

Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



Liberal PMs in retirement

Kevin Theakston

The afterlives of former Liberal prime ministers

Constance Rynder

Sheelagh Murnaghan and the Ulster Liberal Party

Martin Horwood MP

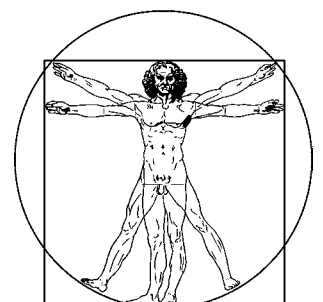
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Welsh women Liberals It wasn't only Lloyd George's daughters



LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS

SUMMER 2011

Welsh Liberal History lecture and tribute to Lord Livsey at the Hay Festival

The Hay literature festival, a favourite haunt of Liberal Democrats, this year featured a recollection of Welsh Liberal history. On 26 May, Professor Russell Deacon, the Welsh Liberal historian, gave a 45-minute talk based on an exploration of the development of Wales' oldest political party, some of its heroes and villains and how its more prominent members have shaped Welsh and British history. There was also a special reference made to the late Hay Festival Vice-President and President of the European Movement in Wales, Lord Richard Livsey of Talgarth.

Professor Deacon took the audience through the period from the Welsh party's foundation with the creation of the Welsh National Council on 7 October 1887 up until the recent Welsh Assembly election. The audience learnt how different coalitions and pacts altered the party's name and identity. They discovered the reason why Liberals created a North and a South Wales federation and why a Mid Wales federation never developed.

The Welsh Liberal Party has produced plenty of national heroes and villains over its existence, and many of these

were touched upon: the Lloyd Georges, David, Gwilym and Megan, Clement Davies, Reginald McKenna, Sir Alfred Mond, Tom Ellis, Thomas Waterhouse, Geraint Howells, Emlyn Hooson, Geraint (G.W) Madoc Jones, Roger Roberts, Martin Thomas, Winston Roddick, Mary Murphy (Thomas) and Lord Ogmore.

The talk ended with a tribute to the late Richard Livsey (Baron Livsey of Talgarth). His background in Welsh and then Scottish politics, and the way that he rebuilt the Brecon & Radnor constituency party in the 1980s was explored. His

1985 historic by-election win was the first post-war Welsh Liberal gain and the only one ever in a by-election. Roger Williams MP gave a summary of Lord Livsey's attributes as a leader of the Welsh party, a constituency MP, promoter of devolution, political organiser and finally as a friend and mentor to so many Liberal Democrats. The talk was also attended by Lord Livsey's widow, Rene.

The talk was based on Professor Deacon's forthcoming book: *The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties in Wales* (Welsh Academic Press).

Richard Wainwright, the Liberals and Liberal Democrats: Unfinished Business

by Matt Cole, published by Manchester University Press; foreword by Vince Cable MP

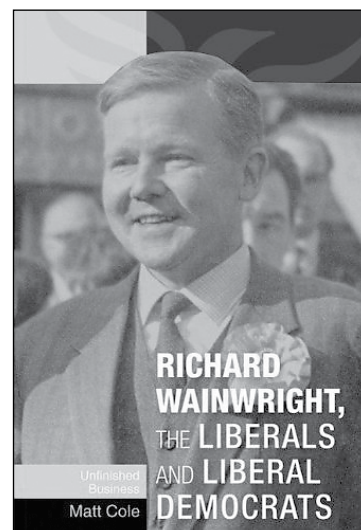
A study of Liberal Party history through the life of one of its parliamentarians, organisers and benefactors during its darkest days, this book examines how and why the Liberals and Liberalism survived from the 1930s to the 21st century. It sees, through Wainwright's experience, the revival of the 1960s, the beginning and end of the Thorpe leadership, the Lib-Lab Pact, the Alliance and the merger; and it highlights the role of Liberal activism and Liberal principles in the party's fate.

'Compulsory reading for the next generation of Liberal Democrat Leaders.'
Simon Hughes MP

'Engrossing ... reading Cole's book, I found Wainwright's life admirable and moving.'
Daniel Finkelstein, The Times

'This wonderful biography captures the essence of a remarkable man and his brand of radical liberalism.'
Baroness Helena Kennedy

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Liberal Democrat History Group

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Sooner or later, every prime minister becomes a former prime minister, and the 'club' of former prime ministers is a small and exclusive one. However, over the years, few of its members have left Number 10 Downing Street as happy, contented or fulfilled people, or at a time and in a manner of their own choosing. There has been (and there still is) no fixed or established role in public and political life for former prime ministers. What they do after they leave office depends very much on personal choices and on circumstances, including the reaction and attitudes of still-active politicians and of political parties to the former political and governmental leader. There is little in the way of a common pattern.

Kevin Theakston looks at the afterlives of five former Liberal prime ministers: Russell, Gladstone, Rosebery, Asquith and Lloyd George.

THE AFTERLIVES OF LIBERAL PRIME MINISTERS



LIVES OF FORMER PRIME MINISTERS

AT ONE point, in the 1920s, there were, remarkably, three former Liberal prime ministers alive at the same time: Lord Rosebery, Asquith and Lloyd George. Before that, Earl Russell and Gladstone were Victorian members of the former Liberal prime ministers' 'club'. Two other Liberal premiers – Palmerston, who died in office (the last prime minister to do so) in 1865 aged eighty-one, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who died aged seventy-one in 1908, only seventeen days after resigning office (the shortest post-premiership of any prime minister) – fall outside the scope of this article. Campbell-Bannerman is sometimes described as the last prime minister to die 'on the premises' but he is in fact the only prime minister (or, more strictly, former prime minister) actually to die in Number 10 itself. (None of the seven other British premiers who died while still holding that post died in Downing Street, but at other locations.) Although no longer in office, it was simply out of the question for the dying Campbell-Bannerman to be moved from Number 10 after Asquith took over.

Both Russell and Gladstone had had previous departures from the topmost office before their final curtain calls in 1866 and 1894 respectively. Russell had resigned as prime minister in 1852 and then played a sometimes awkward role in front-bench politics, serving in the Cabinets of two other prime ministers

(Aberdeen and Palmerston), before resuming the premiership in 1865. Gladstone had withdrawn from the party leadership after the Liberals' electoral defeat in 1874 and for a while disengaged from politics (although he did not give up his parliamentary seat). However, he then resumed the leadership, becoming prime minister again in 1880, and during his next period out of office, after 1886, he was clearly Leader of the Opposition. This article focuses only on former prime ministers after their final departures from the premiership. Leaving the premiership need not mean relinquishing the party leadership. Gladstone gave up both roles in 1894, but Russell continued as Liberal leader in the Lords at any rate for two years (1866–68), Rosebery remained party leader for nearly sixteen months after quitting as prime minister, and Asquith was Liberal leader for almost ten years after losing office. In contrast, Lloyd George only became party leader four years after leaving the premiership.

Leaving Number 10

Two of the Liberal premiers left office as old men – Russell was seventy-four when he resigned in 1866 and Gladstone was eighty-four when he finally quit the scene in 1894. Russell then lived for another twelve years before dying in 1878, while Gladstone lived for only four years in retirement, dying in 1898. In contrast, the other three left at ages when they did not feel that

they were retiring but, rather, still believed they had, and were perceived to have, political futures.

When Rosebery resigned in 1895 he was only forty-eight years old – the youngest former prime minister there had been for sixty-seven years, and there has not been a younger former prime minister since then. He lived nearly another thirty-four years before he died in 1929; no one since Rosebery has had so long a post-premiership. Certainly for the first decade of that post-premiership, there was a widespread expectation that he would soon be back, heading another government or otherwise in high national office. He remained in that period a celebrity figure and a major presence on the political stage. But his star then pretty soon faded, he dropped out of public life and he became a sad, isolated and reclusive figure many years before he died.

Asquith was sixty-four when he lost power in 1916, but he did not want to give up office and resented being forced out in a 'palace coup'. He did not take a peerage and declined the Garter, thus signalling that he did not intend to retire but to stay in frontline politics. He lived for another twelve years, dying in 1928, but his glory days were all behind him.

Lloyd George was only fifty-nine years old, world famous, and still at the height of his powers when he was forced out in 1922. But no one believed that he would be out forever. The King, political allies and enemies, advisers, friends

At one point, in the 1920s, there were, remarkably, three former Liberal prime ministers alive at the same time: Lord Rosebery, Asquith and Lloyd George.

and family members, and Lloyd George himself – all expected that he would return to government, and fairly soon at that. No one suspected that, in the twenty-two more years he would live, he would never be in power again.

We are now familiar with the televised exit from Number 10 of the resigning or defeated prime minister – the brief farewell remarks, the posing in front of the cameras with spouse and family, and the brave waves before the official car speeds them out of Downing Street for the last time. Lloyd George's fall and exit from power in October 1922 was actually the first to be captured on film in this way. A short silent newsreel film shows Conservative MPs spilling out of the Carlton Club meeting after the dramatic party debate and vote there which triggered his resignation, stilted footage of other top politicians of the time and the King, and – with the caption 'I am no longer Prime Minister' – a top-hatted and smartly dressed Lloyd George, with his wife and daughter, stepping out of Number 10, being saluted by the police constable on duty, and pausing for the cameramen. The film ends with a caption 'In the Wilderness but with one faithful friend at least', showing a relaxed former prime minister, in the country with his dog, about to go for a walk.¹

Some former prime ministers found the practicalities of adjusting to life out of Number 10 easier than others. The Asquiths had nowhere to live, as their old house had been let out and a friend had to put them up for a while until they could move back into it. Asquith himself sometimes just stagnated and slumped into an easy life with his books, his family and the social round, playing bridge, enjoying his young lady friends and drinking too much. Money was tight with the loss of the prime-ministerial salary, as they had no savings but still maintained a substantial domestic staff and a free-spending lifestyle. Asquith had left office much poorer than when he entered it and going back to the Bar was not an option. Eventually, his financial position became so bad that some of his friends organised an appeal through *The Times* for a fund to pay his debts and give him a private pension for the last few years of his

Unlike Asquith, Lloyd George left office substantially wealthier than when he entered it.

life. He left £9,345 on his death (about £300,000 in today's money).

As a younger son, Russell had spent most of his life at the financially hard-pressed end of the upper classes, admitting at one point that he had never been in debt before becoming prime minister, feeling the loss of a ministerial salary when out of office, and dependent on an annuity from his brother (the Duke of Bedford). He was unable to afford a country house of his own befitting his prime-ministerial status, although his position was helped by inheriting an estate in Ireland (in 1861) and by Queen Victoria giving the Russells a house, Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park, for their lifetime use. His grandson, the philosopher Bertrand Russell, lived there as a child and recalled the ex-prime minister as an old man: warm, kindly and affectionate in his family circle, being wheeled around his overgrown garden in a bath chair and sitting in his room reading Hansard.²

Most of Gladstone's retirement years were spent at Hawarden, interspersed with a number of trips in the winter months to Cannes in the South of France (wealthy friends picking up the bills and providing accommodation). By any reckoning Gladstone was a rich man. The family's Hawarden estate (which was not actually formally owned by Gladstone himself) amounted to 7,000 acres and produced an income of £10,000–12,000 a year. He effectively gave away most of his own money in the 1890s, however, settling large capital sums on his children and giving £40,000 and 32,000 of his own books to set up St Deiniol's Library at Hawarden. (Many of the books were moved to the new building in a wheelbarrow, with Gladstone himself helping out.) When he died his will was proved at £57,000 (around £3 million today).

Rosebery, who was enormously wealthy, can scarcely have noticed the loss of his prime-ministerial salary. He had inherited his titles, estates and an income of £30,000 a year when only twenty-one, going on to marry a Rothschild heiress, which increased his total income to £140,000 (something like £9 million a year today). He had grand houses at Mentmore, Berkeley Square, Dalmeny in Scotland, The Durdans at Epsom, a villa at Naples,

thousands of acres, a yacht. At death he left £1.5 million (equivalent to over £50 million today), a sum that did not include extensive properties made over to his heir several years before. He poured money into horseracing, winning the Derby twice during his short premiership and then for a third time in 1905. He once joked that 'politics and racing were inconsistent which seemed a good reason to give up politics.'

Unlike Asquith, Lloyd George left office substantially wealthier than when he entered it. He turned down offers of City directorships but received an annuity of £2,000 a year from the American tycoon Andrew Carnegie and made serious money from his writing and journalism, being paid one pound per word by the Hearst Press of America for thousand-word articles on contemporary political and international issues which were given world syndication. He has been described as the highest paid political journalist of his time, and he once admitted that in his first four years out of office his journalistic income was much greater than the aggregate of his ministerial salaries during his seventeen years in government. It cannot be said that Lloyd George was personally corrupt but he did realise and exploit the fact that, as an ex-prime minister, he was 'a valuable commercial property', as Kenneth O. Morgan put it. In his first year out of office (1923) he was able to cash in on his reputation as a world statesman in a triumphant five-week lecture tour of America. He also controlled substantial political funds of his own (totalling several million pounds) – controversially built up from honours sales and the purchase and then profitable resale of the *Daily Chronicle* newspaper – used for organisation, campaigning and propaganda, and to support his energetic ideamongering (funding teams of advisers and experts).³

Putting pen to paper

All of these former Liberal premiers put pen to paper after they left Number 10. For a practising politician, Russell wrote a lot over his lifetime, including histories, biographies, and constitutional studies and, as a young man, a novel and a play. However, his memoirs, published in 1875, described as

'disappointing' and 'sour' by one biographer, were written after his memory had begun to fail.⁴

Gladstone needed a cataract operation in May 1894, which was not wholly successful and left him virtually half-blind, so that reading and writing became more difficult. But he remained intellectually active in retirement, still spending many hours at his desk in the 'Temple of Peace', his library at Hawarden. He published in these years his translation of Horace's Odes, some long journal articles on theology, and two substantial volumes on the works of Bishop Butler. He had received various offers for his autobiography and Andrew Carnegie had offered in 1887 the huge sum of £100,000 (roughly £5 million today), but Gladstone signed no contract. He did write some autobiographical fragments and leave papers on some particular episodes but never got down to planning or working on a proper volume of memoirs.

Rosebery was a noted writer and, having published a biography of William Pitt in 1891, he went on to write studies of *Napoleon: The Last Phase* (1900), *Lord Randolph Churchill* (1906) and *Chatham: his Early Life and Connections* (1910), together with many shorter essays and addresses, after leaving office. Professional historians tended to be sniffy, but the books sold well enough. He turned down invitations to write the biographies of Gladstone, Disraeli and Lord Kitchener, however, and refused ever to write his own memoirs or an autobiography.

Needing the money, Asquith wrote several impersonal and unrevealing volumes of reminiscences and memoirs, which did not sell as well as Margot Asquith's more colourful and indiscreet autobiography and other writings. The problem was that 'he had no desire to tell the world what really happened', as Roy Jenkins noted, 'and he was insufficiently interested in himself.'⁵

Lloyd George wrote six fat volumes (totalling one million words) of *War Memoirs*, published between 1933 and 1936, followed by two further volumes, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, in 1938. Pugnacious, controversial and partisan, they sold well. In them he took the chance to vindicate his record, settle personal scores and refigure his battles

with the top brass. It was a Lloyd George-centric account of the war, much like Churchill's later World War II memoirs. Margot Asquith reported with delight her mother's reaction: 'I always knew that [Lloyd George] had won the war but until I read his *Memoirs* I did not know that he had won it single-handed.'⁶ Later on, he mused about possibly writing a character study of Gladstone or a book on Welsh preachers (he was a connoisseur of sermons) or even a novel, and given his taste for trashy 'shilling-shockers', one wonders just what sort of novel he might have produced!

Honours

Gladstone always wanted to go down in history as plain 'Mr Gladstone'. He had refused a knighthood in 1859 and offers of a peerage in 1874 and 1885. He was not an egalitarian and had great respect for rank and the social hierarchy, but he always saw himself as a commoner. In 1894 Queen Victoria curtly said that she did not offer her retiring prime minister a peerage only because she knew he would (again) refuse it. He also encouraged his wife to decline the offer of a separate peerage in her own right.

Rosebery had inherited his earldom, while Russell had accepted his in 1861, and both had been created Knights of the Garter while still active in politics. Rosebery added the Order of the Thistle when he resigned as prime minister, Russell getting a GCMG. Asquith finally accepted an earldom and the KG in 1925.

Lloyd George had long held the Lords in contempt and once praised Gladstone, Joe Chamberlain, Bright and Cobden for never making the 'mistake' of taking an honour. He remained an MP until near the end and became Father of the House. But, fading rapidly and seriously ill in 1944 it was obvious that he was in no fit state to fight another general election, and in any case his Caernarvon seat was no longer looking so safe. Hints were discreetly dropped with Churchill and, after some last minute agonising over the decision, Lloyd George accepted a hereditary peerage, the honour being announced to widespread amazement (and, in some quarters, dismay) on 1 January 1945. The new Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor died

before he could take his seat in the House of Lords, however.

Russell: the ex-prime minister as nuisance

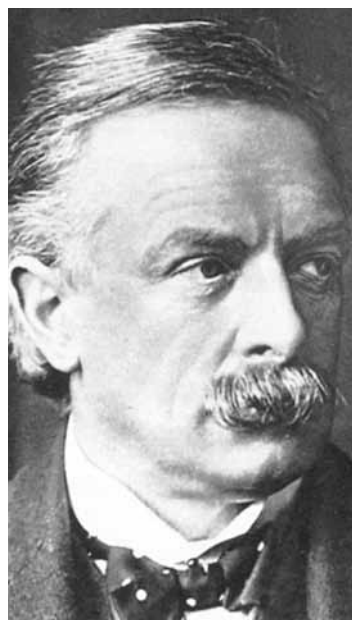
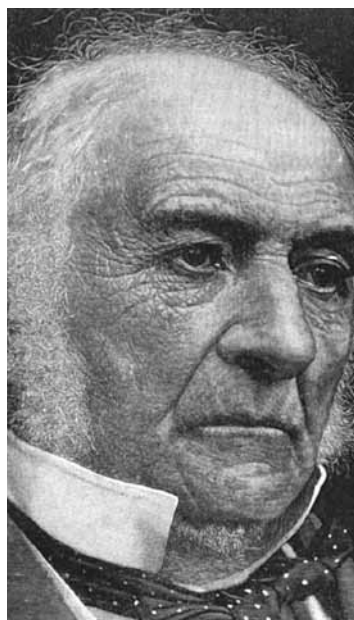
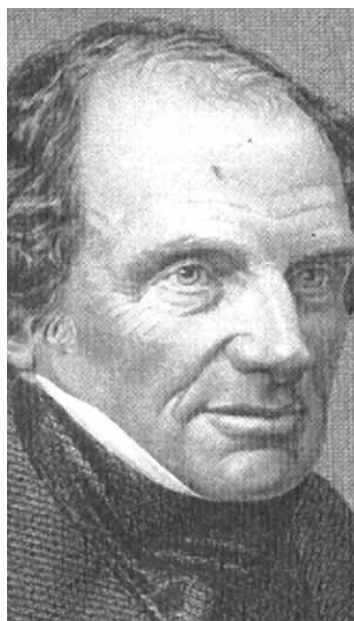
Russell was not ready to retire completely in the late-1860s and remained politically active in the Lords, attacking the policies of the Conservative government that succeeded his own and opposing Derby's reform bill. Looking ahead, he tried in 1867–68 to set out an agenda for the next Liberal government, publishing pamphlets proposing Irish church reform and introducing resolutions in the House of Lords calling for a minister of education and improved education for the working classes. He told Gladstone that he had pretty well made up his mind not to take office again, but there were rumours that he wanted to be Foreign Secretary again if the Liberals got back in. Knowing how troublesome the independent-minded Russell could be, Gladstone thought that it might be safer to have him on the inside and when he became prime minister in 1868 offered Russell a seat in the Cabinet without portfolio, but Russell declined (and later complained about what he had been offered).

