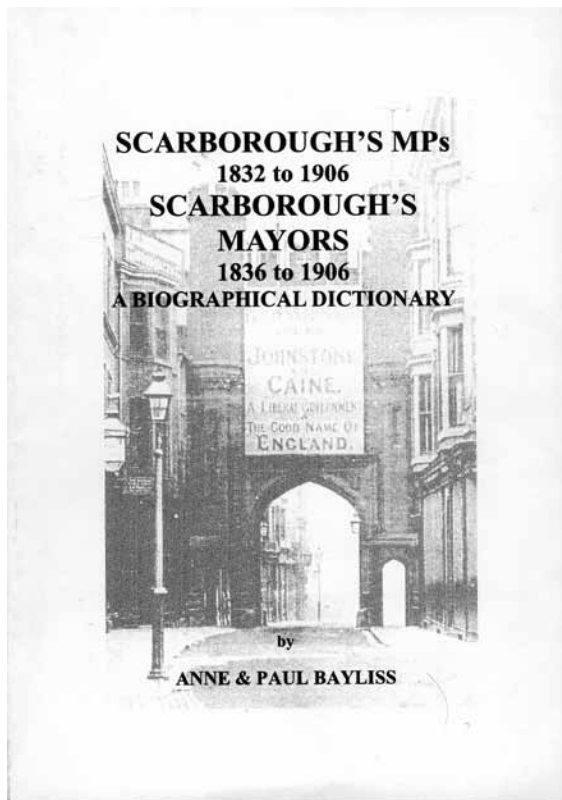
Much of the biographical information in this book is extracted from local newspapers and focuses on the MPs' and mayors' connections with the town. There are few differences in the social backgrounds of Conservatives and Liberals. The landed gentry predominate; there are some Liberal industrialists in the later nineteenth century and a few small tradesmen, but only a handful of the mayors included had a humble background. It would have been useful if the authors could have drawn some general conclusions about the town's political elite, but the introductory essays are very short and relate almost entirely to the

electoral system prior to the Great Reform Act and the municipal reforms of the 1830s.

This points to the main problem with this volume for anyone interested in wider themes in political history than the history of Scarborough: the lack of political context which could be illuminated by the primary material provided by the biographies. The authors do not seem to have consulted Pelling, for example; their local knowledge could usefully have added to his assessment and helped explain Scarborough's political eccentricity. It would have been interesting to know more about how elections were conducted in Scarborough, the party organisations in the town, and links with other institutions such as the churches.

The authors have written a number of biographical dictionaries relating to Scarborough and are clearly performing a valuable service to students of the town's local history. There is some interesting material in this volume for the political historian, principally to indicate questions about politics at the grassroots in the nineteenth century rather than to provide any answers.

*Robert Ingham is Biographies Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.*



## Testament of hope

Shirley Williams, *Climbing the Bookshelves* (Virago Press, 2009)

Reviewed by Tom McNally

ONE ALWAYS approaches reviewing the autobiography of a very old friend with a certain trepidation. What if it is awful? How candid a critic can one be without being hurtful? Thankfully Shirley Williams has written a memoir which gives me no such conflict of interests. She has written a kindly book; but one which deals frankly with her own emotions and failures. She also gives a stark reminder of the difficulties for a woman politician in the sexist, male chauvinist world of the 1960s and 1970s.

Like many political biographies, it is her childhood and youth which proves most fascinating to someone already familiar with the political career. Hers was not an orthodox middle-class family life, given her two distinguished academic and politically active parents. In addition it was lived in the shadow and then the reality of the Second World War. I have to confess, however, that, as I read the chapter on childhood and youth, the picture which came in to my mind was that of 'George', the tomboy heroine of Enid Blyton's 'Famous Five' books.

As youth gives way to early womanhood the friendships and love affairs are remembered with due discretion; but with colour and flavour to capture the mood and personalities of post-war Oxford and fifties London.

