



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.

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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,

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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

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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

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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.

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## 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