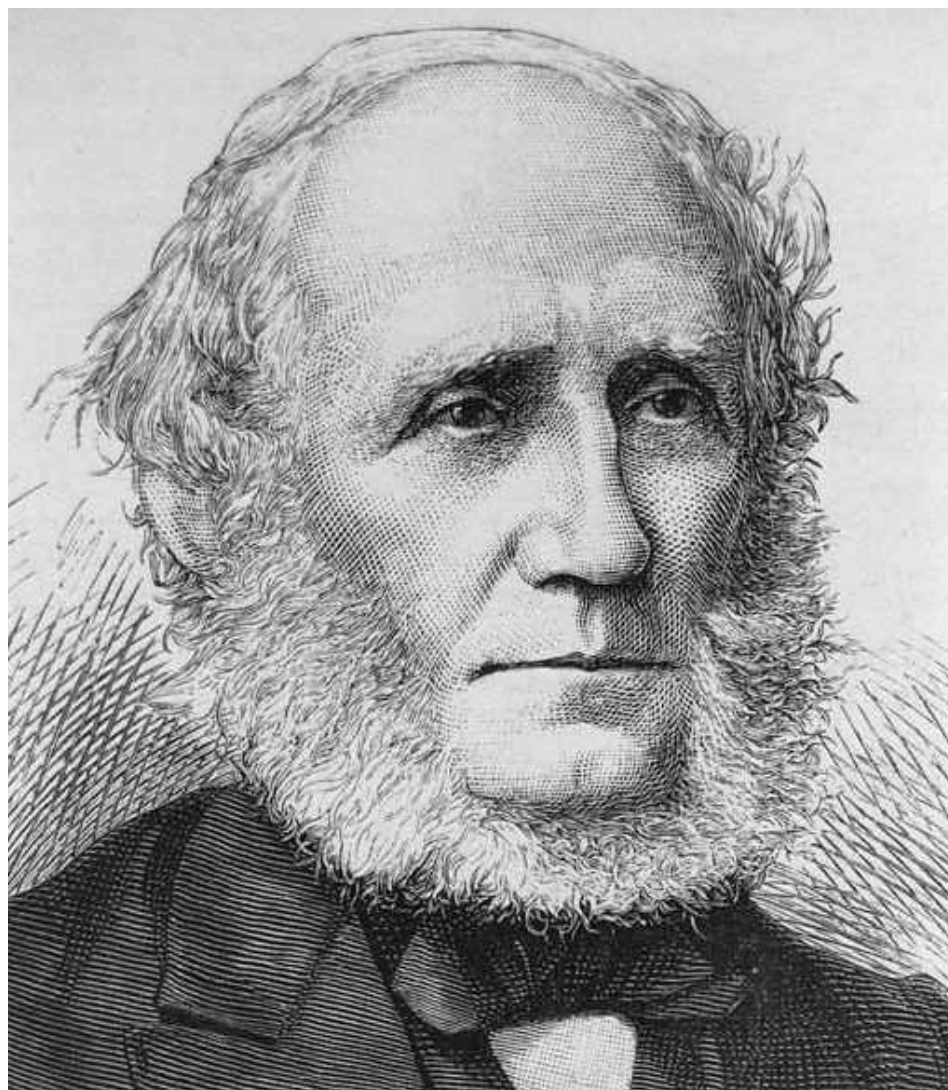


THE 'MEMBER FOR DUNCAN MCLAREN DOMINANCE OF VIC

As Liberal MP for Edinburgh, Duncan McLaren (1800–86) was nicknamed 'Member for Scotland' because he was so assiduous in pursuing all manner of Scottish causes. The tag may also, however, reflect the crucial nature of his contribution to the creation of the Liberal Party that dominated late Victorian and Edwardian Scotland.

Willis Pickard asks why the role he played in creating the Liberal dominance of Victorian Scotland has been so ignored.



FOR SCOTLAND' AND THE LIBERAL TORIES SCOTLAND

IN GENERAL histories of Scotland, Duncan McLaren is little more than a footnote. He did not become an MP until he was sixty-five and never held office. He was a leader around whom men gathered but he was also a divisive figure.