He supported some of the Liberal government's policies: the Education Act, the Irish Land Act. He introduced a proposal for life peers that Gladstone backed. But he was often unhelpful and a nuisance, criticising the government or quibbling over the details of its measures in the Lords or the press. He opposed the introduction of the secret ballot in elections, for instance, and, though he favoured the abolition of the purchase of commissions in the army, he opposed the way in which the government went about it. He was often critical of Gladstone's foreign policy, venting his dislike of his successor's attitude towards the colonies, the empire and the armed forces.

Gladstone handled the erratic and crotchety ex-prime minister as tactfully as he could, writing to keep him in touch, giving Russell credit for his achievements and arguing that he was building on them, and claiming that he looked upon him as his 'oracle and master' on constitutional questions. But he complained to Lord Granville about Russell's 'petulant acts' and about him 'leading the mad'.⁷

Lloyd George had long held the Lords in contempt and once praised Gladstone, Joe Chamberlain, Bright and Cobden for never making the 'mistake' of taking an honour.

THE AFTERLIVES OF FORMER LIBERAL PRIME MINISTERS



Left: Lord John Russell (Prime Minister 1846–52, 1865–66); William Gladstone (Prime Minister 1868–74, 1880–85, 1886, 1892–94); Lord Rosebery (Prime Minister 1894–95)

Above: H. H. Asquith (Prime Minister 1908–16); David Lloyd George (Prime Minister 1916–22)

Gladstone: overshadowing your successor

Gladstone was an octogenarian during his last premiership: the oldest man ever to be appointed prime minister. He always felt that Wellington and Palmerston had made the mistake of clinging to office for too long, and he ultimately did so as well, most of his colleagues in the end being frankly glad to see the back of him. The Queen could scarcely conceal her glee at his departure. He had expected and wanted to be formally asked about his successor – and would have nominated Lord Spencer (the top Liberal in the Cabinet most committed to Home Rule). But the Queen did not consult him and sent instead for Lord Rosebery – a choice that dismayed him (he would have preferred even Harcourt over Rosebery).

After Gladstone's resignation, Rosebery's Liberal government lasted only fifteen months. The Grand Old Man did not think much of its performance or the new leadership. He disliked the way in which Rosebery abandoned Home Rule. He regretted having brought the 'difficult' Rosebery to the front and making him Foreign Secretary, where they had had policy clashes. 'I cannot understand him – he remains a closed book to me', Gladstone complained after resigning. 'He never consults me.' Later, in 1896, Gladstone said that 'he gave Rosebery up altogether as a competent man for Liberal leadership – for lack of judgment and even sense.'⁸

Nor did his successor's regime please him in other ways. He disliked Harcourt's budget and the new graduated death duties on land. He had reservations about aspects of the Welsh Church Disestablishment legislation, and ministers feared that he might intervene to speak out against it at the committee stage (it fell with the government).

The problem was that Gladstone had become out of date and out of touch with the party and the new ideas coming into it. If he had stood aside earlier, the Liberals may have been better able to make the transition to a new and effective leadership and to adapt themselves to new social forces and political challenges.

Gladstone liked to refer to his 'political death' in 1894. But, as Feuchtwanger noted, his 'authority was ... still so great that any

move on his part caused more than a ripple in the muddied waters of Liberal politics. Nobody could be quite certain that he might not sweep back into the arena as he had done before.⁹ Echoing the events of twenty years earlier, it was his controversial intervention on the issue of the Armenian massacres which brought him back briefly onto the political stage, meeting deputations, writing to the press and making his last great public speeches. He called for strong action and argued that the Turkish empire should be wiped off the map. The more direct impact, however, was on his successor and on the infighting within his own unhappy party. Shortly after Gladstone's September 1896 speech in Liverpool, Rosebery – ill at ease and miserable under his great predecessor's shadow, and looking for a way out – resigned as party leader.

Rosebery: throwing away chances

Thought still to have a brilliant future before him when he ceased to be prime minister, Rosebery threw it away by his posturing, grandstanding, disloyalty and disengagement from the disciplines of organised party politics.

When he left office in 1895, Rosebery had been prime minister for just one year and 109 days. 'There are two supreme pleasures in life', he later wrote. 'One is ideal, the other real. The ideal is when a man receives the seals of office from his Sovereign. The real pleasure comes when he hands them back.' Yet his defeat and failure as a prime minister had been a shattering experience and Rosebery was haunted by a sense of failure, for the rest of his life brooding on the traumas of 1894–95 and often declaring that he wished he had never accepted office. When chances of a return occurred in the years ahead, part of him always recoiled from them.

Disillusioned and disenchanted with politics, Rosebery had wanted to quit the Liberal leadership and retire from politics, for a time at any rate, immediately after the disastrous 1895 general election. But he continued nominally to head the party, while not giving it any real lead, for more than a year after the defeat until Gladstone provided him with the excuse he had been looking for to jump ship. He wanted, he

Rosebery's dramatic speech at Bodmin in November 1905, denouncing Home Rule and insisting that he could not 'serve under that banner', was an act of political self-destruction, finally cutting him off from his erstwhile supporters and ensuring that there would be no place for him in the Liberal government that Campbell-Bannerman would soon form.

told friends, to free himself from the 'Gladstonian chains' that he had been bound by ever since he had entered politics and was through with the thankless role of acting as 'Mr G's political executor'. Rosebery believed that the Liberal Party needed to change, developing a new programme and widening its electoral appeal, but he did not want to get involved in the hand-to-hand political fighting necessary to effect that change. He seemed almost to want the party to change and then by acclamation to welcome him back as leader on his own terms.¹⁰

Rosebery's future was the subject of considerable speculation. He was still relatively young, had experience of the highest offices, and had real political star quality. He sent out mixed and confusing signals, however, and his political intentions and plans seemed changeable, elusive and mysterious even to himself, let alone his often-bewildered supporters in the party and the public. By the time Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was elected leader in 1898, Rosebery was more popular than he had been as prime minister and many of his supporters regarded Campbell-Bannerman as a second-rate figure, a stopgap who would just keep the seat warm until their hero was ready to reclaim his rightful place.

In 1899 Rosebery was elected, at the top of the poll, to Epsom District Council. He was unanimously voted chairman but characteristically refused the post, though he was an active member of the council, scrupulously attending meetings through the three years he served. This was very worthy and indeed unique for a former prime minister, but not quite what those who wanted to see him back in political office had in mind. (He had, of course, earlier been chairman of the London County Council before becoming prime minister, in 1889–90 and 1892.)

The three or four years following the outbreak of the South African War in 1899 were the crucial period in which Rosebery might have returned to a position of national or party leadership. But he lost the chance, partly through his own doubts, hesitations and mistakes and partly because of the way the wider political situation developed and changed.

With the Liberal Party in argumentative disarray over the war,

Rosebery's ultimate aims were not always clear or consistent. He appeared at some times to be wanting to battle for the future of the party (the Liberal League being formed with him as president to press the Liberal Imperialist case against the anti-war 'Little Englanders' in the party). At other times he apparently wanted to provoke a formal split in the party. His supporters certainly schemed to undermine or displace Campbell-Bannerman as leader. And Rosebery also appeared to hanker after a political realignment and a non-party or above-party political and personal future (latching on to the fashionable 'national efficiency' ideas).

During the infighting in the Liberal Party at this time, Rosebery and his acolytes underestimated Campbell-Bannerman (a tougher and shrewder figure than his detractors thought) and overestimated their own strength and support. Rosebery certainly showed his mastery of publicity and ability to command attention and headlines. But Campbell-Bannerman carried with him the centre and the bulk of the party. Any prospect of either a Rosebery-led 'national' coalition or a Roseberyite takeover of the Liberal Party faded as two-party partisanship revived with the ending of the Boer War and controversies over the 1902 Education Act, and were finally ended with Joe Chamberlain's launch of his protectionist crusade in 1903 and the Liberals uniting in defence of free trade. As events moved on, Rosebery was left stranded, his position weakened, looking increasingly marginalised. Behind the scenes, the King had apparently tried to persuade him in 1901 to come back and resume the Liberal leadership and in 1905 again appealed unsuccessfully to him to take office. But by 1904 it was becoming widely understood that the King would send for Campbell-Bannerman when the time came to change the government.

Rosebery's dramatic speech at Bodmin in November 1905, denouncing Home Rule and insisting that he could not 'serve under that banner', was an act of political self-destruction, finally cutting him off from his erstwhile supporters and ensuring that there would be no place for him in the Liberal government that Campbell-Bannerman would soon form. Once

Campbell-Bannerman became prime minister, appointed the leading Liberal Imperialists to senior positions and won a landslide majority, Rosebery was effectively politically finished.

He stayed on the political stage a few years longer, an increasingly isolated and irrelevant figure with virtually no personal followers, sitting on the crossbenches in the Lords, a purely negative critic of the Liberal government. It might have been better for his reputation if he had taken himself out of the way by accepting the post of ambassador to the United States pressed on him in November 1906 by Sir Edward Grey and the King, but he refused it. His alienation from the Liberals now became even more pronounced and his attitudes and views markedly Conservative.

Having opposed the introduction of old age pensions, Rosebery strongly attacked Lloyd George's 1909 'People's Budget' as 'tyrannical and socialistic' and heralding a 'social and political revolution', and he defended his fellow aristocratic landowners as a 'poor but honest class'. But when the crunch came, he declared that he would not vote against it, fearing that the Lords' actions in defeating the budget could imperil the very existence of the second chamber. Later, although he strongly opposed the Liberals' reform of the Lords powers, he further damaged his reputation by finally voting for the Parliament bill. He was now despised on both sides of the political divide, Liberals viewing him as a reactionary, Tories as a coward. After 1911 he never again entered the House of Lords.

At the age of sixty-four, Rosebery's political career was over. He no longer had the necessary standing, influence, following or appetite for office. 'If I were to join the battle', he told one confidant, 'I should find myself back again where I will not be.' He had come to hate and detest politics – 'this evil-smelling bog', as he called it, from which 'I was always trying to extricate myself'.¹¹

When Lloyd George became prime minister in 1916, in an effort to bolster his administration, he offered Rosebery the post of Lord Privy Seal – he would not have departmental duties but serve in a 'consultative capacity' – but he refused the job. It is not clear what Rosebery at this stage would have

'Asquith cuts no ice', protested his old ally Edward Grey. 'He is using the machine of a great political brain to re-arrange old ideas.'

brought to the government, other than the public appeal of his name.

In November 1917 tragedy struck when his younger son, Neil Primrose – who had been an MP and a promising junior minister – was killed in action while serving with the army in the Middle East. A year later, in November 1918, Rosebery was felled by a massive stroke that left him partially paralysed. For the last ten years of his life before he died in 1929, aged eighty-two, he was a largely forgotten figure, living a lonely and melancholy invalid existence. For all his glamour, gifts and brilliant early promise, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he had been a political failure: an unhappy and unsuccessful prime minister and then an unhappy and unsuccessful ex-prime minister.

Asquith: hanging on too long

Asquith remained leader of the Liberal Party after 1916 but found being the leading opposition figure in wartime an awkward, unwelcome and constraining position. Many of the senior Liberals had followed him rather than serve under Lloyd George, but he did not want to widen the rift in the party ranks and temperamentally was always basically a ministerialist and not a man for to-the-sword opposition, which he anyway felt would be inappropriate in wartime.

On a number of occasions Lloyd George tried to lure him back into government, despite some doubts about this in his close circle and Lloyd George's own sense that Asquith was 'sterile' when it came to policy ideas. Various posts were dangled in front of him – Foreign Secretary, Chancellor, Lord Chancellor (with a tempting £10,000 salary and a £5,000 pension) – but Asquith turned them all down. On the only occasion when Asquith did try to turn the heat up on Lloyd George during the war – when he led calls in 1918 for a select committee to be established to inquire into whether Lloyd George had mislead parliament about troop levels available to the generals on the western front – it backfired on him and underlined the party split.

The 1918 'khaki election' was a disaster for Asquith. He had little in the way of a positive programme to offer and largely ended up simply warning against giving Lloyd

George a 'blank cheque'. His heart was not in it and he expected to lose, but the outcome was worse than he had thought likely. The coalition swept the board while Asquith's Liberals won only twenty-eight seats, being overtaken by Labour, and Asquith lost his own seat. It might have been a good moment to quietly bow out. But with no obvious successor, Asquith chose to soldier on as Liberal leader although he was really in a sort of political limbo. In the first half of 1919 he received not one invitation to speak from any Liberal association in the country. Taking on the job that year of chairing a Royal Commission on Oxford and Cambridge universities was hardly the sort of assignment to bring him back to the centre of the political stage.

It was February 1920 before he returned to parliament via a by-election. But the odds were stacked against a great political come back. He was the leader of a small and unhappy parliamentary force. His own political position was ambiguous, as he was rightly seen as a Whiggish figure but was the leader of the more radical part of the divided Liberal Party. Fatally, he had no real fight left in him and dismayed followers were soon complaining that he gave no strong lead. Graham Stewart has put his finger on 'Asquith's inability to inject new thinking into Liberalism. He offered nothing to suggest he had adjusted to a changed environment, but nor would he step aside for someone who might carry forward the party into the post-war world.' 'Asquith cuts no ice', protested his old ally Edward Grey. 'He is using the machine of a great political brain to re-arrange old ideas.'¹²

Like a general fighting the wrong battle, Asquith took pleasure from the fact that in the 1922 general election his wing of the Liberal Party did slightly better than Lloyd George's, although more significant was that Labour's advance continued. In 1923 the two Liberal factions were brought together by Baldwin's move towards protectionism but the unity was superficial and half-hearted. Asquith remained formally party leader but Lloyd George controlled substantial independent funds and provided the real dynamism and ideas, and tensions and bitter mistrust continued. After the December 1923 election produced a hung

parliament, Asquith was the 'king-maker', rejecting the idea of a coalition and opting to put in a minority and inexperienced Labour government which he judged would not last long and the failure of which would hopefully benefit the Liberals. It was a major miscalculation, for when Labour fell from office in October 1924 and another general election was held, which the Conservatives won, the real casualties were the Liberals, who lost three-quarters of their seats. Asquith was again unhorsed, losing Paisley.

He moved to the Lords and remained overall party leader while Lloyd George led in the Commons. This was an unstable arrangement and an uneasy partnership that could never last for long, and things came to a head in May 1926 when they fell out over how to respond to the General Strike (Asquith backing the government). Asquith then had a stroke after which he resigned the leadership in October 1926. His post-premiership had been a painful and protracted anti-climax and political decline. 'He had stayed too long in an impossible situation', Jenkins concluded, his reasons for hanging on largely negative, and offering the declining Liberal Party little that was positive.¹³

Lloyd George in the wilderness

Certainly up to 1931 (and to a lesser extent after that), Lloyd George remained a critical player and at the very centre of British politics, and he was one of the most creative and exciting politicians of the period, brimming with ideas, plans and

schemes. Some of his impact was negative, in the sense that he was a bogeyman to his rival political leaders, haunting their minds and their political calculations as they manoeuvred to thwart him and keep him out. Much of the politics of the 1920s were a reaction against Lloyd George – his methods, record, policies and personality.

Ideas about new coalitions or alliances, dividing or breaking up the established parties, seemed never far from his thoughts. Options were kept open and feelers put out to left and right at various times, hoping to attract moderate Labour and progressive Conservatives, and he looked to exploit whatever opportunities came his way as the tectonic plates of the party system groaned and shifted, with five elections in nine years (1922–31) and two periods of minority Labour government (1924 and 1929–31). The underlying problem was that his political space was more and more squeezed as the Liberals lost out to Labour and the Conservatives and as two-party politics was restored. In 1924–29 and even more so after 1931, large government majorities effectively sidelined him. 'Ideas and experts were not enough', as Kenneth O. Morgan argued. 'He needed also supporters, organisation, a party base – above all, public trust. These were assets which Lloyd George, however fertile in ideas and initiatives, conspicuously lacked.'¹⁴

While the role of a 'permanent one-man opposition' played to his strengths and was perhaps the only one that circumstances really

permitted, it was ultimately a cul-de-sac. He thought that his free-wheeling independence was an asset, as John Campbell noted, but the absence of a strong party base actually left him isolated, cut off from the real road to power and, eventually, in the wilderness.¹⁵

Liberal reunion after 1923 was always rather cosmetic and Lloyd George's relations with Asquith were edgy and uneasy. Had Lloyd George won control of the Liberal Party sooner, he might have been better able to rescue its position and restore its fortunes. 'When Lloyd George came back to the party, ideas came back to the party', one Liberal politician said. What Lloyd George tried to offer in the 1920s was a non-socialist radical alternative, a politics of creative ideas, attractive to moderate and progressive opinion. But while headlines were captured, and the contrast with Baldwin's 'Safety First' and MacDonald's call for 'no monkeying' was marked, the electoral rewards (in 1929) were frustratingly scanty.

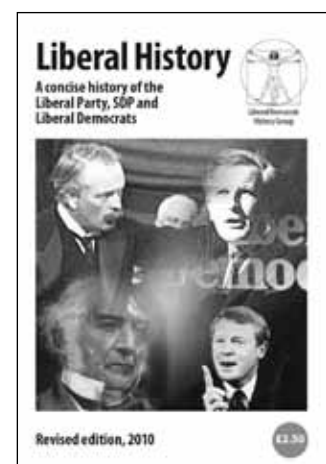
Lloyd George and the Liberals were really on a hiding to nothing in helping to prop up a minority Labour government after 1929 but getting little in return. Divisions within the Liberal Party were deepening while Lloyd George was casting about for some formula to escape from the tightening third-party squeeze that they were experiencing. He toyed fruitlessly again with the idea of a Centre Party, talking with mavericks like Mosley and Churchill and with dissident young Tories like Macmillan. In February 1931 George Lansbury,

Liberal History

300 years of party history in 24 pages

The Liberal Democrat History Group's pamphlet, *Liberal History: A concise history of the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats*, has been revised and updated to include the 2010 election and the formation of the coalition.

Liberal History is available to *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers for the special price of £2.00 (normal price £2.50) with free p&p. To order, please send a cheque for £2.00 (made out to 'Liberal Democrat History Group') to LDHG, 54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN.



on his own initiative, wrote to Lloyd George urging him to join the Labour Party, suggesting he could become its deputy leader. By July 1931 he was closer to regaining office and power than at any other time between 1922 and 1940. The embattled MacDonald, it is suggested, was almost on the brink of bringing Lloyd George and the Liberals into government, with secret talks going on and rumours that Lloyd George would become Leader of the House of Commons and either Chancellor or Foreign Secretary.