The book is a useful reminder that public figures have to live their public life whilst surviving all the trials and tribulations which beset the rest of us. Love, marriage, births and bereavements do not work to a politically convenient timetable. Shirley deals with all of these with candour and poignancy which will make the book of interest to those not closely involved in the minutiae of politics.

On a second level, I hope readers of Liberal Democrat

history will find the book of interest in giving a very accurate telling of the story of those who made the often emotional journey from the heart of the Labour Party, via the SDP, to the Liberal Democrats. There is not doubt that, if she had remained in the Labour Party, Shirley Williams would have gone on to hold one of the highest offices of state. Her book, however, is happily free of the 'might have beens'. Although she does concede two errors during the SDP days which made the journey travelled by both the SDP and the Liberals more painful than it might have been.

Her decision not to contest the Warrington by-election in 1981, which she would probably have won, was a major failure of nerve. As she frankly admits, 'My reputation for boldness, acquired in the long fight within the Labour Party, never wholly recovered.' That lack of confidence also revealed itself in her willingness to defer first to Roy Jenkins and then to David Owen in the leadership of the SDP. She is equally candid about this failure: 'Like many women of my generation and of the generation before mine, I thought of myself as not quite good enough for the very highest positions in politics.' That self-deprecation meant that in the 1987 general election the Alliance was 'led' by the uncomfortable Owen/Steel partnership which the electorate sussed as a mismatch long before election day. A more confident and decisive Shirley might have avoided a few of the missed opportunities on the way to the birth of the Liberal Democrats. However, she made, and continues to make, a massive contribution to the work of our party, both in policy development and campaigning. In many ways she reminds me of one of her American heroes, Hubert Humphrey, in her optimism in the political process to find solutions to difficult problems.

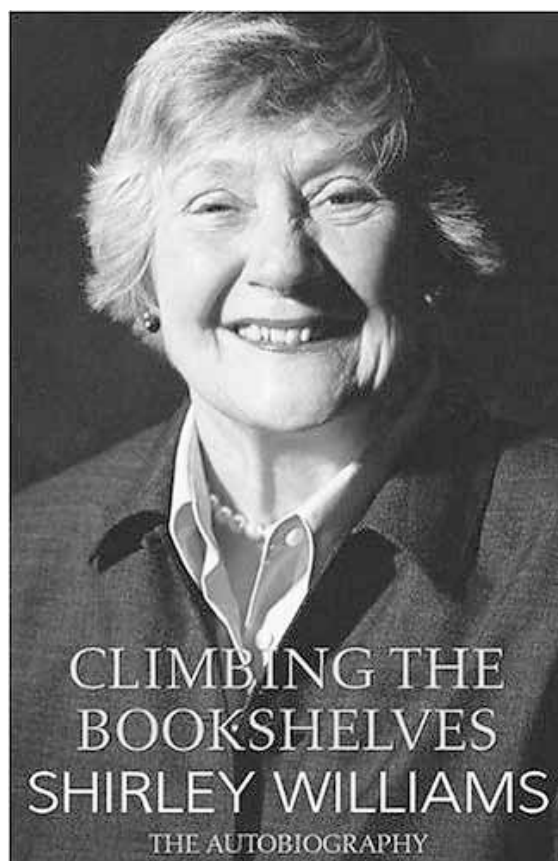
In that respect the book has further value as a story to be commended to any young person who is considering becoming involved in politics; but who is deterred by modern-day cynicism about the parliamentary and political process. Here is a story of someone who came from a comfortable middle-class background which provided her with the education and the opportunity to choose almost any profession she wanted. Not only that, she could, more than once, have quit the political arena and settled for a comfortable academic berth on either side of the Atlantic. Instead, she chose to stay with the rough and tumble of party and parliamentary politics. The book is an affirmation of both the parliamentary and the democratic process by someone who has walked the walk and got the scars to show for it. What is more, she has done so not by delivering great thoughts from Olympian heights, but by getting down in the trenches with the poor bloody infantry. Many a time I have asked Shirley her plans for the weekend after a very full week in the Lords, only to be told that she was off to speak at a party event in some location far from the Westminster village. Her book reveals the difficulties, and sometimes the pain, of a woman trying to make her way in politics and parliament, and as such it should provide as inspirational a read for

young women as any feminist tract.