So what did McLaren achieve and why has history served him so ill? Politically, McLaren's life was a series of challenges to the Whig domination of Scotland. Although he started representing his home city of Edinburgh two years before the second Reform Act, the bedrock of his support came from the working men enfranchised in 1867 – the electorate who, in neighbouring Midlothian, were to be so enthused by William Gladstone. The Grand Old Man was always suspicious of self-proclaimed Radicals but he would not have won his marginal seat in 1880 and become the 'people's William' without the allegiance of voters whom the proudly Radical McLaren, more than anyone, made into a formidable Scottish force.

Duncan McLaren was born to a family of Argyll crofters that had moved to the developing textile industry of Dunbartonshire. Apprenticed at twelve to a shop-keeping uncle in Dunbar, he

established in his twenties a draper's business in the High Street of Edinburgh opposite the High Kirk of St Giles. By the time of the reform of local government in 1833, he was well enough established to afford the time to sit on the town council that replaced the self-perpetuating oligarchs who had run the capital of Scotland into bankruptcy. He soon became treasurer and largely made the deal with the government that restored the city's finances. But he and his allies on the council were increasingly frustrated by the refusal of Lord Melbourne's Cabinet to maintain an agenda of reform – and in particular to abolish the tax that paid the stipends of Church of Scotland ministers. McLaren argued that the tax was unfair to the many thousands who worshipped in Presbyterian churches that had seceded from the Established Church of Scotland.

Pressure on the Whigs

The argument was the same as made against church rates in England, and similar groups were brought into public life to rally opposition. McLaren's skill was in marshalling facts and in particular the statistics that showed how the

subsidised Church of Scotland no longer commanded the adherence of a majority. McLaren's supporters were not yet a fully formed group of political Radicals – and certainly they had no time for the Chartists – but the power of congregations of religious Dissenters formed into a national committee could make life uncomfortable for a Whig government. In November 1837 Andrew Rutherford, the Solicitor General, wrote to a fellow junior minister that the Committee of Dissenters had been to see him and made clear that there was 'a very lukewarm and partial support, if not abandonment of the Whigs'.¹ Rutherford recognised McLaren as 'an able and excellent man'.² That recognition was soon to be turned by the Whigs into suspicion of his motives and fear for their continued domination of Edinburgh and Scottish politics. The men who had defeated the 'Dundas despotism' in Scotland were landed gentry and advocates at the Scottish Bar. They were happy to have prosperous shopkeepers run town councils but not to challenge the Whig leadership within the loosely organised Liberal party. McLaren, using resentment against slights by the government and the Established Church to

Duncan McLaren (1800–86), from a photograph by J. G. Tunny (picture reproduced by kind permission of Scran)

show the power of organised Dissent, began to pose a real threat.

Not that he displayed open ambition himself. His supporters had no one to challenge Thomas Babington Macaulay, whom the Whigs imposed on Edinburgh in an 1839 by-election. McLaren interfered in a hotly disputed election for Lord Provost in 1840, but only from the sidelines. He had left the town council to look after his business and his growing family. His first wife had died leaving him responsible for three children. His second wife, Christina Renton, was a member of a prominent Dissenting family who encouraged his involvement in church politics but she failed to recover from the birth of a third child. McLaren's unmarried sisters rallied to the young family, and success in business allowed him to keep his commitment to public affairs and polemical journalism.

The campaign to abolish the Corn Laws was taking root in Scotland, and McLaren (aided by his Renton relatives) saw a way of harnessing his supporters to the new cause. The self-regarding claims of Dissenting churchmen faded from public attention as splits in the Church of Scotland culminated in the cataclysm of the Disruption and the founding of the Free Church in 1843. McLaren marshalled the army of Dissenters to help Richard Cobden and John Bright in the Anti-Corn Law League. In January 1842, McLaren organised a large conference of Dissenting ministers in Edinburgh. Of 494 who were asked their opinion, none was in favour of the existing Corn Laws and 431 wanted total repeal. The next month saw McLaren lead an Anti-Corn Law League march along the Strand in London to the House of Commons, where MPs were about to vote on the annual repeal motion by Charles Villiers. John Bright first met McLaren at the Edinburgh conference, and both he and Cobden quickly recognised the Scotsman's organising abilities. He facilitated their visits north of the border and led fund-raising efforts. With Cobden he exchanged letters about once a month in 1842–43.³ The topics covered a gamut of Radical causes: taxation, household suffrage, triennial parliaments.