With cruel bad luck, however, Lloyd George was knocked out of action at one of the crucial moments in inter-war British politics, falling seriously ill and needing a prostate operation just as the Labour government collapsed in the great political-financial crisis of August 1931 and a 'National' government was formed. Other top Liberals (Samuel and Reading) joined the Cabinet and Lloyd George's son Gwilym became a junior minister. But he was against any lasting alliance between the Liberals and the Conservatives ('If I am to die, I would rather die fighting on the Left', he declared) and detected a Tory plot to take party advantage of the national emergency in the decision to hold an early election in October 1931, breaking with Samuel and Reading when they went along with it. But he was then completely and humiliatingly shipwrecked by the 'National' government's landslide election victory. Estranged from the Liberals, he was reduced to heading a small 'family' rump group of just four MPs.

In 1935 he stumped the country again and dominated the media with his ideas for a British 'New Deal', campaigning for economic reconstruction and public works to cure unemployment, linked to support for the League of Nations, international disarmament and peace. MacDonald and Baldwin toyed with the idea of cooperation with him and even of bringing him into the Cabinet, but backed off when they realised the strength of Tory opposition to doing a deal. He set up the non-party 'Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction', working with the Free Churches to try to tap Nonconformist radicalism, and pouring money into sponsoring candidates

The authors of *The Federalist Papers* conjured up a memorable image of former American presidents 'wandering among the people like discontented ghosts, and sighing for a place which they were destined never more to possess.'

in the hope of perhaps holding the balance of power after an election. But when the Conservative-dominated 'National' government won another huge majority in November 1935, the game was up.

In September 1936 he made a controversial visit to Germany, meeting Hitler. Unfortunately for the ex-prime minister's reputation, Lloyd George appeared to admire and get on well with the Führer, the two men fascinating and flattering each other. An article he wrote about his visit in the *Daily Express* was so enthusiastic and uncritical it had to be toned down. However, if he had been taken in by Hitler and was an appeaser in 1936 he was certainly not two years later, condemning the Munich settlement and criticising Neville Chamberlain's government for its failures to rearm and to stand up against the aggression of the dictators.

In 1916 Lloyd George had offered the energy and the will to win the war. But in 1939–40, in his final significant appearance on the political stage, it was very different. He seemed in fact pretty pessimistic and defeatist, convinced that Britain could not win the war and defeat Germany by itself, and that it might actually lose the war. He believed a negotiated compromise peace was possible and would be better than another long and costly war. Some indeed saw Lloyd George as a potential British Pétain.

He helped to bring Neville Chamberlain down with his last great parliamentary speech in May 1940 – 'the Prime Minister should give an example of sacrifice ... [and] sacrifice the seals of office'. For the final time, it seemed that he was on the brink of a return to office. He might be good for only six hours work a day, it was said, 'but they would be six hours of pure radium'. One idea was that if he was not capable of running a department, he should become a sort of food or agriculture supremo, chairing a food production council. Churchill appeared to be anxious to have Lloyd George with him and, in discussions in late-May/early June 1940, offered a post in the War Cabinet but Lloyd George turned it down, unwilling to serve with Chamberlain. He may also have felt that the call had come too late and doubted his physical capacity and resilience. Perhaps, too, he doubted whether Churchill

would succeed and thought he should hold himself back 'in reserve': 'I shall wait until Winston is bust'. Later, in December 1940, he also turned down the offer to become British ambassador to the United States on health grounds.¹⁶

After that, Lloyd George went into sharp physical and political decline. He was very jumpy, terrified of German air raids, and had a deep and luxurious underground shelter built at Churt in which he would sleep. He became very bitter about Churchill and his conduct of the war, seeming to take a perverse delight when things went badly and there were setbacks. In February 1943 he cast his last vote in parliament, voting against the government and with Labour rebels in support of the Beveridge report. He last set foot in parliament to listen to Churchill's statement on the D-Day landings on 6 June 1944. Soon after, he moved back to Wales, where he died in March 1945.

Discontented ghosts?

The authors of *The Federalist Papers* conjured up a memorable image of former American presidents 'wandering among the people like discontented ghosts, and sighing for a place which they were destined never more to possess.'¹⁷ The label has a wider application and relevance. The Liberal prime ministers considered here mostly found giving power up, or being brushed to one side, and then life after Number 10, difficult and frustrating in different ways. The problems experienced by Asquith and Lloyd George in the 1920s reflected the wider difficulties of Liberal division and decline, but their personal feud also contributed to the situation. Russell and Gladstone showed that when old prime ministers and leaders do not go gently into that good night they can cause headaches and problems for their successors. Rosebery discovered that ex-prime ministers cannot have a constructive continuing role in British politics if they try to 'go it alone'. These Liberal prime ministers' experience is not unique for many of their Conservative and Labour counterparts have also had problems in letting go, finding a new role, and settling into political and personal retirement. The role of ex-prime minister is a tricky one to play and get right.

Kevin Theakston is Professor of British Government at the University of Leeds and author of *After Number Ten: Former Prime Ministers in British Politics* (London: Palgrave, 2010) – which is reviewed in the issue of the Journal.

- 1 The film, 'End of an era for the "Welsh Wizard"', can be seen on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYeLTdW2b4c> and on the Number 10 Downing Street website at: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page11749>.
- 2 Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, vol. 1, 1872–1914* (London: Allen and Unwin,

1967), pp. 19–20.

- 3 Kenneth O. Morgan, *Lloyd George* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974), pp. 178, 207–208.
- 4 John Prest, *Lord John Russell* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 420; Paul Scherer, *Lord John Russell: A Biography* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999) p. 336.
- 5 Roy Jenkins, *Asquith* (London: Collins, 1978), p. 257.
- 6 Thomas Jones, *A Diary With Letters 1931–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 169.
- 7 Prest, *Lord John Russell*, p. 419.
- 8 J. B. Conacher, 'A Visit to the Gladstones in 1894', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 2, no.2, 1958, p. 159; *The Personal Papers of Lord Rendel*

(London: Ernest Benn, 1931), pp. 135–136.

- 9 E. J. Feuchtwanger, *Gladstone* (London: Allen Lane, 1975), p. 273.
- 10 Robert Rhodes James, *Rosebery* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), pp. 386, 392, 402; H. C. G. Matthew, *The Liberal Imperialists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 23–24.
- 11 Leo McKinstry, *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil* (London: John Murray, 2005), p. 509; Rhodes James, *Rosebery*, p. 474.
- 12 Stephen Koss, *Asquith* (London: Allen Lane, 1976), pp. 244, 249–255; Graham Stewart, *Friendship & Betrayal: Ambition and the Limits*

of *Loyalty* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007), pp. 336–337.

- 13 Jenkins, *Asquith*, p. 517.
- 14 Morgan, *Lloyd George*, p. 181.
- 15 John Campbell, *Lloyd George: The Goat in the Wilderness 1922–1931* (London: Cape, 1977), pp. 9, 177; Charles Loch Mowat, *Lloyd George* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 55.
- 16 Paul Addison, 'Lloyd George and Compromise Peace in the Second World War', in A. J. P. Taylor (ed.), *Lloyd George: Twelve Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971).
- 17 Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers* (London: Dent, Everyman's Library, 1970), pp. 370–71.

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

A study of the Liberal Party at its grassroots during the period in which it went from being the party of government to the third party of politics. This research will use a wide range of sources, including surviving Liberal Party constituency minute books and local press to contextualise

the national decline of the party with the reality of the situation on the ground. The thesis will focus on three geographic regions (Home Counties, Midlands and the North West) in order to explore the situation the Liberals found themselves in nationally. Research for University of Leicester. Supervisor: Dr Stuart Ball. Gavin Freeman; 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 Terssac, France; +33 6 10 09 72 46; cynthia.boyer@univ-jfc.fr.

The political career of David Steel, Lord Steel of Aikwood

David Steel was one of the longest-serving leaders of the Liberal Party and an important figure in the realignment debate of the 1970s and '80s that led to the formation of the Liberal Democrats. Author would like to hear from anyone with pertinent or entertaining anecdotes relating to Steel's life and times, particularly his leadership, or who can point me towards any relevant source material. David Torrance; davidtorrance@hotmail.com.

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.

SHEELAGH M AND THE ULSTER

‘In Northern Ireland politics, I don’t know which is the greatest obstacle: to be a woman, a Catholic or a Liberal. I am all three.’
Sheelagh Murnaghan,
c. 1961.¹

Constance Rynder examines the life and political career of the Ulster Liberal Party’s most successful office holder, the only Liberal to win a seat in the Northern Ireland parliament during its fifty-year existence, Sheelagh Mary Murnaghan (1924–1993).



MURNAGHAN R LIBERAL PARTY

UNTIL 1956 the Liberal Party in Northern Ireland had lain virtually dormant since the partition of Ireland in 1921.² That it re-emerged at all, first as the Ulster Liberal Association, owed much to the dynamic leadership of its co-founder, Albert McElroy. A non-subscribing Presbyterian clergyman³ and former Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) activist, in 1956 he met with a small group of English Liberals interested in expanding the Liberal revival into Ulster.⁴ The Ulster Liberal Party's (ULP) influence on developments in the early years of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', however, derived in large measure from its most successful office holder, Sheelagh Mary Murnaghan (1924–1993). The only Liberal to win a seat in the Northern Ireland parliament (Stormont) during its fifty-year existence, Murnaghan regularly voiced the Liberal agenda there from 1961 to 1969. She hosted visits by British Liberal Party leaders Jo Grimond and Jeremy Thorpe and kept in close touch with developments at Westminster.⁵ Following the collapse of Stormont in 1972, Northern Ireland Secretary of State William Whitelaw appointed her to his Advisory Commission

where she continued to push the ULP's programme of reform.

The Murnaghan family was no stranger to Ulster politics. Sheelagh's grandfather George Murnaghan, a 'returned Yank'⁶ and successful dairy farmer in Omagh, had represented Mid-Tyrone at Westminster from 1895 to 1910 as the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) MP. When the Local Government Act of 1898 finally empowered the native Irish to elect their own county, urban and district councils, Murnaghan also secured a seat on the Tyrone County Council from which he wielded considerable regional influence until 1921. Allied with the British Liberal Party on the issue of Home Rule, the IPP took a constitutional approach to Irish national aspirations. Passage of the third Home Rule Bill in 1912, and its anticipated implementation as of 1914, seemed to justify the IPP's alliance with the Liberals at Westminster. Both underestimated the depth of opposition coming from Ulster's unionist majority; neither could anticipate the havoc wreaked on Ireland's political landscape by World War I and its aftermath.

Suspension of Home Rule for the duration of the war led inexorably to open rebellion by physical force nationalists, beginning with

the Easter Rising of 1916. In mid-1916 an increasingly desperate IPP leadership began negotiating with Britain's Liberal-led coalition government over a plan to partition Ireland as a mechanism for granting Home Rule immediately.⁷ As Ulster Catholics and nationalists, the Murnaghan family vehemently opposed the exclusion of six northern counties from a unified self-governing state. In Omagh, George's solicitor son, George Jr, co-founded the Irish Nation League; he, his father and most of the large Murnaghan family subsequently transferred their allegiance to a newly reorganised Sinn Féin Party.⁸ After the Government of Ireland Act came into full force in 1921, the Murnaghans initially refused to recognise the new Belfast regime. The Tyrone County Council, as well as other boards and councils on which George Sr sat, reported instead to the Dail Eireann in Dublin until their offices were raided by Belfast authorities.⁹ Like most Ulster Catholics, especially those in the majority Catholic counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh, the Murnaghans never quite forgave David Lloyd George and the Liberal Party for abandoning them to a Protestant-dominated separate state.

Given her staunchly nationalist heritage, Sheelagh Murnaghan

Sheelagh Murnaghan MP with Rev. Albert McElroy in 1963.

seemed an unlikely candidate to become the primary standard-bearer for the Ulster Liberal Party. Yet, early in 1959 she eagerly joined Albert McElroy in building an ecumenical alternative to the sectarian politics of unionism and nationalism. A Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) graduate, practising barrister and former captain of the Irish Ladies' Hockey Team, Murnaghan embodied much that typified a younger generation of educated, middle-class Catholics in Northern Ireland. She sought equal treatment *within* the existing state, rather than an end to partition. In her first foray into electoral politics, Murnaghan stood for South Belfast in the 1959 Westminster general election. 'Ulster Liberals', she told voters, 'are pledged to maintain Northern Ireland's constitutional position unless a majority of the people desire to revise it.' In addition, the ULP supported English Liberal goals of greater economic integration with Europe, full employment, profit-sharing and co-ownership in industry, and electoral reform.¹⁰ Although she garnered only 7.5 per cent of the poll, the sight of a Presbyterian minister out canvassing for votes alongside a Catholic female candidate made news.¹¹

A 1961 QUB by-election for the Northern Ireland parliament gave Murnaghan and the ULP their first electoral success. With its small, well-educated electorate, the QUB constituency afforded women and newcomers their best venue for challenging entrenched party interests at Stormont. Moreover, it was the only electoral area to retain proportional representation; Albert McElroy had nearly won one of its four seats in 1958. Murnaghan's victory over her Unionist opponent in a straight fight spurred the creation of new Liberal associations across the province.¹² It also guaranteed the ULP a voice at the centre of political power for over a decade. Murnaghan held her seat easily through the next two general elections, losing it only through the abolition of the university constituency in 1969.

Already accustomed to being a woman in a man's world, Murnaghan did not hesitate to take the initiative with her Stormont brethren. She brought to her parliamentary debates the aggressive no-nonsense style of a former Irish Hockey International.¹³ Her legal

experience as the lone practising female barrister of her day and her earthy sense of humour ultimately won Murnaghan the respect of her male colleagues. She often joined them in the Members' Bar for brandy and cigars, swapping yarns and building useful relationships. Ever the individualist, she rarely stood on ceremony, regardless of the circumstances. For example, as there were yet no 'ladies' facilities' on the business floors of Stormont, Murnaghan began using the men's loo, persuading the notoriously stuffy Attorney General Basil Kelly to stand guard for her.¹⁴ In Sheelagh Murnaghan the ULP had acquired both a courageous and a colourful political operator.

A firm opponent of capital punishment, Murnaghan joined in an extensive floor debate on its merits only weeks after delivering her maiden speech at Stormont.¹⁵ At the time, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland Lord Brookeborough and his government refused to accept in any form the 1962 Nationalist bill to abolish capital punishment. It was clear from the debate, however, that several Unionist backbenchers resented not being allowed a free vote on the bill.¹⁶ Murnaghan considered this an opportunity to garner cross-party support for penal reform, including the abolition of the death penalty. In 1963 she introduced her own private member's bill, hoping the Unionist government would eventually respond with a proposal of its own. The Homicide and Criminal Responsibility Bill dealt with various aspects of the murder statutes, but its main focus was the elimination of capital punishment.¹⁷ Several Unionists spoke in favour of Murnaghan's bill, but, once again, the government refused to allow a free vote. Two years later, however, the government did introduce similar legislation, retaining the death penalty mainly for the murder of a police officer or prison warden. Murnaghan's strategy of pressuring the government to take action seemed to have paid off in this instance.

While Murnaghan's goals encompassed most of the Liberal Party agenda, the special circumstances of Northern Ireland led her to concentrate most of her efforts on introducing civil rights legislation, pressing for electoral reform, and calling for repeal of the 1922 Special Powers

On four separate occasions between 1964 and 1968, Murnaghan introduced human rights legislation at Stormont.

Act. By the early 1960s, long-standing minority grievances in the province had begun to draw persistent protests from Catholic professionals and social justice advocates. They cited widespread discrimination in private and public sector employment, housing allocations and the justice system. In addition, gerrymandered electoral boundaries, especially at the local level, deprived the Catholic community of political influence even in those parts of the province where they constituted a majority of the citizenry. Unionist one-party rule had left the Catholic minority at the mercy of a majoritarian regime. Murnaghan devoted her political career to trying to change this system, before it was too late to avert violence.

On four separate occasions between 1964 and 1968, Murnaghan introduced human rights legislation at Stormont. In 1963 a moderate Unionist, Captain Terrence O'Neill, replaced the aging hardliner Brookeborough as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. Reform now seemed possible. In June 1964 Murnaghan submitted her first Human Rights Bill. Modelled on the law in Ontario (Canada), and no doubt inspired in part by the Civil Rights Bill recently passed by the US Congress, it represented the very first attempt at broad civil rights legislation within the UK. It banned discrimination in employment, housing and public facilities 'on the basis of race, creed, colour or political belief.' The bill recommended establishing a Human Rights Commission for Northern Ireland. Most Unionist and Nationalist MPs boycotted the debate; only the NI Labour Party showed much interest.¹⁸

In February of 1966 Murnaghan again brought essentially the same bill before the Northern Ireland House of Commons. Reflecting the British Liberal Party platform as well as recent legislation in the United States, it also included a clause on equal pay for women.¹⁹ A Labour government held power at Westminster, some of whose party members now actively supported the struggle for minority rights in Northern Ireland. More Nationalist and Unionist MPs felt compelled to show up for this debate, including the Minister for Home Affairs, Brian McConnell. While no longer denying the existence

of discrimination, he argued that education was the remedy, and such 'unnecessary legislation would be largely unenforceable.'²⁰ Solid Unionist opposition doomed the bill to defeat, 26–9. Faced with the government's apparent intransigence on this issue, Murnaghan threatened to seek a remedy directly from Westminster.

Before bringing her bill forward for a third time in February 1967, Murnaghan redrafted it, removing criminal penalties for violations. Instead she placed more authority with a five-member Human Rights Commission to investigate and adjudicate a documented case of unjust discrimination.²¹ She had hopes that Prime Minister O'Neill might accept some form of civil rights legislation this time. The intensification of political and civil unrest in Northern Ireland during the preceding year had increased Westminster's scrutiny of O'Neill's administration. Frustrated with the slow pace of reform, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson summoned O'Neill to Downing Street in January of 1967 and warned him of potential direct intervention.²² O'Neill's modest attempts at rapprochement with the Catholic community, however, had produced a backlash from Unionist backbenchers as well as from the Rev. Ian Paisley and his ultra-loyalist followers. Faced with a weakened grip on the party leadership, he declined to consider Murnaghan's revised Human Rights Bill in any form, and the House voted along party lines (24–7).²³ When she brought the bill to the House for a fourth and final time in January 1968, the outcome was nearly the same (22–8).²⁴ It would be more than thirty years before a Bill of Rights again received such a thorough airing in a Northern Ireland legislative body.

Directly related to civil rights, the issue of local and national government electoral reform loomed large on the ULP agenda. Under the terms of the 1919 Local Government (Ireland) Act, county, urban and district councils were elected by PR. Under this system many local councils in the west of Northern Ireland returned Nationalist majorities in 1920, including those led by Sheelagh Murnaghan's forebearers in Co. Tyrone. In response, the Unionist government abolished PR for local elections in 1922, and redrew

constituency boundaries to guarantee Unionist majorities on all but a handful of small district councils.²⁵ All attempts to draw Westminster's attention to this flagrant disregard for the terms of the 1919 Act were stymied by a Speaker's ruling disallowing debate on any internal matter in Northern Ireland.