Memoirs are, by their very nature, backward looking, particularly when written by a woman in her eightieth year. Yet, as the final chapters of the book show, here is a politician deeply concerned about nuclear proliferation and using her amazing network of contacts to influence disarmament policy on both sides of the Atlantic, or using her experience and democratic credentials to promote good governance in the Ukraine and Latin America. With no large party or high office to underpin her ventures, she is received at the highest level in Africa, in the Middle East, China and India, as well as in any capital in Europe. She is still someone influencing policy and policy-makers in many parts of the world.

Shirley's mother, Vera Brittain wrote one of the greatest books to come out of the First World War: *Testament of Youth*. It was a unique book written in unique circumstances. Her daughter, however, has written a testament of hope by someone with eyes still firmly fixed on the possibilities of tomorrow.

*Lord Tom McNally is Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice and Deputy Leader of the House of Lords. MP for Stockport 1979–83, he was one of the founders of the Social Democratic Party.*



of public funds rather than their private lives.

*Screwing Up* is an unusual political memoir. Oaten's prose is written in a sympathetic if somewhat dull way, and he comes across as ordinary and genuinely likeable. The tone is self-deprecating, and he reserves bad words only for the party activists typified by the 'Liberator collective' who were opposed to his right-wing leanings and for bloggers who indulged in innuendo about what Oaten may have got up to in his private life.

The structure of *Screwing Up* is also different to many political memoirs. Chapters focus on MPs' foreign trips and, presumably due to the mood of the time when the book was published, the intricacies of parliamentary expenses. The book seems to assume its readership has only a casual knowledge of the work of an MP and therefore gets bogged down with these weaker chapters.

There is, unfortunately, little in *Screwing Up* for either political anoraks or scholars of recent Liberal Democrat history to get their teeth into. The chapter on working with Charles Kennedy

---

## The end of the affair

Mark Oaten, *Screwing Up* (Biteback, 2009)

Reviewed by Tom Kiehl

**P**UBLISHED ON the eve of the Liberal Democrats' 2009 Autumn Federal Conference, *Screwing Up*, the political memoirs of the former leadership candidate Mark Oaten, who resigned from the party's frontbench in January 2006 following tabloid revelations of an affair with a rent boy, received criticism from some activists for reopening a wound during

the party's last major spectacle ahead of the 2010 general election. However, coming as it does in the aftermath of the parliamentary expenses scandal that dominated British politics for much of 2009, *Screwing Up* was suitably timed for Oaten, who did not seek re-election, to rehabilitate himself at a period when public contempt for politicians is reserved for the extravagant use

does not contain any revelations that cannot be found elsewhere. The chapter on Mark Oaten's initial two-vote election to parliament in Winchester, and the eventual legal challenge and by-election victory, is adequate but could have been developed further to explain why the turbulence surrounding his taking his seat in parliament could perhaps account for the detached displacement, evident in later chapters, that he felt whilst in Westminster.

The most successful and interesting chapters in *Screwing Up* concern Mark Oaten's period as the party's Home Affairs spokesperson and his doomed bid to replace Charles Kennedy as the party leader. Mark writes enthusiastically about his time covering the Home Affairs brief. Whether one supported Oaten's approach to the portfolio or not, this chapter makes one realise that, in recent years, very few Liberal Democrat spokespeople have had the same sense of how they want to develop their brief as Mark Oaten at Home Affairs did. In the context of this chapter, it makes perfect sense why

Oaten was seen by some as a credible future party leader at the time he held this brief.