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McLaren's abilities made him more than just the League's eyes and ears in Scotland. His judgment was valued among Radical thinkers and campaigners – just as his motives were questioned by the Whig establishment. Macaulay, in particular, had a difficult relationship with his disputatious constituent. The MP's tentative approach to Corn Law reform led to a tetchy correspondence, and his reluctance to appear at meetings in Edinburgh was widely resented. In the wake of the Disruption, political allegiances were tangled up with sectarian differences. Within the supposedly Liberal fold there were factions belonging to the Free Church, the Dissenters (a majority of whom, including McLaren's core supporters, were soon to coalesce in the United Presbyterian Church), and the Church of Scotland, whose members included both Liberals and Tories. As elsewhere in Britain, the government's grant to the Roman Catholic Maynooth College in Ireland became a focus for sectarian squabbling. Macaulay refused to join the bulk of his voters in opposing the grant and in whipping up religious intolerance – although McLaren's church supporters could at least be excused from purely anti-Catholic prejudice because they opposed grants by the state to all religions, including Protestant good causes.

At the general election of 1847, Macaulay was defeated, and McLaren was chief among those blamed for creating the coalition of United Presbyterians and Free Churchmen who brought shame on the city by removing a national statesman and writer. *The Scotsman* newspaper, in particular, had by now turned against McLaren and embarked on a campaign of denigration and misrepresentation that lasted most of his life. Macaulay, sick of his disputatious constituents, wrote to his niece: 'I am not vexed, but as cheerful as I ever was in my life.'⁴ He left behind him the question of whether the Whigs in Scotland had suffered a mortal blow. That was the hope of those who challenged their privileged self-interest and reforming timidity. But there was no real battle at this time for the Liberal soul. In a country where Liberals

held almost all the burgh seats and most of the counties, MPs continued to be returned from the upper reaches of society. Even a prosperous merchant like McLaren doubted whether he could support six months' unpaid life in Westminster as well as a home in Edinburgh. Like other constituencies in Britain that returned two members, Edinburgh gave an opportunity for the Liberal factions to share the spoils. A Whig and a Radical (or Independent Liberal, as the term usually was in Edinburgh) might each take a seat. That could give the Radicals a representation that was usually denied them in single-member constituencies. McLaren and his friends did try to find sympathetic candidates to challenge Whigs elsewhere, but not often successfully. One seat in which McLaren took an interest was Stirling Burghs which, in the 1847 parliament, was represented by John Benjamin Smith, the Manchester free trade businessman, with whom McLaren formed a close alliance.⁵

Bright as brother-in-law

McLaren was encouraged in broadening his Radical agenda from religious to wider issues by both Cobden and Bright, the latter in his role from 1849 as brother-in-law. McLaren took as his third wife Bright's sister Priscilla, herself ardently committed to advanced causes. She was a Quaker who on marrying a non-Quaker was expelled, to her brother's fury. McLaren and John Bright formed a lifelong working partnership, with McLaren deferring to Bright's oratorical skills and national reputation, and Bright relying on McLaren's assiduity in delving into parliamentary papers and drafting reforming legislation.

Ventures into banking and railways in these years proved profitable but worrisome, and McLaren's natural calculating caution meant that for the rest of his life he built his prosperity on the draper's business, employing up to 200 'hands', and through land purchase and development in rapidly growing suburban Edinburgh. In 1851 he was reluctantly persuaded to rejoin the town

council, knowing that he would be catapulted by his loyal supporters into the Lord Provost's chair for three years. He was called on to tackle again the despised clerical tax, and he had already shown enterprise and persistence in other civic matters such as locating a dependable water supply, especially for tenement houses. He confounded critics by the even-handedness of his dealings as Lord Provost, and he showed his Liberalism in beginning the process by which museums and private gardens were made accessible to the wider public. In tackling the prevalent and damaging abuse of alcohol he was an advocate not of total abstinence but of limiting public-house opening hours. Edinburgh's lead was soon followed elsewhere in the country.

