

which new members of the party elite were recruited.

One of the most interesting sections reports on Egan's research into the views and attitudes of the party's activists during that period. Issues that he examined included why they joined the Liberal Party, family and religious background, ideological factors and political opinions. Many of those interviewed were still active in the Liberal Party when I first became involved in the early 1980s and there is a real sense of the continuity of the party in this section.

The local government part is also one of the highlights. Although Egan admits that the data is incomplete, he makes an attempt to analyse the changing numbers of Liberal councillors during the period, including their regional distribution. This shows that, during the 1940s and 1950s, the party's local government heartland was in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Indeed, by 1956, over two-thirds of Liberal borough councillors in England came from Lancashire, Cheshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. From 1956 to 1963, however, the number of Liberal borough councillors from south-east England exploded from eight in 1956 to 277 in 1963, presaging a more significant shift in the party's geographical base in later decades. Furthermore, after 1956 there were significant declines in representation in such former local government strongholds as Rochdale, Halifax and Huddersfield. Egan selects a number of case studies to look at in more detail, including Rugby, Southend and Liverpool. Rugby, in particular, is highlighted as one of the birthplaces of community politics, with innovations such as grumble sheets and regular report-back newsletters, but other pioneers such as Cyril Carr in Church Ward, Liverpool, and the Liberal group in Greenock near Glasgow are also looked at in detail.

Coming into Focus is a valuable contribution to the limited amount of literature on the Liberal Party in the immediate post-war years. It provides a wealth of detailed information about the party's activists in that period based on some excellent research. The conclusion is that many of the changes and developments in the Liberal Party in the late 1950s and early

The content of Dr Egan's book makes it essential reading for any academic study of the Liberal Party during this crucial period of survival and the first, Orpington, period of revival.

1960s were taking place without any significant input by the party's MPs or parliamentary leadership. Indeed, Egan shows that there was no real connection between them, arguing effectively that Grimond and Bonham-Carter did not show any greater interest than Clement Davies had in the local Liberal associations or Liberal councillors elected in the towns of Britain. To a substantial extent, there were two parallel Liberal revivals in this period – one in local government, focused on the south-east of England; the other in parliament, the media and academia,

revolving around the personality of Grimond. Despite the rather pedestrian style, the content of Dr Egan's book makes it essential reading for any academic study of the Liberal Party during this crucial period of survival and the first, Orpington, period of revival.

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The land question explored

Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman (eds.), *The Land Question in Britain, 1750–1950* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

THIS IMPRESSIVE collection of essays, full of highly original material, certainly fills a distinct gap in our historiography. The ownership of the land and the use made of it was a political hot potato in all four nations of the British Isles from the mid-eighteenth century almost through to the mid-twentieth. According to many radical Liberal politicians, the very concept of 'landlordism' was in itself full of attendant evils, an idea perpetuated by many socialists thereafter. Conversely, the landlord class and the concept of political landlordism were defended by political Conservatives.

Curiously, comparatively little attention has been paid to 'the land question' by modern historians. The one exception, Roy Douglas's *Land, People & Politics: a history of the land question in the United Kingdom, 1878–1952* (London: Allison and Busby, 1976), though still useful and readable, is inevitably by now somewhat dated.

This collection of essays is basically the published proceedings of a conference convened at the University of Hertfordshire back in 2005 and organised by the book's editors, Professor Matthew Cragoe (who has recently migrated

from Hertfordshire to take up the position of Professor of Modern British History at the University of Sussex), and Dr Paul Readman, presently senior lecturer in modern British history at King's College, London. All the contributors are distinguished scholars, most holding senior university posts, many considered expert historians in this field of study. The individual essays are arranged strictly chronologically within the volume.