After World War II Stormont created a new Northern Ireland Housing Authority to build government houses whose allocation they placed in the hands of local councils. By the late 1950s, civil rights advocates, including Murnaghan, pointed to blatant discrimination by Protestant-controlled local housing authorities, especially those in the West. Unionist councillors regularly denied Catholics access to these homes as a means of maintaining exclusive political control over majority-Catholic areas. Allocation of council housing also meant allocation of voting rights: only householders and business owners could exercise the local franchise; all other adults – many living in overcrowded Catholic ghettos – were excluded. From its inception the ULP called for the restoration of PR for local elections, universal adult suffrage at the age of eighteen, and the centralisation of public housing allocations based on a points system.²⁶

In concert with their British Liberal colleagues, the ULP and Murnaghan also advocated PR for national elections. From the Liberal point of view, the first-past-the-post approach in Britain had led to a virtual two-party parliamentary system, excluding smaller parties from any meaningful input on government policy. In Northern Ireland the elimination of PR and multi-member districts for Stormont elections in 1929 produced a permanent Unionist Party majoritarian government. The biggest loser after 1929 turned out to be the NILP. Nevertheless, Nationalist MPs saw it as more evidence that they and their constituents had been banished to the political wilderness. The Unionist Party had, indeed, succeeded in blocking any future alliance between the Protestant and Catholic working classes, but in so doing, perpetuated the bitter sectarian divisions that plagued Northern Ireland political life thereafter.

In particular, Murnaghan argued for a Single Transferable Vote (STV)

form of PR in a multimember constituency. 'It ensures that the ordinary elector has a choice and an effective vote in any election.'²⁷ PR/STV still prevailed in the QUB Stormont constituency, and Murnaghan was well aware of its potential for representing various minorities. Since World War II, for example, QUB had returned four of only five newly elected female Stormont MPs: two Independents, one of them the first Catholic woman MP; one Liberal; and one Unionist. Elitist though the university franchise seemed, this electoral anomaly afforded female political practitioners their best vehicle for breaking into the patriarchal power structure at Stormont.

Murnaghan got the government's response to this suggested reform in March 1966. O'Neill's administration proposed to abolish the QUB constituency, since it allowed QUB graduates a plural vote. No mention was made of applying the same principle to the business and property vote in local or parliamentary elections, a system long abandoned elsewhere in the UK but still prevailing in Ulster. She suspected that the motive was not reform and a fairer distribution of seats; rather, the Unionist Party could no longer count on holding a majority of the four QUB seats. She did not necessarily oppose the abolition of her constituency, but unless the government applied this policy to all levels of plural voting, 'the Government will stand indicted as a Government which is not prepared to implement democratic principles, except where it happens to be for the convenience of the ruling party.'²⁸ Piecemeal 'reform' was no substitute for the real thing.

In the March 1966 Westminster election, Murnaghan carried the ULP banner in North Down. She entered the contest just two weeks prior to polling day in order to prevent the seat from going unchallenged. With no election address and a severe shortage of canvassers, she nonetheless took 21.4 per cent of the vote. The ULP monthly newsletter, *Northern Radical*, crowed that Murnaghan got more votes in North Down than British party leader Jo Grimond did in his Scottish constituency.²⁹

Murnaghan and the ULP welcomed the organisation of the civil rights movement into the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association

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(NICRA) in January of 1967. Its thirteen-member steering committee included representation from the ULP, and its broad objectives mirrored much of the ULP agenda.³⁰ Initially, the NICRA embraced a cause especially dear to Murnaghan's heart: the plight of itinerant or 'gypsy' communities. She had already founded the cross-community Assisi Fellowship to combat abuse by local officials and to lobby for accommodations for itinerants. In speech after speech on the floor of the Commons Murnaghan chided the Unionist Government for failing to provide these families with secure caravan sites, basic facilities and protection from harassment. After leaving Stormont, she chaired the Belfast Itinerant Settlement Committee formed in 1969, and helped to establish St Paul's School for travelling children.³¹

Of immediate concern to Murnaghan, her QUB constituents and the NICRA, however, was the Unionist government's use of the Special Powers Act to curtail dissent. Created in 1922 as a temporary weapon against the IRA, the Special Powers Act became permanent in 1933. It granted the Minister of Home Affairs authority to ban meetings, parades, publications and organisations whenever he deemed it necessary. Sinn Féin had long been proscribed, but, beginning early in 1967, O'Neill's Home Affairs Minister, William Craig, also banned all republican clubs. Like the ULP, republican clubs had representation on the NICRA steering committee as well as at QUB. Murnaghan objected to the ban on both Sinn Féin and republican clubs on the grounds

The Stormont Parliament

that there was no evidence that either was engaging in unlawful activities. 'The Minister in taking this step,' she told the House, 'has been actuated more by concern for the peace and good order of his own party than for the peace, order and good government of Northern Ireland as a whole.'³²

Worse still in Murnaghan's estimation was the provision in the Special Powers Act allowing for arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of individuals without trial or judicial oversight. This, together with entry into private homes without a warrant, constituted 'a direct infringement on personal liberty' that was 'unjustifiable in any circumstances.'³³ The fact that historically the government had applied the act exclusively to one segment of the population only served to bring Northern Ireland into disrepute. Indeed, as recently as 1956–1961, then-Home Affairs Minister Brian Faulkner had used it to combat the IRA during its so-called 'border campaign',³⁴ and he continued to believe that internment, rather than lack of support from the wider Catholic community, had ended that campaign. Against such a background, Murnaghan, the ULP and the British Liberal Party demanded the repeal of the Special Powers Act.³⁵

As the NICRA and the radical student movement at Queen's University grew more confrontational in their protests after 1967, the old Nationalist Party slowly disintegrated, unable to find a viable alternative to street level civil rights activism.³⁶ Pressed by Paisley's sectarian loyalists, the Unionist Party underwent further internal dissent

that threatened O'Neill's hold on political power. He called a snap election for 24 February 1969, hoping to capitalise on popular support outside the party rank and file. Instead, it split the party into pro- and anti-O'Neill factions across the province, and failed to provide the mandate he had hoped for. Her QUB seat now gone, Murnaghan contested the North Down seat, but lost decisively to her Unionist opponent. Murnaghan's career as an elected official came to an end, but not her service to the ULP or to the struggle to guarantee individual and civil rights to all of Ulster's citizens.

In May 1969 James Chichester-Clark replaced O'Neill as prime minister. The summer 'marching season' plunged dozens of Northern Ireland communities into uncontrolled mob violence and the Wilson government was forced to send in troops to restore order. Northern Ireland had now clearly entered a new phase of what came to be known as the 'Troubles'. To avoid further erosion of its prerogatives, Stormont hastily created a new Ministry of Community Relations with the vague remit of reducing tensions between Protestant and Catholic working-class neighbourhoods. Murnaghan served on its Community Relations Commission (CRC) from 1969 until the collapse of Stormont in 1972. CRC chair Maurice Hayes remembered her as 'one of the few truly liberal voices around,' and one of the best-informed members of the commission. 'Had she been heeded to at any time in the sixties,' he later reflected, 'most of the demands of the civil rights movement

would have been anticipated and dealt with, and much conflict and destruction and death might have been avoided.³⁷

Murnaghan continued to write position statements for the *Northern Radical*, the ULP's monthly newspaper. She spoke publicly against both paramilitary violence and Unionist government policies. Her ongoing high profile made her a target: in February of 1970 her South Belfast home was bombed, a hole blasted in the front wall and most of the windows shattered. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) never identified the perpetrators. Murnaghan herself speculated that the attack could have been staged by either republican or loyalist paramilitaries. In any case, she told reporters, 'nobody is going to force me out of my house.'³⁸

The election of a Conservative government in Britain under Edward Heath in 1970 lessened Westminster's reform pressure on Stormont. At the same time, it inadvertently enabled the newly organised Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) to assert greater control over the civil rights struggle. The following spring, hard-liner Brian Faulkner succeeded Chichester-Clark as Northern Ireland prime minister. Security concerns now trumped political reform as a solution to the escalating violence. Backed by the Conservative government, Faulkner imposed internment without trial, beginning in August 1971. Relying on flawed RUC intelligence, the British army 'lifted' hundreds of suspected republican terrorists, many of them civil rights activists with no connection to the PIRA. These included key members of the NICRA. Despite widespread loyalist paramilitary violence, no Protestant was interned before 1973. Near-total alienation of the Catholic community predictably followed, as did increased recruitment for the PIRA.

Internment outraged Murnaghan. Reports, later verified, soon emerged of gross mistreatment of some detainees. In addition to severe beatings, interrogators employed the so-called 'five techniques' to extract confessions and information. They included wall standing, hooding, sleep deprivation, white noise and the withholding of food and drink.³⁹ Such a

wholesale violation of human rights ran counter to everything Murnaghan stood for, both as a Liberal and as a practising barrister. In a small personal gesture, she foreswore her two favourite vices, brandy and cigars, for the duration.⁴⁰ Over the next several months anti-internment rallies, many organised by the NICRA, brought increased confrontation with authorities. The tragic climax came in Derry City on 30 January 1972 when British paratroopers fired on a largely peaceful group of protesters, killing thirteen unarmed people. 'Bloody Sunday' brought to an end the now largely dysfunctional Stormont government.

After the imposition of direct rule from London in March 1972, William Whitelaw, the new Northern Ireland Secretary, appointed Murnaghan to his Advisory Commission. In many respects, this presented her with her best opportunity sell the ULP's reform program. A Unionist government at Stormont could – and did – reject ULP recommendations out of hand; London dared not, if it hoped for a workable political solution to the Troubles and an expeditious exit from the province. Whitelaw invited ideas from across the political spectrum. This included three new political parties organised in 1970–71 as well as the rump of the UP. The Social Democrat and Labour Party (SDLP) in essence replaced the Nationalists and the NILP. The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI), a cross-community centrist group, drew initially from people with little previous history of party affiliation, except for long-time ULP member Oliver Napier.⁴¹ Ian Paisley's ultra-loyalist Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), however, refused to participate. These new groupings signalled a fundamental realignment of party politics in Northern Ireland.

Whitelaw's government White Paper on Northern Ireland published in March 1973 embodied much of what Murnaghan had lobbied for on the Commission and throughout the preceding decade: a standing Commission for Human Rights, and a Fair Employment Agency; a PR/STV electoral system for a broader provincial legislature, with an eighteen-year-old voting age; and a power-sharing executive. In addition, Whitelaw

indicated a willingness to phase out internment once the power-sharing executive was established.⁴²

At the SDLP's insistence, the plan also called for an ill-defined 'Irish Dimension' in the form of a North/South Council of Ireland. Details of its role were to be hammered out by the power-sharing executive headed by Brian Faulkner and SDLP leader Gerry Fitt, which came together in the wake of the December 1973 Sunningdale Agreement. The Council of Ireland provision reflected ULP President McElroy's long-cherished dream of a future united Ireland within the British Commonwealth.⁴³ Murnaghan, however, saw in it little more than some possibilities for economic and security coordination with the Republic. She rightly feared that raising the old border issue at this time could undermine unionist support for power sharing. She did not even mention it in her subsequent campaign literature.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, elections for the new Northern Ireland Assembly took place in June 1973. Murnaghan contested one of the South Belfast seats, but neither she nor the only other ULP candidate, Berkley Farr, fared well.⁴⁵ By this time, much of their middle-class and liberal unionist support had migrated to the APNI, which took eight seats in the 78-member Assembly.⁴⁶ To all intents and purposes, the APNI had replaced the ULP as the cross-community, centrist party of choice in Northern Ireland. The collapse of the power-sharing executive less than a year later rendered moot even the role of the APNI for the time being. It also dashed Murnaghan's hopes for an early resolution to the Troubles. Her vision of a just society in which Protestants and Catholics could live together in peace would not be realised in her lifetime. Of her years as a ULP politician dedicated to constitutional reform, she later remarked: 'Nobody could have a greater sense of failure than I have.'⁴⁷

Murnaghan returned to her career as a barrister. She went on to chair the National Insurance and Industrial Relations Tribunals. Still an unabashed individualist, she regularly brought her mixed-breed dog Brandy to hearings, slipping him treats under the table to guarantee his silence.⁴⁸ In 1983 Murnaghan adjudicated the very first case

Internment outraged Murnaghan. Reports, later verified, soon emerged of gross mistreatment of some detainees ... Such a wholesale violation of human rights ran counter to everything Murnaghan stood for, both as a Liberal and as a practising barrister.

of sexual harassment heard in the UK. Her decision in that landmark case set a precedent that other labour courts and tribunals in Ireland and the UK would subsequently follow.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, she continued her crusade for the humane treatment of itinerants. In 1988 she was awarded an OBE for her outstanding service to the people of Northern Ireland. Sadly, Sheelagh Murnaghan died of lung cancer in 1993, too soon to witness the 1998 Peace Accord that finally brought an end to the bloody mayhem she had fought so hard to prevent.

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- 1 Quoted by Jeremy Thorpe in his letter to the editor of *The Times*, 22 September 1993.
- 2 In 1929 a briefly revived Liberal Association put up candidates in both the Westminster and Stormont elections, but faded from view soon after. Berkley Farr, 'Liberalism in Unionist Northern Ireland', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History*, 33 (Winter 2001–2), pp. 29–30.
- 3 Members of this Irish denomination refuse to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith, and take a distinctly liberal and tolerant approach to Christianity.
- 4 Gordon Gillespie, *Albert McElroy: The Radical Minister, 1915–1975* (Albert McElroy Memorial Fund, 1983), p. 17. McElroy led the ULP until his death in 1975.
- 5 Both Grimond and Thorpe were stationed in Northern Ireland during their army service; Thorpe's grandfather had been a Church of Ireland archdeacon and rector of Dundalk. See *Northern Radical* (NI Young Liberal Newsletter), February 1967, ULP Papers, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI). They visited Northern Ireland during the 1960s, and Murnaghan attended the annual Liberal Party Conference in Britain.
- 6 Part of an impoverished County Down family, in 1867 George

emigrated to the US at the age of twenty, where he established several successful businesses in St Louis, Missouri and became a US citizen. He returned to Ireland with his young family in 1887, making him part of a tiny cadre of former Irish émigrés known then as 'returned Yanks'.

- 7 Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2005), p. 453.
- 8 See the *Ulster Herald*, 5 and 19 August, 9 September, 16 September 1916; 16 September, 17 October 1917.
- 9 *Ulster Herald*, 10 and 17 December 1921.
- 10 Open letter to the Electors of South Belfast, 1959, ULP Papers, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI).
- 11 Gillespie, *McElroy*, p. 19.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 13 Maurice Hayes, *Minority Verdict: Experiences of a Catholic Public Servant* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1995), p. 81.
- 14 So relates Anne Dickson, Murnaghan's close friend and the only female MP in the last Stormont parliament. See Constance B. Rynder, 'Sheelagh Murnaghan and the Struggle for Human Rights in Northern Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, 14, no. 4 (November 2006), esp. p. 457 and n. 76.
- 15 In keeping with tradition, Murnaghan gave her maiden speech on a non-controversial subject: rate relief for amateur sports clubs. She had continued to play hockey until 1958 and thereafter refereed hockey matches when time permitted. Hansard, Northern Ireland House of Commons Debates (NIHC), vol. 50, col. 153–156 (7 December 1962).
- 16 NIHC, vol. 50, especially cols. 1397–1416 (6 February 1962).
- 17 *Ibid.*, vol. 55, cols. 960–1006 (19 November 1963).
- 18 *Ibid.*, vol. 57, cols. 1990–1996 (16 June 1964).
- 19 Peter Barberis, 'The 1964 General Election and the Liberals' False Dawn', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 21 (September 2007), p. 379.
- 20 NIHC, vol. 62, col. 740 (8 February 1966).
- 21 *Northern Radical*, February 1967, ULP Papers, PRONI.
- 22 Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster*

Unionism in the O'Neill Years, 1960–9 (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 147–148.

- 23 NIHC, vol. 65, col. 937 (7 February 1967).
- 24 *Ibid.*, vol. 68, cols 573–592, *passim* (30 January 1968).
- 25 Thomas Hennessey, *A History of Northern Ireland, 1920–1996* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1997), pp. 44–50.
- 26 Murnaghan letter to Electors of South Belfast, 1959, ULP Papers, PRONI. See also NIHC for various speeches on this subject.
- 27 NIHC, vol. 62, col. 1499 (1 March 1966). In this electoral system, voters rank the candidates in order of preference. When a candidate receives sufficient first-preference ballots to win the first seat, any additional votes for that candidate are transferred to the voter's second preference on a percentage basis, and a new round of counting is done. This process continues until all seats are filled.
- 28 NIHC, vol. 62, col. 2019 (15 March 1966).
- 29 *Northern Radical*, March–April 1966, ULP Papers, PRONI; Farr, 'Liberalism', p. 31.
- 30 Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1990), Ch. 4. Posted on the CAIN (Conflict Archives on the Internet) Web Service: cain.ulst.ac.uk
- 31 According to fellow itinerant advocate Father Alex Reid, her tireless lobbying forced local authorities to begin addressing the problem. Nick McGinley (nephew of Sheelagh Murnaghan), DVD interview with Father Reid. No date.
- 32 NIHC, vol. 66, col. 184 (16 March 1967).
- 33 *Ibid.*, vol. 64, cols. 72–73 (7 June 1966).
- 34 Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 73.
- 35 *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 February 1969; *Newsletter*, 17 February 1969.
- 36 Among Murnaghan's QUB constituents was Bernadette Devlin, a NICRA activist and co-founder of the leftist People's Democracy. In an odd twist of fate, Devlin won a 1969 by-election for the Westminster seat once held by Murnaghan's grandfather George. Seeing in Devlin much potential, she tried to persuade her to tone down her militancy, clearly to no avail. McGinley, DVD interview with Fr Reid.
- 37 Hayes, *Minority Verdict*, p. 81.
- 38 *Newsletter*, 10 February 1970; author's interview with Colette Murnaghan (Sheelagh's sister), 14 May 2006, London, U.K.
- 39 In 1972 the Irish government brought the issue before the European Commission of Human Rights. For an analysis of the case and its outcome, see R. J. Spjut, 'Torture Under the European Convention on Human Rights', *The American Journal of International Law*, vol. 73, no. 2 (April 1979), pp. 267–272.
- 40 Author's interview with Anne Dickson, 10 July 2000, Greenisland, Co. Antrim.
- 41 Sydney Elliot and W. D. Flackes, *Northern Ireland: A Political Directory* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999), pp. 156–157. Napier had supported McElroy's bid for a QUB seat in 1958, and joined the ULP shortly thereafter. See Oliver J. Napier to Albert McElroy, 12 March 1958, in McElroy Papers, PRONI. He led the APNI 1972–1984.
- 42 Ian McAllister, 'The Legitimacy of Opposition: The Collapse of the 1974 Northern Ireland Executive', *Eire-Ireland*, 12, no. 3 (Autumn 1977), p. 34.
- 43 Gillespie, *McElroy*, p. 18.
- 44 Sheelagh Murnaghan, 'The White Paper', *Northern Radical*, February 1973, ULP Papers, PRONI.
- 45 Each garnered about 1 per cent of the vote. Farr, 'Liberalism', p. 32, n. 26.
- 46 35 per cent of the ULP membership was Catholic, and a few of them may have joined the SDLP. However, an analysis of the transfer votes from the 1973 Assembly elections makes it clear that the bulk of former Liberal backers were now voting for the APNI. *Northern Radical*, June 1969, ULP Papers, PRONI; Gillespie, *McElroy*, p. 35.
- 47 McGinley, notes on his DVD.
- 48 *Telegraph* obituary, 14 September 1993.
- 49 See Rynder, 'Murnaghan', pp. 454–457 for details of this precedent-setting case.

