mainstream of Liberal Democrat thought. Mark Garnett and David Howarth search for a Liberal Democrat centre, though they find it in rather different places: Garnett in the idea of Liberalism as a force for political moderation, embodied by successive party leaders since the Thorpe era and reconstructed in a centre-right direction under Menzies Campbell and Nick Clegg; Howarth in a 'core liberalism' where Liberals can unite around the goal of a society in which individuals enjoy the freedom and capacity to make their own life choices.

One paradoxical achievement of the contributions to this volume is to reveal just how difficult classical and social liberalism – not to mention the 'centrist' strand of Liberal thought – are to pin down. Hickson, in the introduction, suggests that the distinction between classical and social liberalism is broadly analogous to that between negative and positive liberty, but alternative definitions appear throughout the volume: for instance, Douglas argues that 'classical liberalism pivots on the idea of personal liberty' and notes that classical liberals differ amongst themselves over the legitimacy of state intervention to remedy 'extreme disparities of wealth and poverty', whilst Grayson suggests that the classical–social liberal distinction may be most useful as a shorthand means of distinguishing between less and more egalitarian and statist positions in Liberal Democrat policy debates. Both Grayson and Brack allude approvingly to David Howarth's argument, developed in the 2007 volume *Reinventing the State*, that most self-described economic liberals in the party are actually not classical liberals – defined by a belief 'that all the state should do is guarantee rights and then move out of the way' – but 'minimalist' social liberals, who share with more 'maximalist' social liberals a recognition that political freedom requires a measure of material redistribution but stop short of recognising Rawlsian supplementary fairness principles as justifications for further intervention.[3] Both of the 'classical liberal' authors in this book can be regarded in Howarth's terms as minimalist social liberals; yet their concerns for free trade, land value taxation, and a smaller or simpler state indicate the influence of a distinctive classical liberal tradition within the party, which is not fully captured by the more philosophical criteria Howarth uses. Perhaps this bears out Howarth's suggestion, in his contribution to the present volume, that Liberal thought has frequently been at its most fertile and distinctive where classical and social liberal ideas have interacted and combined.

Overall, however, this is an extremely valuable addition to the literature on post-war Liberalism, combining scholarly rigour with often passionate argument about the nature of Liberalism and its implications for the future of the party.

In a couple of respects, the volume falls slightly short of what it might have been. Recurrent hints of divergent Liberal views on the welfare state – from Cable's reminder that Jo Grimond supported education vouchers, to Grayson's observation that social liberals have tended to support diversity of provision in the public services in principle but to shy away from it in practice – suggest that a chapter on social policy might have been well justified. Perhaps, too, the commentaries by Cable, Howarth and Webb at the end of the book would have been of greater value if they had discussed the arguments developed in the preceding chapters as well as the influence of the different ideological traditions on contemporary Liberal Democrat policy; the compilation schedule may, of course, have prevented this. Overall, however, this is an extremely valuable addition to the literature on post-war Liberalism, combining scholarly rigour with often passionate argument about the nature of Liberalism and its implications for the future of the party. Hickson and his contributors should be congratulated on their achievement. As with many similar academic texts, the price (£60) will be prohibitive for many; but it is well worth reading, so you should certainly get your library to buy it.

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1 Vernon Bogdanor (ed.), *Liberal Party Politics* (Oxford, 1983); Don MacIver (ed.), *The Liberal Democrats* (1996); *Political Quarterly*, 78, 1 (2007), special issue on the Liberal Democrats.

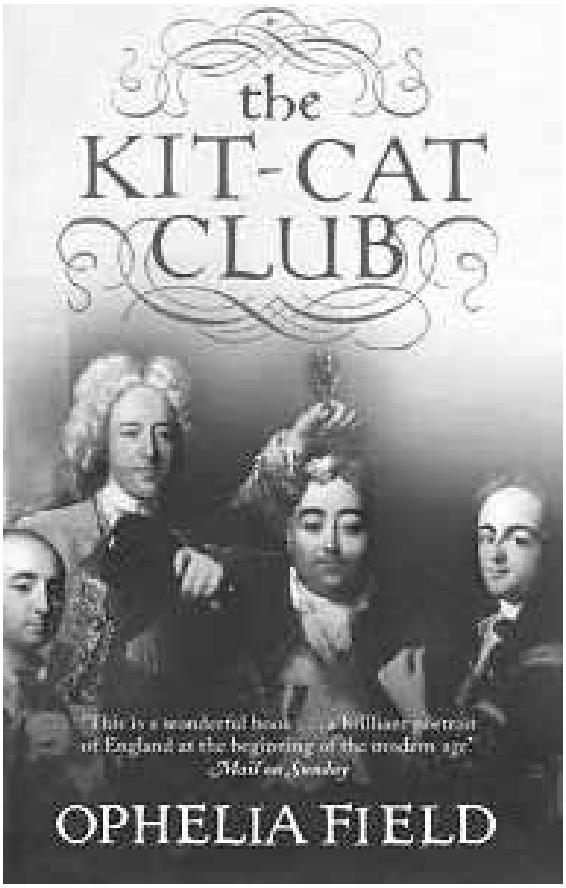
2 Kevin Hickson (ed.), *The Political Thought of the Conservative Party since 1945* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

3 David Howarth, 'What is social liberalism?', in Duncan Brack, Richard S. Grayson and David Howarth (eds.), *Reinventing the State: Social Liberalism for the 21st Century* (Politico's, 2007).