When the revelations about Oaten's affair became public, the question most people asked was why someone with such a big skeleton in their closet would seek the leadership of a political party. But the impression *Screwing Up* gives is of Oaten, against his better judgment, being pushed into running for leader, largely by Charles Kennedy's supporters, who wanted an MP they perceived as loyal to succeed.

In the wake of the scandal, it has been easy to forget that Oaten failed to make the ballot paper for the leadership contest not because of his affair but due to a lack of support amongst his fellow MPs. When Oaten announced his candidacy, to many outsiders he presented a fresh contrast to the only other declared candidate, Ming Campbell, and had a similar PR background and media-friendly image to David Cameron, who had won the Conservative Party leadership only a month previously. However, such credentials did not translate into support from parliamentary colleagues who, instead, either flocked to Campbell or supported alternative and then as yet undeclared candidates. There was clearly something wrong with Mark Oaten's relationship with other Liberal Democrat MPs, and *Screwing Up* would have benefited from more insight from Oaten about this.

It is evident that Oaten felt intellectually inferior to other MPs, and he makes it clear in *Screwing Up* that he was more at ease on a radio or television interview than in a debate in the House of Commons. This inferiority complex may explain in part why the state school and polytechnic-educated Oaten was never able to persuade the predominantly public school and Oxbridge-educated MPs who contributed to or were sympathetic towards *The Orange Book* to back him, although on an ideological basis they would have been Oaten's natural supporters.

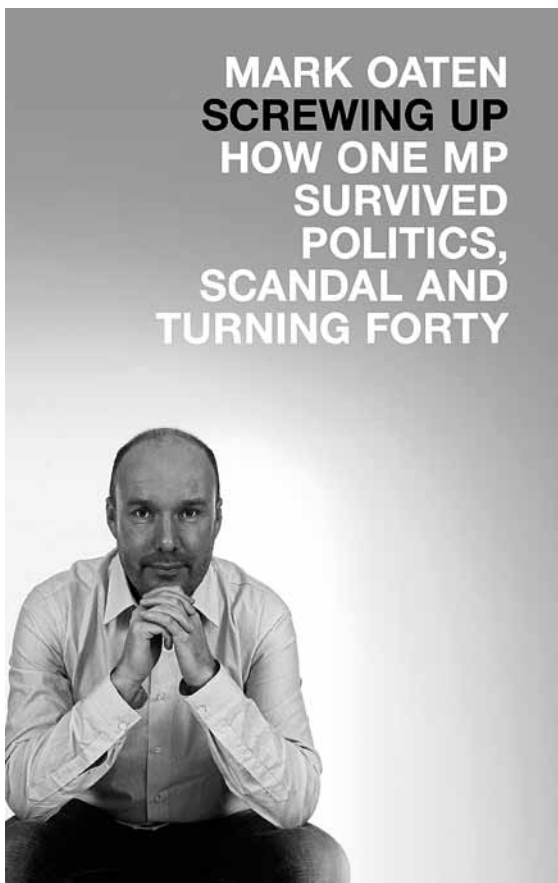
On reading *Screwing Up*, one never really understands why Oaten joined a political party in the first place, let alone why he eventually sought elected and high office for that party. If he was as unforthcoming with his motivations to his parliamentary colleagues as he is to readers of his book, then this may further explain why he failed to get the necessary support.

The one ideological theme that is consistent throughout Mark Oaten's political career is his preference for working with the Conservative Party. Oaten is honest that, whilst an MP, he at times flirted with the idea of joining the Conservative Party. Oaten's tendency to work with Conservatives is also tellingly catalogued in *Screwing Up* in an incident he recounts from the very beginning of his political career while a councillor in Watford in the 1980s. Oaten uses the concluding chapter of this book to reiterate arguments made in his other published work, *Coalition*, that the Liberal Democrats should consider working with the Conservatives if the 2010 general election results in a hung parliament.