For the first and perhaps only time, McLaren was now persuaded to override his customary caution in making major decisions. Despite recently becoming Lord Provost he stood in the 1852 general election. The alliance of Independent Liberals that had defeated Macaulay was at an end. Free Churchmen continued to back Charles Cowan, Macaulay's conqueror. The Dissenters loyal to McLaren thought little of Cowan's abilities, and when Macaulay agreed to stand again for the other seat now vacated by a Whig MP, the McLarenites calculated that they could displace Cowan. McLaren was confident that he would add to his own support the second votes of Macaulay's backers as well as Cowan's and the Tory candidate's. Sectarian issues including Maynooth still loomed large at public meetings and in the newspapers, which openly backed one or other of the religious factions. But, despite the unpleasant atmosphere (from which Macaulay kept clear by not appearing in Edinburgh at all), it was not religious affiliation that decided the outcome. Poll books published after election day showed that an elector's occupation was the main determinant of how he voted.⁶ McLaren scored heavily among merchants and shopkeepers but had scant support among lawyers and other professionals, who formed a large proportion of the limited electorate. He did not win enough

second votes to prevent Macaulay and Cowan from taking the seats. McLaren had been launched into public life by fellow Dissenters. It was clear that their loyalty was no longer enough. A broader-based organisation was needed to challenge the Whigs. It neither could nor should have a sectarian taint. The local campaign against the clerical tax would go on, but McLaren increasingly involved himself in national issues. He worked with Bright on franchise reform, and with Cobden on taxation. His reputation among Radicals was never higher than when, as Lord Provost, he presided over a Peace Congress in Edinburgh, one of a series in European cities designed to set public opinion against the belligerence of leaders (not least the supposedly Liberal Lord Palmerston). It was a great intellectual gathering, Bright told Cobden, and it outshone a similar event months earlier in Manchester. Unfortunately, realpolitik prevailed over the well-meaning peace party, and the Radical cause was set back by the years of war against Russia. Bright was among those who paid the electoral price in the 1857 election. The following year he was on holiday in Scotland when a by-election occurred in Birmingham. McLaren convened a meeting at his Edinburgh home to persuade his reluctant brother-in-law to stand. The pair hastened to the Midlands and Bright was returned for the seat he went on to represent for thirty years.

Despite Macaulay's retirement through ill health in 1856, there was no prospect of an Independent Liberal coup against the Whigs. Cobden hoped that McLaren would look beyond Edinburgh: 'For Heavens sake come into the House for one of your Scottish boroughs, or try an English one that you may endeavour to set up something better in the House than the present forlorn state of the representation of Scotland.'⁷ But McLaren would not be drawn beyond Edinburgh where the arch-exponent of lawyers' Whiggery, James Moncreiff, became MP in 1859 and Lord Advocate in Palmerston's government. Moncreiff had represented *The Scotsman* in a libel case successfully brought by McLaren three years

earlier over publication of a depiction of him as 'snake the draper'. Now Moncreiff had the opportunity to rid his constituents of the unpopular clerical tax. His compromise legislation only reignited the opposition, brought McLaren briefly back into the town council and then, at the behest of the Independent Liberals, into parliament in 1865. With Palmerston, the main obstacle to franchise reform, soon dead, the issue of the time was legislation to widen the urban electorate and redraw constituencies. McLaren, who sat himself among Radical friends on the Liberal benches rather than with the Scottish Whigs, was ready to assist Bright in the struggle ahead. They had worked on reform bills. 'You are a very "steam engine" for work at figures and arguments,' Bright told him.⁸ In 1859, the year that Whigs, Radicals and Peelites came together to form the Liberal Party as we know it, McLaren enunciated the principle on which he was to campaign at elections and to follow as an MP: it was 'to unite the working classes and the honest portion of the middle classes who were disposed to go with them.'⁹

He won election in 1865 on a narrow electorate. By 1868, with the urban working man largely enfranchised, his Independent Liberal appeal had a larger and dependable audience. The business of electioneering through public meetings and canvassing depended on support by the ward committees that annually returned McLaren's allies to the council. In the 1865 contest McLaren's eldest son, John, canvassed with his friends in affluent and therefore less favourable areas. He reported: 'We have not a majority in the New Town as a whole but I am told that in the Old Town the majority is overwhelming.'¹⁰ His father topped the poll, but it took until 1868 to displace the Whigs with a second successful Independent Liberal.