LETTERS

Mill and Morley

In his article, 'John Stuart Mill and the Liberal Party', in the spring issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*, Eugenio Biagini reminds us that John Morley, 'one of Gladstone's most enthusiastic collaborators and his greatest biographer' was so closely associated with Mill's intellectual legacy that he was called 'Mr Mill's representative on earth.' This is cited as evidence of the close link between Mill's thinking and Gladstonian Liberalism but it would surely be wrong to put too much weight on a joke (albeit a very funny one), clearly designed to ridicule the notorious agnosticism of both Mill and Morley.

There is of course no doubt about the deep reverence that Morley felt for Mill, but it is important to bear the timescale in mind. Morley's acquaintance with Mill covered only the last eight years of the older man's life, up to his death at Avignon in 1873. This was ten years before Morley was first elected to parliament as a Gladstonian Liberal, and thirty years before he published his *Life of Gladstone*. The Morley whom Mill knew was not a parliamentary politician but the radical young editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, in which he published articles by an impressive list of contributors (including Frederic Harrison, Leslie Stephen, and T.H. Huxley) as well as many articles that the editor wrote himself. Morley, then nearly 27, was introduced to Mill at the end of 1865 and became a regular guest at the Blackheath dinner parties where the philosopher entertained friends and disciples. Two years later, when Morley was about to visit the United States, Mill introduced him to Emerson as 'one of our best and most rising periodical writers on serious subjects'.

When Mill died in 1873 Morley described him to his sister as 'the one living person for whom I have an absolutely unalloyed veneration and

attachment'. Over a period of months he wrote a series of tributes, totalling over forty thousand words, for the *Fortnightly Review*. For Morley, Mill's distinctive vision was the union 'of stern science with infinite aspiration, of rigorous sense of what is real and practicable with bright and luminous hope'. He described *On Liberty* as 'one of the most aristocratic books ever written', and quoted from it Mill's elitist belief that in a successful democracy 'the Sovereign Many' must allow themselves to be guided by 'a more highly gifted and instructed One or by Few'. Morley saw his role as a writer and editor as contributing to this task of guidance. Only later did he feel the need to play a more active part in parliamentary politics, finding in Gladstone a father-figure who to some extent replaced Mill.

Incidentally I wonder whether Sue Donnelly, whose article described the appalling way in which Mill's papers were treated after his death, knows that John Morley offered to help Helen Taylor to edit them, 'to repay a trifle of the debt I owe ... to one whose memory will always be as precious to me as to a son'.

Patrick Jackson

Mill and equality

Alan Butt Philip's 'John Stuart Mill as politician' (*Journal of Liberal History* 70, spring 2011) rightly stresses Mill's credentials as a 'thoroughly modern man'. Re-reading *The Subjection of Women* last summer, I was struck how Mill's impassioned arguments focused not only on equality, but also on efficiency, describing women's subordination as 'one of the chief hindrances to human improvement'.

What is nowadays known as the 'business case' for gender balance (research by Catalyst, McKinsey and others showing that businesses with

gender-balanced leadership outperform those with male-dominated leadership) was foreshadowed by Mill as long ago as 1869: 'In all things of any difficulty and importance, those who can do them well are fewer than the need, even with the most unrestricted latitude of choice: and any limitation of the field of selection deprives society of some chances of being served by the competent, without ever saving it from the incompetent'.

How much longer until politicians in Mill's former constituency of Westminster catch up with their insightful forebear?

Dinti Batstone

Chamberlain's relatives

Paul Tilsley's interesting article about Birmingham (*Journal of Liberal History* 70, spring 2011), and the photograph of Highbury Hall, prompted a number of family memories.

My family has well over a century of links with Birmingham. For a start, anyone with the surname Chamberlain, Slade, Beale or Kenrick is likely to be related to us on my father's side and, as if that were not enough, my grandfather on my mother's side, himself a widower with five daughters at the time, married Joseph Chamberlain's widow, the third Mrs Chamberlain. My grandmother had died very young in 1905, leaving my grandfather with five daughters. He was a very tall, good-looking but impoverished Protestant Irish clergyman who came to Birmingham with his daughters in 1905 as rector of St Philip's Church, near Highbury. In this capacity he got to know the Chamberlains well. The Chamberlains had married in 1887 when she was 23 and he was 51. Joe Chamberlain was a wealthy man and Mary Endicott, his third wife, was equally comfortable in her own right because she was the daughter of the Governor of Massachusetts. They lived in style in Highbury Hall.

Soon after my grandfather first met them Joe Chamberlain had the serious stroke that was

to incapacitate him for the rest of his life. He died in 1912 and my grandfather married Mrs Chamberlain in 1915. They moved to London because he was appointed Canon and sub-Dean of Westminster and Chaplain to the House of Commons. They lived in 17 Deans Yard, now, I believe, the home of the Headmaster of Westminster School, where Canon and the new Mrs Carnegie liked to hold political dinner parties, but as far as I know, because of Joe's change of allegiance from Liberal to Liberal Unionist to Tory, the guests were only ever Tory ministers or prime ministers. However, my grandfather was often criticised for some of the left-of-centre views he expressed in his sermons, particularly in the aftermath of the First World War.

Sadly I never attended any of those occasions. My grandfather died in 1936, before I was born, and although my step-grandmother remained remarkably spry and interesting for another 21 years, I never felt old enough to discuss politics with her, although she quite frequently used to refer to Joseph Chamberlain, calling him 'Uncle Joe' because of his relationship to our family on my father's side.

As history relates only too well, there were a number of Chamberlains in politics in the Conservative Party over the years but, as far as I know, in our unusually linked family not a single active Liberal politician between the original Liberal Joseph Chamberlain and myself. Nor has there been one since. Not much of a political dynasty, I am afraid, but a small fragment of Liberal Democrat party history perhaps.

Adrian Slade

Liberal peerages

Reading in J. Graham Jones' excellent 'Archie and Clem' article (*Journal of Liberal* 70, spring 2011) of Archie Sinclair's long wait for a peerage – Churchill was never likely to deny his companion in the

– concluded on page 51

CHEL TENHAM'S L

Cheltenham's elegant spa reputation and Cotswold hinterland means that it is often assumed to be a natural Tory seat, the current run of five Liberal Democrat victories presumably something of an aberration. From a historical perspective, this is quite wrong. Always an essentially urban constituency, Cheltenham has rarely been a safe Tory seat, and the tally of MPs since 1832 is now nine Tories to nine in the Liberal tradition with one fascinating independent. And many of the Tories were distinctly urban in flavour with new money and social reform cropping up as recurring themes.

Martin Horwood MP examines Cheltenham's Liberal history.



Cheltenham Promenade showing the Boer War Memorial.

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THE INDIVIDUALS who sat on the green benches for the town have been an extraordinary cast of characters, only occasionally involved in great affairs of state but reflecting the changing nature of politics and parliamentary representation over the last two centuries. For the *Journal*, I have inevitably concentrated on the Liberal MPs but a full profile of each member is available on my website at www.martinhorwood.net/past_MPs.html.

Berkeleys and Beauforts

Before 1832, Cheltenham had no MP of its own but was represented by two county members for Gloucestershire. Polls and party allegiances are first mentioned in the seventeenth century and the first recorded votes were in the 1776 by-election held in the turbulent reign of George III after the Tory incumbent entered the House of Lords. A furious

by-election contest ensued between the 'gallant sailor' George Cranfield Berkeley for the Whigs and the Duke of Beaufort's Tory candidate William Bromley Chester. £100,000 is said to have been spent on sweetening the few thousand electors – a staggering sum for the time. Chester won 2,919 votes, narrowly beating Berkeley who polled 2,873. But Berkeley succeeded before long. He was elected in 1783 and on a further seven occasions, one of the thirty members of the family to represent Gloucestershire in parliament over the centuries.

The Berkeley family's presence in Gloucestershire dates back to Norman times with the original charter for Berkeley Castle and the title of baron granted by Henry II in 1117 to the merchant Robert FitzHarding, probably in return for generous loans to the king. Robert's son Maurice married Alice de Berkeley and their descendants still live in the castle today. The family's gift for politics helped them navigate

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rebellions, civil wars and dynastic changes. The ninth Lord Berkeley was given an earldom by Charles II and raised to the Privy Council by James II but nevertheless emerged on the winning side in the Glorious Revolution. By the early nineteenth century, more than twenty Berkeleys had already been Gloucestershire MPs, including William 'Fitz' Berkeley who was elected in 1810 but narrowly escaped being unseated on the grounds that he was actually the high-living fifth Earl's illegitimate son, his glamorous wife Mary having been an unmarried maidservant at the time of his birth.

Cheltenham's reputation as a fashionable spa resort was by this time well established, and the town finally gained its own parliamentary representation in the Great Reform Act of 1832. The very first election was unopposed, the seat going to yet another member of the ubiquitous Whig family: Fitz's younger (and unquestionably legitimate) brother.

An atheist, an infidel and a scoffer at religion

Craven Berkeley, Cheltenham's first MP, could politely be called a bit of a character. The twelfth child of the fifth Earl of Berkeley and his former maidservant Mary Cole, Craven reached the rank of captain in the Life Guards and was brother to four previous Gloucestershire MPs. He was also accused of guarding the door of a London bookshop while his brother horsewhipped the Tory proprietor for publishing a bad review of his book. He fought a duel against the Tory MP for Chippenham but both missed twice. Before he was even elected, Craven had also crossed swords (metaphorically) with 'the Pope of Cheltenham', the formidable evangelical Anglican and arch-Tory Dean Francis Close.

He certainly didn't share Close's disapproval of racing, theatre and drink and when Close called him 'an atheist, an infidel and a scoffer at religion',¹ Craven threatened to sue him for slander. Close probably felt vindicated after Craven's election when he proposed an amendment to Sunday pub opening hours which would have removed closing time. A passionate liberal, Craven couched even his argument for more drinking time in terms of solidarity with working people and consistently supported extending the franchise. Perhaps he always had his own mother's modest origins in the back of his mind.

Craven was re-elected in 1835 against token opposition from a Radical candidate. His election campaigns were boisterous affairs involving entertainment, marching bands decked out in his orange and green colours, and several small riots. He defeated serious Tory opponents in 1837 and 1841, but was defeated in 1847 by Sir Willoughby Jones – the only Tory ever to beat him at the polls – after tactlessly drawing attention to the mortality rate in Cheltenham during a parliamentary debate on public health. It was an important issue to raise but potentially devastating for the spa town's tourist trade.

Passing rich and gloriously drunk

Jones interrupted an otherwise continuous thirty-year run of Berkeley domination following an election 'in which money was spent like no other' and 'every man who had a vote and was willing to sell it was passing rich for many days after, not to say gloriously drunk also.'² Perhaps the Berkeleys were sore losers, but no sooner had the Norfolk baronet been elected than he found himself fighting off a petition to

unseat him on grounds of 'bribing and treating'. The evidence was not difficult to gather and parliament's liberal majority voted to unseat him. The subsequent by-election was won by Craven, but he was promptly unseated on petition for exactly the same reason as Jones. The two fought each other again in 1852 in what must have been a particularly bitter campaign. Craven won, but this was to be his last election. He died in Carlsbad in Germany in 1855, still an MP but aged just fifty.

When Craven was unseated on petition in 1848, Berkeley Castle suddenly needed a new candidate to keep the seat warm. Step forward cousin Grenville, who narrowly won the by-election and then graciously stood aside for the returning Craven at the following general election in 1852, despite having been appointed a whip in the meantime. He then secured his own election as MP for Evesham but, when Craven died, Grenville yet again responded to the family's call and resigned his Evesham seat to stand in Cheltenham. Whether in sympathy for the family, through his own talents or simply by outspending his bank manager opponent, he secured a whopping 81 per cent of the vote at this second by-election. Having caused a third by-election, in Evesham, by resigning there, he sat for Cheltenham for less than a year before forcing yet another by-election by accepting the crown office of Commissioner of Customs.

Grenville was succeeded by his cousin Francis, a captain in the Royal Horse Guards and nicknamed 'the Giant'. Cheltenham's third Berkeley MP was the son of one of Craven's older but illegitimate brothers, Admiral Sir Maurice Berkeley, who was already MP for nearby Gloucester. Francis, by now Colonel Berkeley, faced no Tory opposition in the subsequent

Craven Berkeley, Cheltenham's first MP, could politely be called a bit of a character.

CHELTENHAM'S LIBERAL HISTORY

1857 general election since they, like him, supported Palmerston's aggressive China policy.

The fall of the house of Berkeley

The Berkeleys got a shock in 1859 when another general election saw a vigorous new Tory candidate called Charles Schreiber come within twelve votes of defeating the colonel. A good organiser and 'a forcible speaker', Schreiber stood again in 1865 and pitched his arguments well to his still-small, urban, property-owning electorate, railing against both the aristocratic fox-hunting activities of the Berkeleys and the threat of concessions to workers, Catholics and Nonconformists. 'Of all the existing forms of government, democracy is the lowest and worst,' he declared. 'Shall England abandon her Protestant Faith, her Established Church, the blessing she enjoys, for the evils offered to her clothed in the specious garb of Progressive Reform and Civil and Religious Liberty?' Religious opinion in the town swung strongly behind him.

Nationally the new 'Liberal Party' had united Whigs and Radicals, but in Cheltenham the colonel obviously failed to rally the troops. Berkeley Castle's influence was waning and, with religion such an electoral issue, even Berkeley's attendance at the Grand Prix in Paris on a Sunday was used against him.

Tensions ran high at the 1865 poll. Schreiber had to dodge rotten eggs and dead cats at the hustings, but the violence got worse and a Liberal runner was shot dead by one of Schreiber's supporters. Amidst riotous scenes, the Tories squeaked victory by twenty-eight votes and promptly had their windows broken by a radical mob. Schreiber astutely left the windows unrepaired for many weeks. He then successfully fought off accusations of bribery in the now customary election petition to take his seat in the Commons.

The defeated colonel bitterly complained that Cheltenham was 'very dear and more money is spent on political matters than it is worth. I wish I had never seen the town of Cheltenham.' Cheltenham returned the compliment. No Berkeley ever stood for parliament here again. Francis inherited his father's title and seat in the House of Lords

in 1867. In 1886, he completed the break with the political past by accepting the presidency of Tewkesbury Conservative Association.

Battle of the undergraduates

It must have been a real blow to the local Conservatives that a man of Schreiber's political talents stood down at the next election. He said it was to 'abandon the quest of politics for that of porcelain'.³ That he and his wife eventually amassed one of the finest collections of fine china in Europe must have been little consolation to the Tories.

A new generation contested the 1868 general election. The Tories selected a twenty-two-year-old Cambridge undergraduate called James Agg-Gardner, who launched his campaign with a rejection of the 'hide-bound Toryism' that opposed all social reform. The Liberals chose a twenty-three-year-old Oxford undergraduate, Henry Samuelson, the son of wealthy Banbury Liberal MP Sir Bernhard Samuelson. It was a good time to be the Liberal candidate, as Gladstone swept to a landslide national victory on a platform of reform. Samuelson campaigned in particular for universal education and turned the Tories' narrow majority into a Liberal one of 188.

Even the kindest friend would have to admit that his maiden speech was hopeless. He chose a debate on the odd subject of the House of Commons Ladies Gallery screen. According to the official record, he dismissed the suggestion that removing the screen would force ladies to wear evening dress because 'it was the custom in society for both sexes to appear in full dress or neither'. Gales of laughter ensued but Henry missed the joke. Within a couple of years, he was putting in a much more assured performance in favour of the revolutionary 1870 Education Act for which he had campaigned and which paved the way for universal primary education for all.

But the mood of the country – and the state of the economy – was changing. Disraeli's Tories had picked up the baton of social reform and, when the 1874 election offered Agg-Gardner and Samuelson a rematch, it was the Conservative who won. Agg-Gardner was to be Cheltenham's longest-serving MP by some distance, representing the town over a staggering timespan of

fifty-four years, but his tenure was to be far from uninterrupted.

The loving cups wink right joyously

As Gladstone stormed back into office in 1880, Agg-Gardner lost Cheltenham to the flamboyant Liberal candidate Charles Conrad Adolphus, Baron du Bois de Ferrières. De Ferrières was the grandson of a Napoleonic general whose family had settled in the Netherlands, where he was born in 1823. The family moved to England when Charles was very young and settled in Cheltenham so, despite his exotic roots, he was actually the Liberals' most local candidate yet. In 1867 he was granted 'letters of naturalisation' without which he couldn't have stood for parliament.

Although he had opposed the establishment of Cheltenham's mayor and corporation in 1876, the handsome baron had joined the triumphant Liberal majority in the first municipal elections that year and succeeded fellow Liberal William Nash Skillicorne as mayor in 1877. 'His mayoralty' commented his rival Agg-Gardner 'was marked by generous hospitality. In the presence of the Baron, maces and loving cups winked right joyously as knowing who was their friend'. A great collector of Dutch masters (which he eventually donated to the town), he was 'a picturesque citizen and a sincere lover of Cheltenham' and the obvious choice for the Liberal parliamentary candidacy in 1880. But the baron only squeaked home in Cheltenham by twenty-one votes. He was an active MP, but it must have dismayed the local party that he declined to defend his tiny majority five years later. Agg-Gardner suggests he had 'had enough of St. Stephen's and of the rather insistent demands made upon him'. With Gladstone's popularity waning, the return of the parliamentary seat to the Tories was pretty inevitable.

Agg-Gardner's majority of 804 over radical *Punch* journalist Rudolph Lehmann in the election of 1885 was a Cheltenham record. The Tories had obviously adapted successfully to the now much-increased electorate with improved organisation, including the foundation of a Conservative Club.

Another election soon followed, in 1886, over the critical issue of

Tensions ran high at the 1865 poll. Schreiber had to dodge rotten eggs and dead cats at the hustings, but the violence got worse and a Liberal runner was shot dead by one of Schreiber's supporters.

Irish home rule. Although they initially failed to get back into government, the Conservatives won many seats – and Agg-Gardner held Cheltenham with a majority that now topped 1,000. In 1892 the pendulum swung back to Gladstone's Liberals yet again. Agg-Gardner's majority was reduced, but this time he held on. At last his persistence had begun to make Cheltenham a safer seat for the Tories.

Implacable warfare

Agg-Gardner chose the 1895 contest to stand down 'for reasons unconnected to politics' but not explained in his memoirs. Colonel Francis Shirley Russell, an Aberdeenshire landowner and soldier, was safely elected for the Conservatives in Cheltenham, albeit with a reduced majority, seeing off both his official Liberal opponent and the first independent labour candidate, Mr Hillen, who polled just twenty-three votes.

The colonel was an active and eloquent MP but already in his late fifties, and when he announced his retirement the local association lost no time in bringing Agg-Gardner back for the 1900 election. As it turned out, the Liberals were now deeply split over the Boer War and failed to find a candidate in Cheltenham, handing Agg-Gardner the first unopposed victory since Craven Berkeley's original win in 1832.

1906 was another matter. The Unionist coalition, now under Arthur Balfour, split itself over free trade, while Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman now led a radical, reforming and reunited Liberal Party. The Cheltenham Liberals selected John Sears, a London architect and son of a Baptist minister, as their candidate. Sears was still a senior London county councillor but promised to be a zealous radical opponent for the old stager Agg-Gardner, who hadn't actually won a contested election for fourteen years. Sears' lack of a local connection was overlooked as Campbell-Bannerman's party swept to a historic landslide victory at national level and the Liberals regained Cheltenham for the first time in twenty years.