As the title implies, *Screwing Up* concentrates heavily on the mental state of Mark Oaten and how the scandal that brought about the end of his political career was a consequence of the Westminster lifestyle that he led. Readers wanting a gratuitous insight into the scandal itself will be disappointed, as the actual details of his affair are skirted over. However, the chapters that concern the fallout of the affair becoming public knowledge, and how Oaten survived that ordeal, are at times compelling.

One would have to be a very hard-hearted person indeed to not feel the slightest bit of sympathy towards Oaten when, in the final paragraph of *Screwing Up*, he recognises that, in spite of his many perceived achievements as an MP, he will always be remembered by the scandal that brought his career to a sudden end.

*Tom Kiehl is the Deputy Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.*



## Railwayman and MP

Adrian Vaughan, *Samuel Morton Peto: A Victorian Entrepreneur* (Ian Allan Publishing, 2009)

Reviewed by **Robert Ingham**

**S**AMUEL MORTON Peto (1809–89) was Liberal MP for Norwich from 1847 to 1854, for Finsbury from 1859 to 1865, and for Bristol from 1865 to 1868. As a political figure he made little impact, but as a contractor for railways and public works he left a lasting impression on the UK. His firm built numerous London landmarks, including Nelson's Column and the Reform Club, and was substantially involved with the building of the Palace of Westminster. Peto also carried out a number of major railway projects at home and overseas, including developing Victoria Station in London.

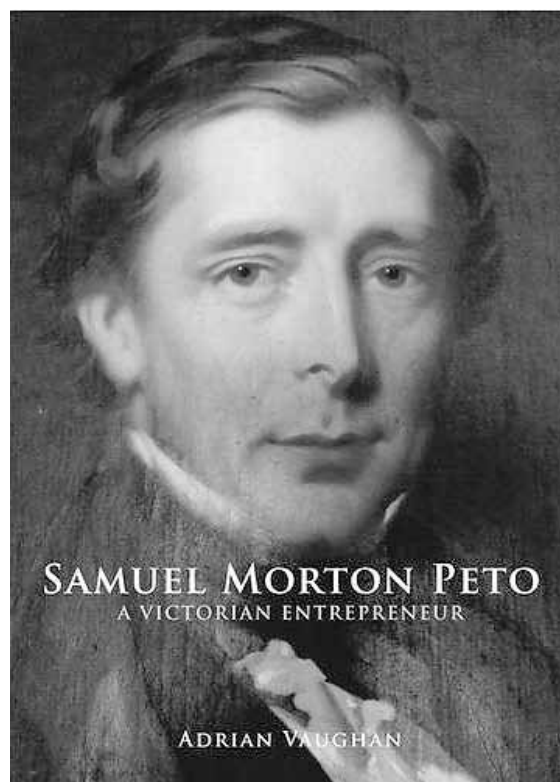
Peto was largely self-made. His father was a farmer, and at fourteen Peto was apprenticed to his uncle, a building contractor, learning the various building trades. When his uncle died, in 1830, Peto and a cousin inherited the business. Concentrating at first on major building projects, Peto took advantage of the railway boom of the 1840s to expand his business. By the 1860s, however, Peto had overextended himself and he was declared bankrupt. His political career was over and his attempts to return to business achieved little. He died in 1889.

Adrian Vaughan's entertaining biography of Peto is a short (190 pages) and lively read, which makes extensive use of privately held family letters. Inevitably, its focus is on Peto's business career, charting the dizzying ascent and sudden collapse of his fortunes. The clarity of the narrative is sometimes lost as Vaughan describes in detail the geographic and commercial arrangements of Peto's various railway projects. The book would have benefited from a glossary so that any reader unfamiliar with the minutiae of mid-Victorian railway companies could distinguish the OWR from the W&FR. Maps would also be of assistance.