McLaren's first parliament was dominated by the Reform Bills and he was in no doubt that the franchise should be extended as widely as possible. As events unfolded and the initiative passed to Disraeli, McLaren found the enemy to be feet-dragging Whigs, and he was willing to vote

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against the Liberals by joining the so-called 'tea-room' dissidents who put pressure on Gladstone not to wreck Disraeli's bill. He was one of a small minority of MPs supporting John Stuart Mill's amendment to give women the vote. When it came to the subsequent Scottish Reform legislation, McLaren's fact-finding skills were deployed on seeking to obtain more seats for Scotland and to spread them more equitably according to population. His belief that Scotland was poorly treated by comparison with England and Wales was at the heart of his parliamentary involvement. It contributed to his being given the 'Member for Scotland' nickname, at first probably as a gentle dig at his omnipresence in debates, which for a man in his late sixties was remarkable. He was no proto-Scottish Nationalist but sought equity, efficiency and economy and was as good a cheese-parer as his party leader Gladstone had been when Chancellor of the Exchequer. Why, he typically asked, did it cost £6,000 to run the Lunacy Board in Scotland but only £3,800 in Ireland and £20,000 for the whole of England?¹¹

His own bills to get rid of Edinburgh's clerical tax failed largely for lack of time (until the government eventually intervened to resolve the matter once and for all). It was this frustration that led McLaren to question the administration of Scotland. He was never in favour of restoring a parliament in Edinburgh and in the last months of his life he railed against Gladstone's plan for Irish home rule, but he wanted a Secretary of State for Scotland to be appointed instead of the burden of Scottish affairs falling on the Lord Advocate. He spoke for a majority of his country's MPs when he asked Prime Minister Gladstone in 1869 to consider 'the propriety of providing some additional means for the transaction of public business connected with Scotland.' A commission to take evidence was appointed but nothing came of it. McLaren, however, could take credit for paving the way for the young Lord Rosebery to persuade Gladstone to reform Scottish governance in the 1880s.

The nexus of radical family alliances

One difficult issue for both McLaren and his wife Priscilla, with her deep commitment to women's rights, was the role of John Bright in Gladstone's governments. Despite his Radical principles and popular reputation, he proved a disappointment to the McLaren family, most notably in his lukewarm attitude to women's issues. He and McLaren still worked together but there is scant evidence of their impressing a Radical agenda on public affairs. That, it has to be said, was down to Bright's ineffectiveness as a Cabinet minister, linked to his bouts of ill health, rather than to any slackening of pressure from McLaren and Radical colleagues on the back benches. Increasingly, as McLaren established a parliamentary reputation, he and Priscilla took a prominent place in the nexus of Radical family alliances which came almost to mirror those of the Whig dynasties that formed the bedrock of Gladstone's governments. Frederick Pennington, MP for Stockport, and his wife were particular friends with whom McLaren and Priscilla would stay, from the mid-1870s, either at their London home during the parliamentary session or at their country house in the Surrey hills. English and Scottish Radicals had aims in common: opposition to the entrenched position of the established Church, parliamentary and electoral reform, commitment to the pursuit of peace. Only differing circumstances north and south of the border would impose different policies. Many non-Anglicans were against a national system of primary education unless it was secular and removed religion from the classroom. Robert Dale, a prominent Birmingham Congregationalist, wanted to campaign in Scotland against the bill that finally gave Scotland a government-supported system in 1872. McLaren was among those who persuaded Dale to stay at home since it had taken over twenty years to reconcile the conflicting interests that had stood in the way of a much-needed improvement to school provision. Unlike many United Presbyterians, McLaren, ever the realist, knew that a

voluntary system would always be inadequate and underfunded. He addressed the contentious issue of religious instruction by saying that the Bible and Shorter Catechism should be in the curriculum, but a parent had the right to withdraw his child from the teaching of them. McLaren knew what he was talking about on education: as a young councillor he had founded thirteen schools for thousands of poor children in Edinburgh, using surplus funds in the trust established by Geordie Heriot, jeweller to James VI and I.

McLaren was in the forefront of a campaign, growing in strength from the 1870s, to disestablish the Church of Scotland. This posed a problem for Gladstone when he became MP for Midlothian where many of his voters were disestablishers. McLaren argued that the prime minister had disestablished the Church of Ireland, but Gladstone in his second government had Irish pre-occupations of another sort that precluded action in Scotland. He wrote to McLaren in typically convoluted terms: 'Were the cause of disestablishment sufficiently powerful and mature to force its way to the front in defiance of all competition, its friends need not be deterred from bringing it into activity and prominence at head quarters. But if it has not reached that very advanced stage, my opinion is that the measure is more likely to be thrown back than pushed forward by endeavours to bring the Government or Parliament to entertain it.'¹²