The new Liberal government waged 'implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness', introducing free school meals, old

The new Liberal government waged 'implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness', introducing free school meals, old age pensions, punishment for child neglect and banning many forms of child labour. Amongst these huge issues, Sears chose the spectacularly boring subject of Inland Revenue organisational reform for his maiden speech.

pensions, punishment for child neglect and banning many forms of child labour. Amongst these huge issues, Sears chose the spectacularly boring subject of Inland Revenue organisational reform for his maiden speech. He stood down from the London County Council in 1907 but never seems to have really established himself in Cheltenham and stood down from the parliamentary seat 'for family and personal reasons' at the next general election. He later made an unsuccessful bid to return to parliament, contesting St Pancras in London for Labour in 1935.

Expenses scandal

In the January 1910 election, dominated by the blocking of Lloyd-George's radical People's Budget by the House of Lords, Cheltenham Tories could hardly have chosen a more aristocratic candidate. Vere Brabazon Ponsonby was the son of an Irish earl, Lord Bessborough, and so himself Viscount Duncannon. The new Liberal candidate, Richard Mathias, was the son of an Aberystwyth steamship owner and pursued careers as a barrister and banker in London before returning to the family shipowning firm. He was a political radical, supporting votes for all women and men and a national minimum wage – just right for the now firmly radical Cheltenham Liberals. But the national swing was against Mathias and, despite winning the largest Liberal vote ever of 3,850, he lost to Duncannon by 138 votes.

The chance of a rematch came in December 1910 when new Liberal Prime Minister Asquith went to the country again to win clearer public support for his attack on entrenched aristocratic privilege in the House of Lords. But in their desperation to unseat Duncannon, Mathias's campaign team overstepped some important marks. No sooner had they snatched victory by just ninety-three votes, than his election expenses were challenged. He took the oath of allegiance on 1 February, but by the end of March his agent, Mr Kessel, had already admitted that he had overspent, illegally paid for lifts to the polls and generally made a mess of the official election return. In court, Mathias's lawyers made some effort to clear his name, but he never made

a maiden speech and goes down in history as Cheltenham's shortest-serving MP.

Four votes, eighty years, three parties

Richard's brother, Major L. J. Mathias, contested the by-election caused by the expenses scandal in September 1911. The nervous local Tories had brought back the popular old warhorse Agg-Gardner yet again, and the Liberals lost after six recounts by just four votes. It was surely the most extraordinary comeback of Cheltenham political history. And it was a fateful moment for the Liberals. The party would be bitterly divided by the coming war, Agg-Gardner wouldn't now relinquish the seat until his death in 1928, and the Liberals would not regain it for more than eighty years. But it would not all be plain sailing for the Conservatives.

In 1918 Agg-Gardner comfortably held the seat as the wartime coalition candidate with a majority of 3,285 over an Independent Liberal. He went on to win the following elections of 1922, 1923 and 1924, although the Liberals shaved his majority back to 1,344 in the middle election. Made a privy counsellor for sheer longevity and affectionately nicknamed 'Minister for the Interior' for his services to Commons catering, the Right Honourable Sir James Tynte Agg-Gardner died in office in 1928.

Gardner's successor, the Conservative Sir Walter Preston, resigned his Commons seat in 1937, leaving Cheltenham an apparently safe Tory seat for the first time in its history. Preston had soundly defeated the Liberals in 1928 and 1929 and when division had left them with no candidate in Cheltenham and only Labour contesting the seat in 1931 and 1935, Preston trounced them too. The Tories had now won nine successive victories. Surely it was inconceivable that the Conservative Party would lose the subsequent by-election ...

The Jew has not so many friends ...

In 1922, the sporting and military private school Cheltenham College decided that the time for their separate Jewish boarding house was past. The incumbent housemaster Daniel

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Lipson was also president, secretary and treasurer of the Cheltenham Synagogue and in 1923 he set up an independent Jewish school. It didn't work out and closed in 1935. But the charismatic Lipson had already been elected as a county councillor in 1925 and a borough councillor in 1929 and in 1935 he became mayor of Cheltenham. When Preston retired, Lipson's name was discussed as an obvious successor. Whether because he wasn't a kosher Conservative or

simply because he was Jewish, the Tories picked Lieutenant-Colonel R. Tristram Harper instead. Showing his independent streak again, Lipson stood anyway, and an association was formed to support him as the 'Independent Conservative' candidate. Lipson polled 10,533 votes, beating the official Conservative by 339 votes.

In parliament, Lipson proved a gifted and frequent orator. He was at his most passionate in condemning

Nazism and, despite his support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, was prepared to support pro-Arab land regulations on the basis that 'at this time, Great Britain's interests are the interests of the Jew and the Jew has not so many friends in the world today that he can afford to quarrel with his best friend'.

1945 brought the defeat of Churchill by Attlee's Labour Party. Labour's vote in Cheltenham surged, too, but Lipson's surged more. Standing as a National Independent, he romped home with a majority of nearly 5,000 votes and knocked the official Conservative candidate, Major Hicks Beach, into a humiliating third place.

War, peace and Zion

By 1950, it had all changed, and in that year's election, the positions were almost perfectly reversed. Hicks Beach took the seat with a majority of nearly 5,000, while Lipson came third with just 25 per cent of the vote. Although there was a national swing to the Tories and every other independent MP lost their seat as well, it seems likely that other factors helped to end Lipson's career. Britain's role as mandated colonial administrator of Palestine had brought it into increasing conflict with the swelling Jewish population. In 1946, Zionist terrorists blew up the King David Hotel, killing 100 people in the British army's local headquarters. In 1947 there were reciprocal executions of Zionist terrorists and British military hostages. Anti-semitism in Britain increased, and anti-Jewish riots broke out in six British cities as the situation in Palestine deteriorated. The next year, Israel was born straight into a war with its Arab neighbours which Britain nearly entered on the Arab side after Israel shot down three British Spitfires over the Egyptian border.

Even the gifted, peace-loving Lipson, who treasured the Jewish relationship with Britain, was going to struggle for re-election as a pro-Zionist MP after all this. He continued to play an active role in Cheltenham local politics after his defeat and was awarded the freedom of the borough in 1953, an honour given to only Agg-Gardner and Baron de Ferrières amongst his predecessors.

Lipson's victorious successor in 1950, Major Bill Hicks Beach, was in

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many ways the archetypal Tory MP: an Eton and Cambridge-educated, Gloucestershire landowner. His successor, Douglas Dodds-Parker, was more famous for his earlier exploits in the Special Operations Executive's daring wartime intelligence and sabotage operations and for his disastrous spell as a minister defending Eden's doomed Suez policy, than for any subsequent achievement as MP for Cheltenham.

The strange rebirth of Liberal Cheltenham

Lipson's defeat ushered in forty years of consecutive Conservative victories, but the same era saw rapid growth in light industry and, from the 1950s, of GCHQ's highly qualified intelligence community, making it a less and less typical Tory county seat.

Labour nearly won the seat in 1966 but, when Harold Wilson called an election in October 1974, it was the reviving Liberals who posed a fresh threat to whoever took up the Tory baton. Freddie Rodger was standing again with the chance to squeeze Labour votes and close the gap on the Tories. The latter played safe, and chose a veteran county and borough councillor and former mayor, Charles Irving, as their candidate. He was also, usefully, a millionaire hotelier. In the event, votes nationally and locally swung back towards Labour and drifted away from Thorpe's Liberals again. Harold Wilson was back in Number Ten, and Irving was safely elected with a majority of 8,454 over an almost equally divided opposition.

As the Labour government descended into chaos, the 1979 election looked like a foregone conclusion, and Charles duly romped home in Cheltenham with the biggest Tory majority since 1935, beating Liberal Nigel Jones by 10,538. But Jones' determined community politics campaign did resolve the issue of who the challenger would be in future. He beat the Labour candidate by nearly 6,000 votes.

The political geography was changing dramatically. While Mrs Thatcher plumbed depths of unpopularity, Labour lurched further to the left, with right-wing defectors forming the new SDP and immediately allying with the Liberals. The new Alliance briefly commanded

the opinion polls, but the Falklands war transformed Mrs Thatcher's image and paved the way for a landslide victory in 1983.

With Jones abroad, the Cheltenham Liberals invited national party president Richard Holme to become probably the party's most heavyweight candidate since the Cheltenham seat's creation. With the added credibility of the new Alliance, their vote surged to more than 20,000, Labour's nearly halved and so did Charles' majority.

Victory, controversy and tragedy

By the next election, in 1987, Mrs Thatcher's popularity was waning again and Labour was reviving, but in Cheltenham the borough council had already fallen to the Alliance and the anti-Tory vote united behind Holme. Irving's majority fell below 5,000. That the parliamentary seat was still even relatively safe was testament to his huge personal popularity, but his health was failing and he stood down at the 1992 election. At national level, Mrs Thatcher had by then been ousted, and her replacement John Major was struggling to hold the government's different factions in check. The Liberals and now Liberal Democrats had been edging closer and closer to victory in Cheltenham for twenty years and were now the dominant party in local council elections. Richard Holme had taken a shortcut to parliament as Lord Holme of Cheltenham, so both parties were looking for new candidates.

After a close-fought selection contest, the Lib Dems chose the returning candidate from 1987, Nigel Jones, now a councillor and proven local campaigner. Despite the obvious vulnerability of the seat, the Tories bravely picked John Taylor, a Birmingham lawyer with no campaigning experience. In one TV interview he tactlessly described his choice of Cheltenham as 'just a box I ticked on a list'. More controversially, Taylor was also the party's first black candidate for a winnable seat and racist remarks were attributed to members of his own party during the campaign, a doubtless unconscious echo of the prejudice against Lipson that may have doomed their 1937 campaign.

The result that had looked increasingly inevitable following

For much of its history, Cheltenham was the setting for furious contests between the Liberal and Conservative traditions, with historic upsets a-plenty.

years of campaigning by Jones and his predecessors finally came about. Nigel snatched the seat with a narrow majority of 1,668, the first Liberal to represent Cheltenham for more than eighty years. Taylor later followed Richard Holme into the Lords as the Tories' first black peer but chose Warwick not Cheltenham as his territorial designation. His political career ended in disgrace in the aftermath of the expenses scandal earlier this year. Media comment that Nigel had won the seat because of Taylor's colour did a particular injustice both to years of Liberal campaigning and to Nigel's profoundly anti-racist politics. He went on to win two further victories with comfortable majorities in 1997 and 2001 and took on a bewildering variety of spokespersonships for the party in parliament. His second term was overshadowed by a sword attack by a mentally ill constituent who hospitalised Nigel and killed his friend and assistant Andy Pennington.

Postscript

Late in 2004, after repeated heart scares, Nigel accepted the inevitable advice of family and doctors to stand down as an MP. He became a working Liberal Democrat peer after the 2005 general election, the first former Cheltenham MP to enter the House of Lords since Lord Duncannon in 1937. The general election wins that year and again this year mark the longest run of Liberal victories since the days of the Berkeleys in the 1840s.

Cheltenham was indeed a safe-looking seat for the Tories in the early 1930s and again in the 1950s and 1970s, generally thanks to divided opposition. But for much of its history, it was the setting for furious contests between the Liberal and Conservative traditions, with historic upsets a-plenty.

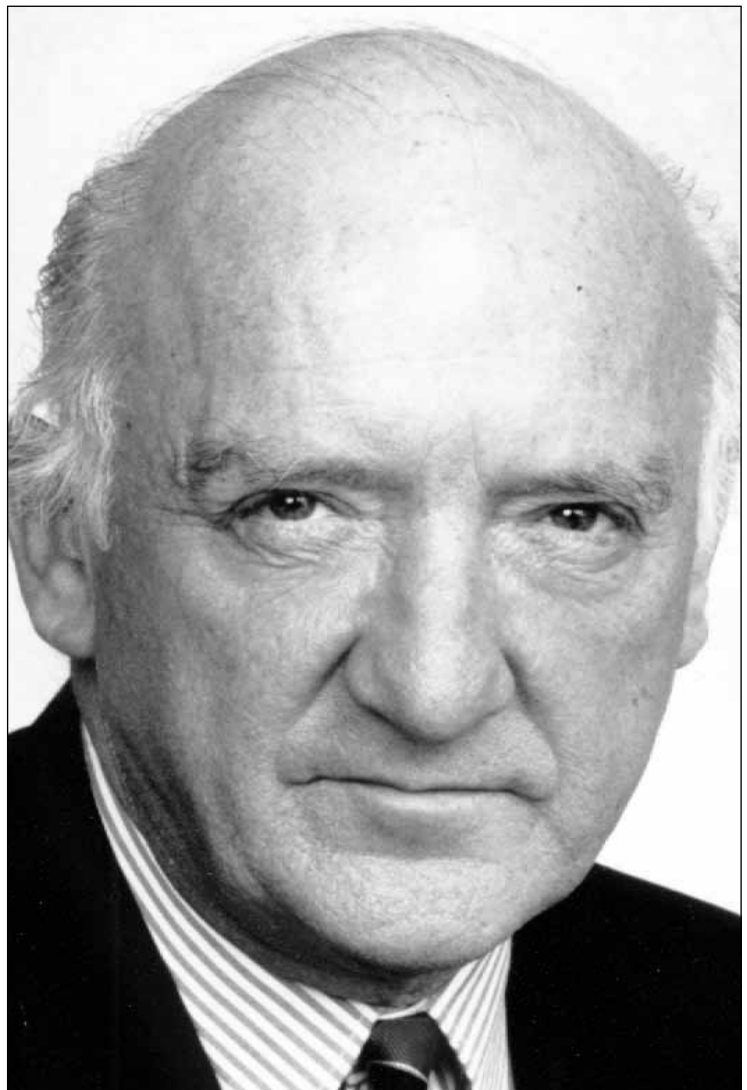
Martin Horwood MP was elected to represent Cheltenham in 2005 and re-elected in 2010. He is currently co-chair of the party's parliamentary committee on international affairs.

- 1 Slander, *A Correspondence between The Rev. F. Close, Mr. C. Berkeley, Mr. P. Thompson, and Major Payn* (Cheltenham, 1831)
- 2 James Agg-Gardner, *Some Parliamentary Recollections* (Burrow, 1927).
- 3 Ibid.

RUSSELL J

A PASSIONATE AND ARTICULA

Lord Russell-
Johnston, 1932–2008,
was a passionate and
articulate exponent
of Liberalism who
helped keep that cause
alive in Scotland
throughout the 1960s,
1970s and 1980s and
who throughout
his political career
expounded liberal
values in the cause of
home rule for Scotland,
international human
rights, and the creation
of a federal Europe.
Ross Finnie examines
the contribution to
Scottish, British and
European Liberalism of
Russell Johnston.



JOHNSTON

THE EXPONENT OF LIBERALISM

DAVID RUSSELL Johnston, known affectionately as 'Russell' to friend and foe alike, was the son of David Knox Johnston, a customs officer serving on Skye, and Margaret Russell who gave birth in an Edinburgh hospital. He was brought up on Skye and educated at Carbost Public School and Portree High School. After graduating MA (Hons) in history from the University of Edinburgh he did National Service, being commissioned into the Intelligence Corps and rising to become second-in-command of the British Intelligence Unit in Berlin. After National Service he returned to Edinburgh to take a teaching degree at Moray House College of Education and became a history teacher at Liberton secondary school near Edinburgh in 1961.

Johnston had a facility for languages being bilingual in English and Gaelic; he was later to become fluent in French and Italian. At both school and university, he displayed a talent for debating and was a member of the teams that won the Scotsman debating prize in 1956 and 1957 and the *Observer* Mace in 1961. Johnston joined the Liberal Party whilst at university, because he agreed with the writings of the Yorkshire Liberal Elliot Dodds,

and was sufficiently motivated to revive the University Liberal Club, becoming its President. Given his commitment to liberalism, his skills as a debater and public orator, and his combination of an engaging personality and pawky sense of humour, it was no surprise when he was adopted as the Liberal candidate for Inverness in 1961. Johnston's potential had been spotted by Jo Grimond, then the leader of the party, who, in turn, informed the party's winnable seats committee, chaired by Jeremy Thorpe MP. The committee enabled Johnston to concentrate on winning the election when in 1963 it organised the funding for a research post with the Scottish Liberal Party enabling him to quit his teaching job.¹

Johnston's predecessor in Inverness had been John Bannerman, the man he regarded as his political mentor. Bannerman had built up the Inverness seat since 1950. In 1961, however, as chairman of the Scottish party and one of its most charismatic figures, Bannerman decided to fight the Paisley by-election² and took 41.4 per cent of the vote to come just 1,654 votes behind Labour. Having come so close, Bannerman then decided to fight Paisley again in the 1964 general election, but a 7.5 per cent swing back to Labour kept him in second place.

Johnston, on the other hand, secured a swing of 6.9 per cent to defeat the sitting Tory MP Neil Mclean by 2,136 votes and become the Member of Parliament for Inverness. Johnston had not only built on Bannerman's work in terms of party membership and organisation but also on the need for a coherent campaign in the Scottish Highlands. This centred on the idea of a Highland Development Board, which Johnston developed further in the pamphlet *Highland Development*.³ The strategy elected not only Johnston in Inverness, but also George Mackie in Caithness and Sutherland and Alasdair Mackenzie in Ross and Cromarty, making Grimond no longer the sole Scottish Liberal MP.

Johnston served at Westminster continuously for thirty-three years, successfully defending his seat in eight consecutive elections. He served nineteen years for Inverness and, after boundary changes which saw the seat lose Johnston's native Skye, fourteen years for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (1964–87 as a Liberal; 1987–92 as a Liberal Democrat). Throughout, Johnston attended diligently to constituents' concerns and campaigned vigorously against what he saw as the social and economic neglect of the Highlands. Increasingly, however,

Johnston served at Westminster continuously for thirty-three years, successfully defending his seat in eight consecutive elections.

he paid less and less attention to the state of his local party and its capacity to fight elections and, as his attention turned more towards Europe, he became vulnerable to the charge made by his opponents: 'Russell's in Brussels'. The combination of these factors meant that, with the exception of the election in 1983, when the Liberals and the Social Democrat Party ('SDP') contested the election as the Alliance, Johnston's share of the vote never got above 40 per cent and in his last contest, in 1992, it dropped to only 26 per cent, the lowest percentage share by a winning candidate in the election, leaving him with a majority of only 458 after three recounts.

The year after Johnston was first elected, he was joined at Westminster by David Steel, following the latter's by-election victory in Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles. After Grimond stepped down as leader in 1967, Johnston and Steel went on to dominate the party in Scotland for the next three decades. Although they did not always agree, and Steel went on to become leader of the party, both, in their different ways, played a major part in developing the party in the UK from being a disparate body of just ten MPs in 1965, to presenting a more coherent political force, as the Liberal Democrats, with twenty-six MPs, by the time they both retired from Parliament in 1997.