Of pies and politics

Ophelia Field, *The Kit-Cat Club: Friends Who Imagined a Nation* (HarperPress, 2008)
Reviewed by **Mark Pack**

Founded in the late 1690s by London bookseller Jacob Tonson, utilising the premises and consuming the food of pie-maker Christopher Cat, the Kit-Cat Club evolved into a club with a cast of prominent members of the cultural, political and social circles of the time. The origins of the club were literary, with Tonson regularly feeding aspiring authors at Cat's pub in return for the promise of a first publication option on their works. Over time this evolved into the Kit-Cat Club, a pioneer in mixing politics, culture and professional interests in one club, such areas having previously been kept separate in organisations that served but the one niche. The combination of the rich and politically powerful with artists and authors in search of patronage was an effective one and, in contrast to the highly stratified nature of society at the time, the club was a meritocratic forum, founded and hosted by non-aristocrats. However, its place in



history has suffered somewhat because, as G. M. Trevelyan put it, 'All the good talk over the pies and wine, Congreve's wit, Wharton's fascinating impudence, and Addison's quiet humour, is lost forever without record. The Kit-Cat Club had no Boswell.'

This lengthy work – over 500 pages including index, along with a pointer to further information online – seeks to remedy this and concentrates primarily on five men from amongst the fifty-odd members: Joseph Addison, William Congreve, Richard Steele, Jacob Tonson and John Vanbrugh.

In politics, the club brought together a group of influential players who pursued an ultra-Whig course; whilst in poetry, theatre and music the club helped to shift authority from the Court both through its patronage role for performers and artists and also through its role in setting trends in fashion and manners. The club's role in Whig politics was reinforced by the Tory–Whig 'paper wars', with the club's marshalling of writers and patronage an important weapon in these propaganda exchanges. Government posts and sinecures were deployed to support club members as part of a deliberate Whig policy to create a wider sympathetic climate of opinion. They aided supportive writers and encouraged complimentary cultural trends, including toleration, at a time when political disputes often featured questions of nationality or religion.

The presence on the throne of a Dutch King – William III – also spurred the club's members to sketch out a strengthening of English identity. Their choice of food – pies – was English rather than Continental cuisine, and its members looked to develop a strong English strand in the arts. The literary magazine was born from the club's membership, with *The Tatler* and then *The Spectator* appearing. The latter, in particular, championed English culture in the form of Shakespeare, Milton and Spenser. Not all their moves succeeded (an attempt to rebuff Italian opera with a new form of English opera did not take off) but sufficient were successful to help shape a new English sense of culture, including manners and styles of speaking which brought different parts of the social spectrum together rather than driving them apart.

The turn of the century saw an unusually high number of elections and, in a period long before the development of party headquarters, the Kit-Cat Club often acted as an informal organising point for Whigs, helping to coordinate several key individuals who sought to exercise electoral influence. However, just as electoral needs helped create a role for the club, so the later reduction in electoral pressure as a result of the passage of the Septennial Act (which moved elections to a nominal seven-year cycle) and the dominance of the Whigs under Walpole reduced the call for the club's political role and helped explain its decline in the second and third decades of the eighteenth century. Although Tonson's death in 1736 marks a formal end to the club's life, the changed political circumstances and the deaths of other key initial members had long since taken the edge off its role.

The Kit-Cat Club certainly brought together influential people who played a major role in shaping their age, including Robert Walpole and a clutch of peers and MPs. Nine Kit-Cat members served on the 1708 commission which drew up plans for the union between England and Scotland. Three of the four members of the Whig Junto were Kit-Cat members. In 1709 a Kit-Cat held every senior post in Ireland's colonial administration save one. For all but nine years between 1714 and 1762 the prime minister was a Kit-Cat Club member (and eight of those years had the brother of a Kit-Cat member in the office). And so on.

However, whilst such activities are well documented in this book, less clear is how important the club itself was. It may have brought influential people together, but were they any the more influential for the club's existence? Had it not existed, would the cast of people or their influence have been significantly different? Many of the club's members were boyhood friends after all, and it is unlikely that the absence of the Kit-Cat Club would have resulted in them not continuing to know and communicate with each other via other means. As a forum for bringing men together to eat and drink (for the Kit-Cat club was an exclusively male enterprise), fostering personal relations, spreading news and offering opportunities, the club provided the networking benefits that other clubs – and indeed particular schools and universities – have provided at other times. The Kit-Cat Club had a stellar cast that makes its story an interesting and lively one, but the book does not make the case that it had any special influence beyond that provided by numerous other networking opportunities.

What the book does unquestionably do, though, is provide detailed and enjoyable portraits of some of the individuals and activities at the centre of political and cultural life at the time. Detailed research is presented through a vivid account as the people and their times are brought to life.

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