As a champion of working men, McLaren was put to the test when the trade unions sought repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act in 1873. He had voted for the legislation two years earlier on the ground that the outlawing of picketing during industrial disputes posed no threat to the overwhelming majority of workers who opposed intimidation. Although, at a 40,000-strong trade-union demonstration from across Scotland, he listened to denunciations of himself as a self-interested large employer, his confidence was not dented and he predicted that he would not suffer at the forthcoming election: 'I would be returned at the head of the poll,' he told his son.¹³

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He was proved right: working-class Liberal voters still looked to middle-class leadership rather than finding representation from among their own. But the election brought two new concerns. The first was that his fellow MP since 1868, John Miller, defected to a new force known as the 'Advanced Liberals', trade-union led. The Edinburgh Liberals were now in three camps: traditional Whig, McLaren's Independents and the Advanced newcomers. Secondly, the Tories had put up a credible candidate who, though defeated (as was Miller) looked to pose a growing threat, which they clearly were in other parts of the country where Disraeli had won a convincing victory.

In search of a united party

Over the next six years the search was for Liberal unity. McLaren had created an electoral force and ensured that, at the very least, his supporters and the city Whigs shared the spoils, which they did in 1874 with the election of Lord Provost James Cowan as the second MP. The Liberals' organisation across Britain was inferior to the Tories', and the splitting of Liberal votes cost them seats. As the party leadership sought to establish a degree of control from the centre, with the Chief Whip William Adam at the helm, aided by James Reid in Scotland, McLaren came under pressure to bring the Edinburgh factions together. He remained lukewarm but did not stand in the way of his eldest son John, who worked hard to help create the united party that gave the Edinburgh Liberals a resounding victory in 1880. John for years was torn between the law and politics. He sought his uncle John Bright's help in securing a salaried legal position, without success. He then decided that occupying a parliamentary seat would make him the obvious candidate for Lord Advocate if the Liberals won the next election. Bright was again called in aid but was pessimistic about his chances south of the border: 'As a rule they [English boroughs] do not like Reform Club candidates. I mean those chosen by W. Adam or any one who is supposed to be active in London for the party ... I want

The carefully choreographed cortege through the city and the outpouring of tributes were a Victorian norm, but McLaren attained a position in Scottish life which makes regrettable the way in which his name has faded from public memory.

to get out of Parliament, which seems as difficult for me as it is for you to get in."¹⁴

By 1879, John was adopted for Wigtown Burghs and proposed the vote of thanks to Gladstone at the opening rally of the first Midlothian campaign. His father attended the festivities for the great man at Lord Rosebery's house, having hurried back from receiving the freedom of Inverness, testimony to his Scotland-wide reputation. Gladstone's subsequent victory in Midlothian was narrow compared with McLaren's across the city boundary, but John's was narrower still, and he lost the seat at the by-election prompted by his becoming Lord Advocate. He fought another by-election unsuccessfully, and in 1881 it was agreed by Gladstone, Bright and the chief whip that McLaren senior should be persuaded to stand down in favour of his son. The old man took some convincing, but John at last had an easy election to win. His problems were only beginning. He annoyed Gladstone by asking to become a privy counsellor, and he fell out with William Harcourt, who as Home Secretary was his ministerial superior and was a difficult colleague for politicians more adept than John McLaren. A vacancy on the Court of Session bench gave ministers the opportunity to remove him as Lord Advocate and MP.

The Liberal unity of the 1880 election soon disappeared as Gladstone's government wrestled with Irish disruption in parliament and adventures abroad, especially in Egypt, that smacked of Tory jingoism. In Scotland, church disestablishment came to the fore. Because English radical Liberals led by Joseph Chamberlain never understood its grip on party activists, his efforts through the National Liberal Federation to focus on social issues barely penetrated north of the border. McLaren remained an ardent disestablisher. His son Walter unsuccessfully fought Inverness Burghs in the 1885 election on the issue against a 'Church Liberal', that is an adherent of the established Church of Scotland. Duncan McLaren, still combative in retirement, now stood in the way of the change of approach needed

by Scottish Liberals to address the social problems which were increasingly being laid at the door of government rather than being left to voluntary commitment. The division of large cities into single-member constituencies did radicalism no favours, according to Priscilla Bright, who in the wake of the 1885 poll pronounced that all four Edinburgh seats were 'once more in the hands of the Whigs, only they dare not be exactly what the Whigs of old were.'¹⁵ She was correct on both counts: the new MPs did not promote her husband's causes but neither were they just a coterie of landowners and legal bigwigs. McLaren had ensured that the party had moved on, broadening its appeal and mobilising thousands of activists. The new Scottish Liberalism that engaged the recently enfranchised voters, urban and then rural, many of whom were members of churches broken away from the Church of Scotland, kept Unionism and Labour at bay until after the First World War. Then its failure to recognise the importance of government in tackling social problems made all Liberals vulnerable.