Whilst being part of a small parliamentary team almost guaranteed a portfolio, nevertheless Johnston's talents were always recognised and he was a front-bench spokesperson throughout his parliamentary career. His first portfolio was education (1964–66), and he then moved on to Northern Ireland (1966–70), foreign affairs (1970–75, 1979–85), Scottish affairs (1970–73, 1975–83, 1985–88), defence (1983–88), and, for the Liberal Democrats, foreign and commonwealth affairs (1988–94), European community affairs (1988–94), East–West relations (1992–94), and central and eastern Europe (1994–97). In addition, Johnston was a member of the Parliamentary Committee for Privileges from 1988 to 1992. Throughout his parliamentary career, Johnston took a particular interest in the rights of the blind, serving as parliamentary spokesman for the Scottish National Federation for the Welfare of the Blind from 1967 to 1997 and

as parliamentary representative for the Royal National Institute for the Blind from 1977 to 1997.

Johnston served on the executive of the Scottish Liberal Party and then the Scottish Liberal Democrats for thirty-three years from 1961 to 1994. He became vice-chairman in 1965 and chairman in 1970. He was elected to the new position of leader of the Scottish party in 1974 and was president from 1988 to 1994. He also sought and held office at a UK level. In 1976, on the resignation of Thorpe, who had been leader of the UK party since 1967, Johnston sought the UK leadership, but only John Pardoe, who was also standing, was prepared to nominate him. Johnston then backed Pardoe against Steel who was elected. Following the merger with the SDP, Johnston was elected unopposed as deputy leader of the Social and Liberal Democrats in each of the years 1988 to 1992.

Having been attracted to the Liberal Party by the writings of Elliot Dodds, and being an accomplished orator and lucid writer, Johnston spent much of his time articulating the principles of Liberalism in which he so passionately believed. In 1972 he wrote and published a pamphlet, *To Be a Liberal*,⁴ which stands comparison with many excellent treatises on Liberalism published before and after. For some time, the Scottish party sent a copy to anyone exhibiting an interest in liberalism, and many prominent members of the Scottish party in the 1990s, such as Jim Wallace (MP for Orkney and Shetland 1983–2001, MSP for Orkney 1999–2007, leader of the Scottish party 1993–2005) attest to having joined the party after reading Johnston's pamphlet.

The pamphlet sets out a broad canvas of liberal thinking and its application and relevance to current affairs. Many passages from the pamphlet appear in Johnston's later speeches and writings but the following quotations on the primacy of the individual and on the need for government to occur at the most appropriate level represent themes that recurred as he pursued not only home rule, but also international human rights and European federalism.

Because Liberalism is about the individual, it makes the assumption that if we concentrate on

him, justice for the group, of which he is a part, will follow logically. While the converse is untrue. In this it is fundamentally set apart from philosophies like Communism, Socialism and Nationalism, which start from this converse, seek to better the group and believe that this will lead, in time, to the improvement of the individual's lot.⁵

It [Liberalism] is a philosophy of distributivism, of decentralisation and devolution. In Government, the Liberal looks for solutions which, at one and the same time, will facilitate co-operation over the widest field – hence his enthusiasm for the European Community and the United Nations – and at the same time involve individuals to the fullest extent in regulating their own communities by creating federal institutions which recognise national aspirations, by strengthening local government and decentralising the maximum degree of power possible to the smallest unit possible.⁶

From before he was adopted as a parliamentary candidate through to the early 1980s, Johnston undertook a wide range of speaking engagements throughout the UK at which he demonstrated his oratorical skills and, invariably, moved his audience to understand why liberalism mattered. He also addressed public meetings during general elections and by-elections, which was much appreciated, by candidates, party workers and the public. Johnston's annual conference speeches were inspirational (and, incidentally, almost always contained a reference to his mentor Bannerman). Based on his elegantly crafted script and delivered in classical oratorical style, they took on a legendary quality and became as eagerly awaited at Federal assemblies (of the Scottish, English and Welsh parties) as at Scottish conferences. The two published volumes of Johnston's speeches are not only a splendid commentary on contemporary politics from a Scottish perspective but also a significant record of the Scottish contribution to Liberal thinking and confirm Johnston's constancy of approach in an ever-changing political landscape. Perhaps his best remembered quotation is the epithet with which he closed

Because Liberalism is about the individual, it makes the assumption that if we concentrate on him, justice for the group, of which he is a part, will follow logically. While the converse is untrue.

his 1971 conference speech: 'To be a Liberal and to know it is enough.'⁷

After the election of 1966, Johnston's clear understanding of Scottish affairs saw him appointed as a member of the Royal Commission on Local Government in Scotland which reported in 1969.⁸ Comprising five out of the twelve members of the parliamentary party, the Scots were a dominant force and their failure to agree on whether or not to have an electoral pact with the Scottish Nationalists was described by Steel as: 'the running sore of the 1966–70 parliament.'⁹ That running sore provided the second of two examples of Johnston never being afraid to speak his mind and never cavilling at taking on the establishment. First, in 1968, prior to the Federal assembly in Edinburgh, Johnston denounced Grimond as a 'dilettante revolutionary' for questioning the role of democracy¹⁰ and later criticised him during his speech to the Assembly. As Grimond's biographer, Michael McManus, observed: 'to attack Grimond once might be regarded as a mistake but to do so twice was wanton iconoclasm.'¹¹ Second, Johnston clashed with Grimond again over nationalism, and when, in 1969, Grimond called for cooperation with the Nationalists, this drew a tart response from Johnston to the effect that nationalist parties are far from liberal.¹² Johnston effectively won that argument because, whilst cooperation with the Nationalists was raised again, it never became a serious proposition. Referring to his clashes with Grimond, at the Scottish conference in June 1976, Johnston paid Grimond a fulsome tribute adding mischievously: 'You and I have not always agreed, but then it's not reasonable for you to expect to be right all the time!'¹³

Johnston, however, was not opposed to all forms of cooperation between political parties: quite the reverse. He made this clear, for example, in 1970 at the meeting of the parliamentary party to consider Prime Minister Ted Heath's offer of a coalition. The majority not only rejected the offer but stated it was quite wrong ever to consider collaboration of that kind with another party. Johnston supported Grimond and Steel in the view that it was nonsense for a party that believed in proportional representation not to be willing, in principle,

Johnston drew a distinction between three concepts: the nation as the symbolic community which gives your feeling of identity; nationalism as an emotional commitment to the nation becoming a nation state; and the nation state as a political formation which rules over a given territory defined by its borders.

to work with others in the right circumstances.¹⁴

Johnston was a passionate Scot. He was a fluent Gaelic speaker who each year attended the premier Gaelic festival, the Royal National Mod. He was an enthusiast for shinty (a Scottish variation of hurling) serving as vice chief of the sport's governing body, the Camanachd Association, from 1987 to 1990. He wore his kilt with skean dhu with pride on all major occasions, including while delivering his maiden speech in the House of Commons, despite the rule forbidding the carrying of offensive weapons, and, as leader, when delivering his annual speech to the Scottish conference. But he was not a nationalist.

Johnston drew a distinction between three concepts: the nation as the symbolic community which gives your feeling of identity; nationalism as an emotional commitment to the nation becoming a nation state; and the nation state as a political formation which rules over a given territory defined by its borders. He stated, for example: 'The recognition of national identity is a basic part of the whole liberal ethos as spelt out by Gladstone and Asquith and Sinclair and McCormick and Bannerman.'¹⁵ And again: 'My criticism of the SNP has ... concentrated on the concept and the fact that I as a Liberal, pledged to a person based philosophy, while able not only to accept but advance devolutionary and federal structures, found the exclusivity of nationalism unacceptable.'¹⁶

Two years after entering parliament, and two years off the half century of the introduction of the Bill for Scottish Self-Government by Asquith's Liberal administration in 1914, Johnston introduced, on St Andrews Day 1966, a Scottish Self-Government Bill.¹⁷ The bill proposed the devolution of powers to a single-chamber parliament, to be called the Scots Parliament, with a Scottish Treasury and powers to levy and collect all taxes in Scotland other than the duties of customs and excise. The bill fell when the government whips objected to it at second reading.

Given his frequent references to the unfairness of the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system, the one glaring omission from Johnston's bill was any reference

to proportional representation. Despite the defeat of his bill, Johnston remained a consistent and persistent advocate for home rule and, in 1972, he reaffirmed his conviction, adding proportional representation to his argument. 'I am certain that the Scots, given a fair electoral system and the opportunity to consider their future as a nation ... would opt for a form of self-government.'¹⁸ That statement was made in anticipation of the publication of the Kilbrandon Commission's proposals on the constitution which reported in 1973.¹⁹ After a lengthy delay, the Labour government introduced in 1976 an unwieldy and complex bill which combined two different schemes for Scottish and Welsh Assemblies. It progressed very slowly through its committee stage and finally fell in February 1977.

Johnston showed his willingness to cooperate with other parties when, in March 1977, he supported Steel's package of measures which was to form the basis of the agreement that became known as the Lib-Lab pact. Johnston believed that, with the country facing a serious economic crisis with inflation verging on 20 per cent, the nation needed not only proposals for economic recovery but also the will of political parties to cooperate.²⁰ He also supported the measures in the package for direct elections to the European Parliament, and for devolution for Scotland and Wales, with the possibility of all of these elections being by proportional representation. At the meeting of the parliamentary party to discuss the continuation of the pact, following the defeat of the proposal for proportional representation for elections to the European Parliament, Johnston again supported Steel in the vote, which Steel won by six votes to four with two abstentions and with one member absent.²¹

During the pact, Johnston was appointed by Steel to lead the Liberal team of negotiators on the drafting of a Scottish Assembly Bill. Johnston was credited by Steel as having 'done a very workmanlike reconstruction of the devolution package'²² that had been originally produced and stoutly defended by Labour's John Smith. The Scotland and Wales Bills that followed became acts in 1978. The acts provided for referenda to be held but with a threshold requiring

40 per cent of the registered electorate to vote in favour of the proposition before it could be introduced. In the referenda held on 1 March 1979, the Scots voted in favour by a narrow majority but it represented only 33 per cent of those entitled to vote, thus failing the 40 per cent test, whereas the Welsh voted against by 80 per cent.

Johnston continued to argue the case for home rule, but there was no appetite for such a measure within the Conservative governments led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Johnston had laid the ground, however, and in 1989, one year after he stepped down as Scottish leader, the Scottish Constitutional Convention was established chaired jointly by Steel and the former Labour Scottish Minister Lord Harry Ewing. The Convention, which reported in 1995, produced the blueprint for a Scottish Parliament, but, by the time the Labour government passed the Scotland Act 1998, Johnston had left the House of Commons.

Although Johnston went on to become one of the most powerful advocates for merger with the SDP, when cooperation with the SDP was first mooted he was sceptical. He had often commented upon what he described as the two Labour parties: the social democrats and the tribunitives glued together by the chance of office.²³ Johnston had also long seen merit in talking to members of the social democrat wing of the Labour party such as Shirley Williams, whom he described in 1979 as 'a Liberal',²⁴ and Roy Jenkins, to whom he gave fulsome praise for his contribution in securing a 'Yes' vote in the 1975 European referendum,²⁵ but he could not forget that, for the chance of office, both had voted against the legislation that allowed the UK to join the European Community in 1972. Johnston, therefore, made his position clear: 'Of course, I'm in favour of co-operation but I'm not selling the great Liberal tradition ... for a mish-mash of unsalted social democratic porridge.'²⁶

Johnston's concerns were answered by Steel and Jenkins (leader of the SDP) making it clear, at the outset, that any form of cooperation was to be on the basis of a statement of principles. Johnston was therefore happy to lead the negotiations with the SDP

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in Scotland and on 12 September 1981 he moved the resolution for the formation of the Alliance in Scotland²⁷ that presaged the passing of a similar motion at the Federal assembly in Llandudno. The SDP then approved arrangements for an Alliance and, by October, guidelines had been agreed for dividing up constituencies between the parties. Johnston led for the Liberals in Scotland but he found the SDP's formulaic approach very difficult as he believed the determining factor should be: 'who will achieve the best result for the Alliance.'²⁸ Despite this very different approach, Johnston persevered and agreement was reached, but not always in accordance with Johnston's preference.

In the immediate aftermath of Jenkins's by-election victory in Hillhead in March 1982, Johnston spoke about the kind of approach and the kind of programme the Alliance was putting before the electorate, describing it as being within the framework of Liberalism and the Liberal Party because 'the Alliance was coming together with such a minimum of ideological difficulty.'²⁹ Johnston campaigned with renewed vigour in the 1983 general election in which the Alliance gained 25.4 per cent of the vote but managed to take only 3.5 per cent of the seats. Following the election, Johnston was amongst the first of the Liberal MPs to advocate a full merger with the SDP but got little support from within the party and the new leader of the SDP, David Owen, had set his face against such a move.

When Steel called for a merger between the two parties, shortly after the 1987 general election, Johnston swiftly and enthusiastically supported the call but with the caveat that the merged party should be called the Liberal Democrat Party. Merger was agreed in September and Steel summed up the conference at Harrogate thus: 'the Assembly voted overwhelmingly for a new political party in a spirit typified by an inspirational speech by Russell Johnston.'³⁰

Johnston was first given responsibility for the foreign affairs portfolio in 1970 and, whilst he spoke knowledgeably on all aspects of international affairs, he took a particular interest in promoting liberty, democracy, human rights, and international cooperation.

His judgement, however, was not always sound. Following two visits to Greece in 1968 as a guest of the military government to see the conditions in which political prisoners were held, he exonerated the colonels, describing them as 'officers and gentlemen', which infuriated Amnesty International amongst others.³¹

Johnston defended the resistance to Iran's theocratic regime for three decades having become deeply concerned about the suppression of human rights and democracy in Iran following Ayatollah Khomeini's appointment as the country's religious and political leader in 1979. In 1982, along with six other Liberal MPs, he wrote a letter to Massoud Rajavi, president of the National Council of Resistance of Iran and leader of the People's Mojahedin of Iran ('PMOI') to declare their support and that of their party for the Iranian's people's resistance.³² In 2006, Johnston joined Lord Alton of Liverpool and others to mount an eventually successful legal challenge to the UK government over its ban on Iran's main democratic opposition group, the PMOI.³³

Johnston was quietly sympathetic to the Palestinians and made several visits to the Middle East, including one in 1980, when, as foreign affairs spokesman, he was part of Steel's team that carried out an extensive visit to the region lasting over a fortnight. The report of the delegation had a material effect on shifting the perception of the party as being uninterested in the Arab side of the problem and an uncritical supporter of the state of Israel to a more balanced position supporting the right of Israel to exist within internationally recognised and secure borders but as part of a solution that involved the creation of a Palestinian homeland.³⁴

Johnston's acute antennae for foreign affairs often identified crucial issues in advance of other MPs. One example was in 1991, when the Yugoslav tanks were rolling into Ljubljana, the Slovenian capital. He already had questions on the order paper to the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, and was quickly able to ask the government to assuage his fears on the trouble that lay ahead in the event of a possible break up of the Yugoslav federation.³⁵ In 1992, he accompanied Paddy Ashdown,

then leader of the Liberal Democrats, throughout the Balkans and was filmed at Manjaca a prison camp, which was alleged to have breached human rights, and where emaciated victims were found.³⁶ In 1993, he beseeched Radovan Karadzic, the Bosnian Serb leader, to accept the Cyrus Vance/David Owen settlement and warned Karadzic of the dire consequences if he refused. His warnings proved to be all too accurate.³⁷

Johnston's enthusiasm for the devolution of power as expressed through self-government at home was matched by his enthusiasm for the development of cooperation between the regions and nations of Europe. 'What the Liberal seeks is a sensitive and fair chain of government from the individual up to the broadest practical level, which one day will be world government.'³⁸ Johnston believed that the solution to dealing with the remote and sensitive parts of Europe might be: 'in the end a con-federal answer, indeed an answer perhaps through the European Parliament based not on the existing states of Europe but on the regions and nations within them.'³⁹ 'Europe des Regions', as he put it.⁴⁰

After the UK's accession to the EU in 1973, Johnston volunteered to become a member of the UK Delegation to the European Assembly from 1973–75 and, after a break of nine months, from 1976–79. He was desperately keen to become a directly elected member of the European Parliament and stood for the Highlands and Islands constituency in the 1979 election. He was hugely disappointed when he lost by the narrow margin of 3,882 votes to the Nationalist, Winnie Ewing who had come to prominence in 1967 with a famous by-election victory in Hamilton, then the second safest Labour-held seat in Scotland. During the election campaign, Johnston had faced two major problems. First, his passionate belief in a federal Europe with members of the European parliament acting together on shared political objectives rather than on the basis of narrow nationalism was not only ahead of its time but also it did not resonate with the electorate. Second, he was thought by his constituents to be overstretching himself and his failure to declare whether he would relinquish his Westminster seat, if successful, was said to have counted against him.

His disappointment in 1979 was nothing compared to the devastation he felt in 1984 when he was heavily defeated by Ewing by 16,277 votes. By then, however, Ewing had positioned herself as Scotland's voice in Europe and earned herself the sobriquet 'Madame Ecosse'. Despite Johnston declaring he would relinquish his Westminster seat, Highland voters were clear: they had sent Johnston to represent them at Westminster in 1983 with his biggest ever majority and, in 1984 with a swing of nearly 8 per cent to the Nationalists, mostly from the Conservatives, they returned Ewing to represent them in Europe.

There were a number of factors that contributed to Johnston's sense of devastation in defeat. There was a sense of hurt that, as a proud Highlander, he had again been rejected by his ain folk. This was compounded by the fact that the winner was not a Highlander and was a member of the Nationalist party that had campaigned for a 'No' vote in the 1975 European referendum. Perhaps above all else, however, having become increasingly disillusioned about his own and the party's prospects at Westminster, Johnston had come to believe that his political future lay in the European Parliament.

Determined to pursue his interest in European affairs, Johnston turned to the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe and of the Western European Union. Johnston found a particular resonance with the fact that the Council of Europe had been established with the express purpose of promoting human rights and democracy and achieving greater unity amongst its members. Johnston became a member of the UK delegation to both assemblies in 1984–85 and again from 1987 until his death.

Johnston was a very active member of the Council of Europe. He was heavily engaged in the Council's programmes of assistance to states that were either former members of the Soviet Union or part of the former Yugoslavia. He was part of numerous delegations and visits, including to Poland, preparatory to its full membership of the European Union in 2004, to Armenia and Azerbaijan as they prepared for membership of the Council of Europe in 2001, and to Macedonia

prior to its joining the Council in 1995. With one of the conditions of membership of the Council being respect for human rights, Johnston also took part in investigations into a number of allegations of possible breaches of human rights. These included denial of freedom of expression in Greece in 1999; progress towards the human rights of Croatian Serbs in 2001; and into Chechen victims of human rights abuses in 2002. As part of the process of members of the European Council having to establish a pluralistic democracy, Johnston also frequently acted as an observer of the conduct of parliamentary elections such as in Albania in 1997, Armenia and the Russian Federation in 2003 and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2006.⁴¹

Within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, he led the Liberal Democratic and Reformers' Group from 1994 to 1999 and was chairman of the Committee for Culture and Education from 1996 to 1999. Within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union he was a member of the Defence Committee and was twice its vice chairman: first from 1984 to 1986 and again from 2002 until his death.