In the opening chapter, Ian Waites uses mainly the evidence of landscape paintings (supported by interesting images) and contemporary literature to examine the widespread impact of the enclosure movement upon the common field landscape from about 1770 to the mid-nineteenth century. His conclusion (pp. 32–33) is that the effects of enclosure were reinforced by the arrival of the railway and modernity in general by the mid-nineteenth century. Kathryn Beresford then discusses the role of the 'yeoman' during the early nineteenth century, a period of far-reaching social structural change throughout rural England. Her chapter examines how this distinctive yeoman class 'formed a crucial element in the idealisation of the

towards land value taxation, land nationalisation, and the centralised planning of agriculture. The cogent analysis ranges from the age of Keir Hardie to that of Hugh Gaitskell. Finally, in a section entitled 'Epilogue', another acknowledged expert in this area, F. M. L. Thompson, turns his sights on 'the strange death' of the land question in England after World War I when the issues previously considered significant became 'politically irrelevant and electorally

ineffective', and closely bound up with the decline of the Liberal Party (p. 260). Subsequently, during the inter-war period, the impact of successive financial and economic crises, mass unemployment and social deprivation all combined to dwarf the importance of the land question.

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Dissent over the airwaves

Adrian Johns, *Death of a Pirate: British Radio and the Making of the Information Age* (W. W. Norton & Co., 2010).

Reviewed by William Wallace

STUDENTS OF Liberal history will not turn unprompted to this wonderfully entertaining book, written by a British-born professor of history at the University of Chicago. Yet it provides a fascinating insight into British political and intellectual culture between the 1930s and 1960s, and into the changing perspectives of Liberals and Social Democrats in the debate over the government monopoly over broadcasting and the control of culture and information that this monopoly implied. This is intellectual history from an unusual angle, with Beveridge and Hayek appearing on opposite sides. But the central character is a man who was at the same time a vice-president of the Liberal Party and the founder of the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA): Oliver Smedley. Walk-on parts in the story include S. W. Alexander, Screaming Lord Sutch, the young Jeremy Thorpe, Richard Hoggart, Tony Blackburn (who started as a DJ on a pirate radio station in which Smedley had an indirect interest), and the Kray twins. But Smedley – whom older Liberals may remember as one of the leading protagonists in the chaotic 1958 Assembly – is the central figure.

The book opens with the incident in June 1966 that catapulted the struggle over pirate radio onto the front pages, and galvanised the

government into acting to control it. Smedley shot one of his collaborators in pirate radio, at close range, when he stormed uninvited into Smedley's home. They were in dispute over the ownership of a radio station set up in an abandoned World War II fort in the Thames estuary. Smedley was charged with manslaughter, but after the court had heard about the extra-legal activities of pirate radio and the threats that had accompanied competition for access to transmitters and advertisers – and the popular press had splashed the story across its pages – he was acquitted. The Labour government, which had until then hesitated to tackle the pirates who were catering to popular tastes that the BBC considered beneath its mission to improve and educate, responded by legislating to control offshore radio, but also by pressing the BBC to pay more attention to what young people wanted to hear. Radio One was launched in September 1967. The majority of its DJs – including Tony Blackburn, John Peel, Kenny Everett and Mike Raven (who was Smedley's cousin) – had started out broadcasting pop music from pirate stations. Although offshore radio was now outlawed, popular culture had successfully invaded official culture; the intellectual battle had been won.

Liberal historians will be most interested in chapters 2–4, which

trace the history of the BBC – which became the model for the 'public corporation', the national monopoly promoting the public interest – and the struggle within the postwar Liberal Party concerning resistance to the extension of state power over the economy, welfare, information and culture. Keynes, as well as Beveridge, was a supporter of the public corporation, and of the use of public institutions to educate and improve popular taste. Hayek, Arnold Plant, Lionel Robbins, Karl Popper, and other opponents of Beveridge within the London School of Economics, saw these as similar to the state corporations of Fascism, building a 'servile state'. The moral certainty of the BBC, which in the late 1930s offered only religious programmes and classical music on Sundays, was authoritarian; it forced independently minded people who owned good radio receivers to tune into Radio Luxemburg for entertainment.

The post-1945 Liberal Party was a party of dissenters and libertarians, opposed to state control. Smedley, a successful businessman with an impressive war record, threw himself into party activity: twice a parliamentary candidate, on the executive from 1953, a