In his final months, McLaren broke with Gladstone over Irish home rule and resigned the presidency of Edinburgh South Liberal Association. His son Charles, MP for Stafford since 1880, was on the other side of the growing Liberal divide, but it was Bright's views that concerned McLaren most. Priscilla recorded that he 'was greatly concerned at the silence maintained by my brother John Bright on the matter, when there were so many wishing to know his opinion, for really few men think for themselves and Gladstone never had become the Shibbolith [sic] of the Liberal party.'¹⁶ Bright avoided having to express immediate opposition to the Home Rule Bill in the Commons by travelling to Edinburgh for McLaren's funeral in April 1886.¹⁷

The carefully choreographed cortege through the city and the outpouring of tributes were a Victorian norm, but McLaren attained a position in Scottish life which makes regrettable the way in which his name has faded from public memory. On

his deathbed, the eighty-six-year-old received a letter from Thomas Lipton, the tea merchant, and the scientist Sir William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin) asking him to address a Liberal Unionist rally in Glasgow. There was a hagiographical biography of McLaren two years after his death.¹⁸ His sons Charles and Walter maintained a family presence on the Liberal benches of the Commons until almost the First World War.¹⁹ One of his daughters, Agnes, qualified among the first batch of woman doctors and, converting to Roman Catholicism, encouraged nuns to run medical missions. Priscilla's long widowhood – she died in 1906 – was devoted to the cause of female suffrage and her belief that Liberal leaders could be persuaded to see justice in

the cause. The family monument in the graveyard under the Castle rock has become encrusted with a century of soot from the nearby railway.

Willis Pickard is a former newspaper editor and rector of Aberdeen University. He is a trustee of the National Library of Scotland. His book The Member for Scotland – A life of Duncan McLaren will be published by Birlinn in spring 2011.

- 1 National Archives of Scotland. Dalhousie papers, GD/45/14/642. Andrew Rutherford to Fox Maule, 20 November 1837.
- 2 Ibid., 25 June 1838.
- 3 West Sussex Archives, Cobden papers, 1-8 (MF1-8) and No. 71
- 4 Thomas Pinney (ed.), *The Letters of Thomas Babington Macaulay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976),

- Vol. 4., letter to Hannah, 30 July 1847.
- 5 Manchester City Library, J. B. Smith papers, MS923.2 S343.
- 6 The 1852 poll book has been analysed by Graeme Morton in *Unionist Nationalism: Governing Urban Scotland 1830–1860* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999).
- 7 Cobden papers, CP 107, Cobden to McLaren, 6 March 1857.
- 8 Edinburgh City Archives (hereafter ECA), McLaren papers, Box 2, Bright to McLaren, 28 December 1859.
- 9 *The Scotsman*, 2 January 1859.
- 10 National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), John Scott Oliver papers, MS24785, John McLaren to Priscilla McLaren, 11 June 1865.
- 11 *Hansard*, July 22 1870.
- 12 H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968–94), Vol. 10, Gladstone to McLaren, 22 December 1881.
- 13 ECA, Box 3, McLaren to Walter McLaren, 25 August 1873.
- 14 NLS, MS24801, Bright to John McLaren, 25 December 1878.
- 15 ECA, Box 2. Priscilla McLaren, in Inverness for her son's campaign, sent daily letters to her husband house-bound in Edinburgh, 18 November to 2 December 1885.
- 16 ECA, Box 3, Priscilla to a friend Mary, 28 November 1886.
- 17 Keith Robbins, *John Bright* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 256.
- 18 J. B. Mackie, *The Life and Work of Duncan McLaren* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1888), two vols.
- 19 Walter McLaren represented Crewe (with gaps) from 1886 until his death in 1912. Charles lost his Stafford seat in 1886. He was MP for Bosworth from 1892 and became the first Lord Aberconway in 1911.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

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

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65)

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

The 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.

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.

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16

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

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.

Beyond Westminster: Grassroots Liberalism 1910–1929

Supervisor Dr Stuart Ball. Gavin Freeman, University of Leicester; gjf6@le.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.

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

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

The Liberal Party's political communication, 1945–2002

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

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.