The book's readability is derived from the author's strong views on Peto's life and character. Peto became a Baptist when he married his second wife and was a renowned benefactor of nonconformist churches and the Church of England. Vaughan, clearly not a religious man, regards Peto as a hypocrite, who used the church as a tool for self-promotion and to develop a strong work ethic in his labourers. Similarly, Peto's political career is described by Vaughan as an offshoot of his business life, providing him with contacts, status and influence over the legislation then necessary to build railways. He was an infrequent attender of parliament; broke a promise to his electorate in Norwich to scale back his business interests once he was elected; unseated a good local MP in Finsbury; and had no local connections with Finsbury or Bristol. Vaughan also finds little to admire in Peto's business methods, which were sometimes unlawful, although he was probably typical of his age.

Vaughan argues that Peto was a Liberal because he stood to benefit financially from free trade. There is, no doubt, some truth in this, but Peto was a radical, speaking out for working men in parliament and regarded as a philanthropic employer. His close connection with working men during his apprenticeship seems to have coloured his political outlook: he was no Gradgrind.

Assessing Peto's place in the mid-Victorian Liberal Party is beyond the scope of Vaughan's book. Was he typical of many MPs, in parliament to pursue a business career not to contribute to the government of the nation? Did he consistently vote in the same way as his leaders? Did he only vote whenever he was in town or could he be summoned by the Chief Whip to the most important divisions? These are largely unanswered questions,



although the digitisation of Hansard and the forthcoming digitisation of the *Mirror of Parliament* and the Victorian division lists should help place MPs like Peto in proper context. By combining religious tolerance, commitment to free trade, and concern for working men, Peto would seem to be representative of the party to which he belonged, but whether he helped shape that party or was shaped by it is an unanswered question.

*Robert Ingham is the Biographies Editor of the Journal of Liberal History.*

### Liberal Democrat History Group news

Join our email mailing list for news of History Group meetings and publications – the fastest and earliest way to find out what we're doing.

To join the list, send a blank email to [liberalhistory-subscribe@lists.libdems.org.uk](mailto:liberalhistory-subscribe@lists.libdems.org.uk).

Also see us on the web at:

- [www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk)
- [www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup](https://www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup)
- [act.libdems.org.uk/group/libdemhistory](https://act.libdems.org.uk/group/libdemhistory)

---

A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

# ELECTION 2010 IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The 2010 election must rank as one of the strangest in the history of the Liberal Democrats or its predecessor parties. Britain's first-ever television debates saw the party catapulted into the front rank of news coverage. Yet after successive opinion polls regularly showed the Lib Dems in at least second place, the result was a crashing disappointment; although the party gained almost a million votes, the vagaries of the first-past-the-post electoral system meant that it lost a net five seats.

Yet in losing, the party won. The outcome of the election – a hung parliament – at last gave the Liberal Democrats a chance of power, and led to Britain's first coalition government for sixty-five years.

Discuss the election campaign and its outcome with **John Curtice** (Professor of Politics, Strathclyde University), **Dennis Kavanagh** (author, *The British General Election of 2010*) and **James Gurling** (Chair, Liberal Democrat Campaigns & Communications Committee).

**8.00pm Sunday 19th September**  
Grace Suite 3, Hilton Hotel, Liverpool

---

## Liberal Democrat History Group at Lib Dem conference

Visit the History Group's stand in the exhibition in the Liverpool Arena and Convention Centre – stand FY1 in the Lower Galleria, just next to the entrance to the auditorium. There you can:

- Take part in our annual Liberal history quiz. Exciting prizes to be won!
- Buy our pamphlet, *Liberal History: A concise history of the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats* – now revised and updated to include the 2010 election and the formation of the coalition. 300 years of party history in 24 pages – £2.00 to *Journal* subscribers, £2.50 to others.
- Buy our second new pamphlet, *Liberal Leaders of the 19th Century*: £3.50 to *Journal* subscribers, £4 to everyone else.
- Buy its companion pamphlet, *Liberal Leaders since 1900*: £5 to *Journal* subscribers, £6 to everyone else.
- Buy a copy of our latest book, the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought*: £28 to *Journal* subscribers, £35 to everyone else.
- Renew your *Journal* subscription – all subs are now due for renewal (unless you subscribe by standing order).