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to its work for nearly fifteen years, Johnston was elected president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe from 1999 to 2002. The presidency was probably the pinnacle of his political career. Johnston described how, having had no opportunity to serve in government he found being 'projected on to an international world where one represented an Assembly – covering forty one states and 800 million people – an especially vivid and wonderful experience.'⁴²

Johnston was made a Knight Commander in 1985 and, when he retired from the House of Commons in 1997, he was created a life peer changing his surname by deed poll to Russell-Johnston and taking the title Lord Russell-Johnston of Minginish in Highland. Johnston was also awarded Grand Cross Orders by Austria, Romania and San Marino and an Order of Merit from Albania.

Johnston was regarded with great affection by all those who came in contact with him, especially those

Johnston's enthusiasm for the devolution of power as expressed through self-government at home was matched by his enthusiasm for the development of cooperation between the regions and nations of Europe.

who worked for him in the party, at Westminster and in Europe. He was regarded as a genial colleague with a delightful sense of humour. He was always accessible, an engaging conversationalist who was keen to socialise, to share a measure (or more) of Scotch whisky or to join you for a meal accompanied by a glass of fine wine.

Johnston married Joan Graham Menzies in 1967 and they had three sons: Graham, David and Andrew. When Johnston was writing speeches or articles he displayed a consistently logical approach but this was in stark contrast to his personal life where he conspired to lead a totally chaotic life style: constantly travelling; generously agreeing to speaking engagements; and, as a consequence, committing to near impossible schedules. His family life suffered greatly not just from this but also from his passionate and, at times, obsessive pursuit of European affairs, with the result that he had been estranged from his wife Joan for over a decade prior to his death, although they remained close. He was an avid reader, a skilled photographer and a compulsive writer of postcards – to the delight of the very many recipients who were kept abreast of his worldwide travels, but a scant consolation to his family. For every post card he wrote, he retained a copy thus amassing a remarkable record of his itinerant life style.

Johnston collapsed and died on the eve of his seventy-sixth birthday, in a street in Paris, which had become his favourite city. He had been diagnosed earlier in the year with cancer of the bone marrow, for which he was receiving chemotherapy, but had continued to work on human rights issues for the Council of Europe. Following his death, Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats, paid this tribute: ‘Lord Russell-Johnston was an institution in his own right. A long-standing MP in the Highlands, a liberal to his fingertips ... but above all a committed lifelong pro-European. Just last week on the last occasion I saw him he was pressing me on the latest European issues of the day. He will be sorely missed, not only by his friends, family and colleagues in the UK but by all those countless people whose lives he touched throughout Europe.’³³

Two memorial services were held in honour of Johnston. The

Johnston was regarded with great affection by all those who came in contact with him, especially those who worked for him in the party, at Westminster and in Europe.

first was organised by the Iranian Resistance movement at its headquarters in Paris and the second by his family, friends and former constituents in St Andrews Cathedral, Inverness. In Paris, tributes were led by Maryam Rajavi, president elect of the national Council of Resistance of Iran. In her address Maryam Rajavi described Lord Russell-Johnston as ‘a man fighting for justice and a great ally ... a symbol who represented (Britain’s) enduring values.’³⁴ In Inverness, his friend and former parliamentary colleague and former party leader, David Steel concluded his warm tribute by quoting from the Introduction to Johnston’s first volume of speeches.

Language can sometimes be inadequate to represent feeling, but for me Liberalism is a Positive Balance. It is a centre in the sense that people of Liberal disposition are motivated always to seek to bridge differences between people, rather than simply to pick and condemn one group outright for intransigence or stupidity or malice. How to reconcile free men and women with each other, without force, that is the aim of the Liberal. How to build a society that is law abiding and caring, thrustful yet protective, creative yet respectful, tolerant yet responsible, just yet kind, dispassionate yet compassionate. In the translation of the Latin, Liber: free and generous. The perpetual search for ways of reconciling order with understanding, stricture with sympathy, hope with reality.

It is a profoundly radical approach-going to the root of all problems – in a society which regards kindness as boring, compassion as weak, fairness as foolish.

And it is difficult. And it is complicated. And it does not appeal to the self-interested or the self-righteous or the simplistic or the militant.

A credo with a valid claim to provide the basic rules for human society cannot be other than complex and full of is and buts and perhaps-es.³⁵

Steel aptly and succinctly summed up this quotation as: ‘Quintessentially Russell’.

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- 3 Russell Johnston, *Highland Development* (Scottish Liberal Party, 1964).
- 4 Russell Johnston, *To be a Liberal* (Scottish Liberal Party, 1972).
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 6 *Ibid.*
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- 8 Royal Commission on Local Government in Scotland 1966–1969, Chairman The Rt Hon. Lord Wheatly, Cmnd 4150 HMSO, 1969.
- 9 David Steel, *Against Goliath: David Steel’s Story* (George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd, 1989), p. 59.
- 10 Michael McManus, *Jo Grimond: Towards the Sound of Gunfire* (Birlinn Limited, 2001), p. 303.
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- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 307.
- 13 Johnston, *Conference Speeches*, p. 55.
- 14 Steel, *Against Goliath*, p. 80.
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REPORTS

Lords reform 1911–2011

Conference fringe meeting, 11 March 2011, with Lord Norton and Lord Marks; chair: Baroness Scott
Report by Mark Pack

ONE HUNDRED years on from the 1911 Parliament Act, the Liberal Democrat History Group's Sheffield conference meeting looked at the history of Lords reform – what has happened in the intervening 100 years and is major reform now really just round the corner?

Ably chaired by former Liberal Democrat President Baroness Ros Scott, the meeting started with her recounting how her own personal experiences of the House of Lords were a reflection of how often Lords reform had been promised imminently but never quite arrived. When Baroness Scott was made a peer in 1999, Charles Kennedy – then Liberal Democrat leader – said to her that, since the Labour government was fully committed to Lords reform, she would not be there for long. Twelve years on, there she still is.

Philip Norton (Lord Norton of Louth), a Conservative peer and renowned constitutionalist, provided the historical background

to current Lords reform debates. He pointed out that, although the ostensible stimulus for the Parliament Act was the rejection of the 1909 People's Budget, this was in fact only an immediate trigger and that there were two causes rooted more deeply in history. The first dated back to the days of Pitt the Younger, who secured the creation of a large number of new peers, giving the chamber a Tory (and later Conservative) majority. This gave the Lords a partisan dominance that was a problem when there were Liberal prime ministers. Second, the Great Reform Act and then, more importantly, the 1867 Reform Act introduced a level of popular involvement in elections that raised an expectation that parliament overall should be elected by the public. Norton quoted a prophetic warning by Lord Shaftesbury, during the 1867 Reform Act debates, who had said that it would have an impact on the Lords, because 'in the presence of this great democratic power, and the advance of this great democratic

wave, it passes my comprehension to understand how a hereditary house like this [the Lords] can hold its own'.

The mounting difference between an unelected Lords and a Commons elected on an increasingly broad franchise, compounded by the frequent rejection of Liberal measures by a Tory-dominated Lords, resulted in a Liberal resolution to 'mend or end' the upper chamber. Lords reform featured in the Newcastle Programme of 1891, and in 1907 a Cabinet committee was created by the Liberal government to look at Lords reform. All this predated the 1909 People's Budget and so showed, Norton said, that the famous crisis it triggered was not the underlying reason for Lords reform.

However, Norton did believe that nature of the immediate events of the 1909 crisis was important in shaping the Lords reform that took place. Asquith initially favoured the notion that, if the Lords blocked legislation, this would be resolved by a conference (or conciliation committee) made up of all MPs and a smaller number of Lords. However, this was rejected, and instead the Lords were given the ability to delay rather than reject – and then solely for non-money bills and only for two parliamentary sessions.

Norton also pointed out that the Liberal Party's failure to win a strong mandate in the two 1910 elections in some ways assisted the passage of Lords reform, because it made them dependent on Irish Nationalist MPs who – with memories of home rule legislation – were much keener on Lords reform than many Liberals. The Nationalists demanded Lords reform in return for support for the Liberal Budget.

In considering the nature of the reform, the Liberal Cabinet decided that it did not wish to change the composition of the Lords, for fear that this would strengthen the mandate of the Lords in any future disputes (something with shades of later controversies). It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that Lords reform moved from the issue of the powers of the Lords to that of its composition, with the concomitant and continuing controversy over whether such reform would strengthen the Lords and therefore impede further reform. Hence it was a

In considering the nature of the reform, the Liberal Cabinet decided that it did not wish to change the composition of the Lords, for fear that this would strengthen the mandate of the Lords in any future disputes

Conservative – Lord Salisbury – who was primarily responsible for the introduction of life peerages in 1958, which were opposed by the Labour Party.

Norton's view was that the 1958 reforms and the abolition of the right of hereditary peers to have seats in the House, in 1999, had, indeed, ended up strengthening the position of the Lords. The influx of new people following the 1958 act revitalised the House of Lords, bringing in active members, as well as altering the political balance and so giving the Lords more authority and legitimacy – which in turn gave its members greater confidence in using its powers.

Jonathan Marks (Lord Marks of Henley-on-Thames), a Liberal Democrat peer and lawyer, looked at the contemporary situation, looking at the prospects for the Coalition Agreement's commitment to Lords reform, creating a wholly or mainly elected Lords on the basis of proportional representation. Marks highlighted that the 1911 reform talked of introducing elections, but not 'immediately'; as he said, a century is a long time to have been relying on a stop-gap measure. Marks also reminded the audience that hereditary peers, even in very reduced numbers, are still present in Lords and he raised the incongruity of the election that was then underway to elect a replacement hereditary peer by the alternative vote following a recent death.

Marks pointed out that the tradition of Lords reform is for temporary reforms – 1911 and then 1998 – to end up becoming long-term. Despite the long gestation period, Marks said he expected pre-legislative scrutiny of the government's Lords reform proposals to take around a year. He emphasised how little agreement there was over the future composition and powers of the Lords, and expected that changes to its composition would require its powers to be reviewed.

Marks said that, almost without exception, reformers believe that the Commons should have supremacy over a reformed Lords. As a matter of principle, Marks believes in an 100 per cent elected upper house, but he thought this point would be used by some to argue in favour of an 80 per cent elected upper house, that being the number that has emerged as

Marks pointed out that the tradition of Lords reform is for temporary reforms – 1911 and then 1998 – to end up becoming long-term.

the frontrunner for an alternative to 100 per cent. In an 80 per cent elected house, it would be possible, and still desirable in Marks's view, for all the political members to be elected, leaving the remaining 20 per cent to be spiritual members, crossbenchers and possibly some particular former post holders, such as Speakers and Chiefs of the Defence Staff. Norton however doubted that all 20 per cent in such a situation would be left to non-politicians, thinking of people such as ex-Cabinet members. He also highlighted the issue of representing some religions in the Lords due to their non-hierarchical nature, making selecting any representatives from them problematic.

Despite this potentially very radical nature of this reform, Marks also said he did not necessarily think that the current reforms would be the final word on the matter. In addition, he talked of long terms of office that would most likely mean elections by thirds every five years, providing a natural mechanism for a gradual, phased introduction of the reforms and replacement of existing members. For the elections themselves, open lists and STV are the only likely electoral options in Marks's view. In terms of both how the Lords operates and ensuring that it continues to be seen as subsidiary to the Commons, a voting system that did not have a tight constituency link would be preferable, he said. He also emphasised the opportunity that such elections would offer for improving the diversity of Parliament, even perhaps including job-share provisions.

Given the number of opponents of Lords reform, including his

fellow speaker Norton, Marks said the government has to make clear a willingness to use the Parliament Act so that people concentrate on the options rather than attempting to delay reform altogether.

During the questions at the end of the session, Norton made the point that the swing voters in the Lords used to be the Liberal Democrats, but a combination of the Lib Dems going into government and crossbenchers turning out in greater numbers meant that significant power had shifted to the latter.

The two speakers disagreed over how likely it was that filibustering would take place over Lords reform: Norton saying that it was only a feasible tactic for the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill because of the referendum deadline, but Marks doubting that there would be any shortage of excuses found to filibuster reform. Bearing this in mind and the way that recently enobled members from the Commons seemed to be changing the culture of the Lords, Marks thought changes in the business procedures of the Lords was likely. That two such knowledgeable members of the Lords both had different expectations and hopes for the future of the Lords left the meeting's attendees in no doubt that there is much debate yet to come as the next stage in the history of the Lords is shaped.

You can watch the meeting in full at <http://vimeo.com/21522060>.

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Class of '81: who are the true heirs to the SDP?

Centre Forum meeting, 21 March 2011, with Andrew Adonis, Chris Huhne MP and Greg Clark MP; chair: Roland Rudd
Report by **Tom Frostick**

MY PARENTS first met while serving on the Hertsmere area committee of the Social Democratic Party (SDP); they were active members around

the time I was born – which, one could argue, makes me a child of the SDP? However, if you ask my parents who they think are the 'true heirs' to their former party, you

are likely get two quite different responses. After the dissolution of the SDP in 1988, one stuck with the Liberal Democrats; the other, several years later, turned to New Labour. Why so? For no particular reason except that one of them was in more of a hurry to see off John Major's ageing, and increasingly unpopular, Conservative government. This is what New Labour promised, and, in 1997, this is what New Labour achieved. The Liberal Democrats doubled their number of parliamentary seats that year, but with a smaller percentage of the vote than in 1992.

To most former members of the SDP, my parents included, Labour's 1997 landslide victory was a moment of relief. It marked the end of the Conservatives' eighteen-year rule and the arrival of a new kind of politics which was broad based and progress oriented. Policies that the SDP had once included in its manifestos finally stood a chance of becoming reality. For, as far as its stance on multilateralism, the EU and welfare was concerned, New Labour was SDP mark II – the more popular, more robust and long-lasting version – a vehicle for drifting social democrats. If the Lib Dems are what the SDP became, New Labour was what the SDP sought to be, argues ex-SDP member and Labour peer Andrew Adonis. And why not?

Of course, the story of the SDP and its lasting legacy is by no means simple. Thirty years on from the Limehouse Declaration, former SDP members occupy senior positions in all three main political parties, and the jury is very much out on whether Tony Blair and his colleagues truly earned themselves the title 'heirs'. As Polly Toynbee observes, 'those who were part of [the SDP] tend to rewrite the history to suit whatever we did next'. Indeed – and it is because of this tendency that CentreForum, the liberal think tank, invited Lord Adonis along with two other ex-SDP members, Chris Huhne and Conservative decentralisation minister, Greg Clark, to address an audience at Portcullis House at the end of March. Among the hundred or so who attended 'Class of '81: who are the true heirs to the SDP?' were a number of familiar faces, including two members of the original 'gang of four', Bill Rodgers and

Shirley Williams, and the family of the late Roy Jenkins. David Owen gave his apologies through a letter read out at the end by Roland Rudd, who chaired the discussion. The timing of the event (21 March) may have confused editors at the *Guardian*, which wrongly reported that the Limehouse Declaration was made 'thirty years ago today'. In fact, it was made on 25 January 1981. The 'gang of four' launched the party over two months later on 26 March.

Anyone who studies the history of the SDP will (or at least should) feel satisfied that things are not nearly as bad today as they were three decades ago. At 'Class of '81', Lord Adonis reminded audience members of the 'winter of discontent', the 'ungovernable state' that came close to disintegration, strike action, mass unemployment, and the widening gap between Margaret Thatcher's Conservatives and a leftward-drifting Labour movement. Chris Huhne, energy secretary in the present Coalition government, talked about the early years of Thatcher's premiership when the 'Tory wets' were on the march and the governing party dropped from first to third place in the polls. It was also around this time that Labour was drafting its 1983 manifesto. 'The longest suicide note in history', as it came to be known, included two policy commitments that drove people out of the Labour Party towards the newly formed SDP. The first was unilateral disarmament; the second was a promise to withdraw Britain from the Common Market. Among Labour's deserters, as Huhne recalled, partisans of David Owen tended to be motivated by the issue of unilateral disarmament, while partisans of Roy Jenkins were more motivated by the Labour stance on Europe. The rest of SDP's support, he added, came from 'one very small group of conservatives' and a number of 'high-minded political virgins'.

What united this amorphous mass of support? Despair on the one hand, but also a strong belief that politics could be done differently. For Adonis, the SDP had the potential to be 'the recreation of the nineteenth-century Liberal Party that would be across class, across community, a national force for progressive reform'. For Huhne,

the SDP–Liberal Alliance was the long-awaited marriage between 'the traditions that came out of the Liberal Party when it was a party of government and the better traditions of the Labour Party'. So far, so good. So why did the SDP fail to make a breakthrough? Agreed, the Falklands conflict in 1982 played its part, galvanising support for Thatcher at a critical moment, as did the peculiarities of first-past-the-post. Tony Benn losing the Labour deputy leadership election was another factor, because it meant that many would-be defectors remained loyal. But it seems that some of the biggest obstacles facing the SDP were internal: the rivalry between Owenites and Jenkinsites and, above all, the party's reluctance to take risks. 'If you are going to create a revolution, you have got to be bold', said Lord Adonis, pointing at the fact that none of the Labour MPs who defected in 1981 resigned to fight by-elections.

For various reasons then, the mould of British politics remained unbroken; despite almost equalling Labour's share of the vote in 1983, the Alliance suffered abysmally in consecutive general elections. Did this failure matter? Yes, to those involved at the time, though possibly less so in the grand scheme of things. According to the third panellist at 'Class of '81', Greg Clark, the significance of the SDP's rise and fall would be greater were it not for the fact that the modernisation of politics, the revival of the radical centre, was already underway by the turn of the 1980s. The crucial period, in Clark's view, was 1970–1974 when the Liberals began to regrow their support and shake off the 'beard and sandals image'. By the time the Alliance was formalised in autumn 1981, the reconstructed Liberal Party under David Steel's leadership shared more or less the same vision as the leadership of the SDP (minus David Owen) – and this wasn't by coincidence, argues Clark. The union of Liberals and disaffected Labourites may have been inevitable as the space in the centre of politics grew larger.

So what about the 'heirs' question: who today can claim to be carrying forward the torch first

Thirty years on from the Limehouse Declaration, former SDP members occupy senior positions in all three main political parties, and the jury is very much out on whether Tony Blair and his colleagues truly earned themselves the title 'heirs'.

– concluded on page 51

IT WASN'T ONLY LLOYD WELSH WOMEN

Professor Russell Deacon provides a short history of some of the more prominent Welsh female Liberal

BY THE time that the Welsh Liberals became the Welsh Liberal Democrats, in 1988, there had been well over a hundred Welsh Liberal MPs – and they had garnered virtually every top political position that British politics had to offer. These ranged from that of party leader to the government posts of Home Secretary, Chancellor and prime minister. In addition, Liberal councillors at one time or another had been the chairs of councils and/or mayors of every county, town and city in Wales. Even to this day, their presence can be seen in statues, the names of parks, road signs, public buildings and even the name of the occasional public house. But all of the names on these visible reminders of Liberal history are male. What, therefore, of female Welsh Liberals? Do they also have a place in history, albeit one that has not been so publicly recognised? Lady Megan Lloyd George was certainly the most visible and famous woman in Welsh Liberal politics, but she was not the only one. This short article will therefore seek to provide some short biographical information concerning some of the more notable female Welsh Liberals, including, of course, Lady Megan.

Welsh women Liberals, 1890–1945¹

Margaret Haig Mackworth, 2nd Viscountess Rhondda (1883–1958),

daughter of the leading Welsh Liberal MP and later peer D. A. Thomas, in her autobiography looked back on her childhood and noted:

‘What,’ as a contemporary remarked, ‘is the use of college for a girl? You don’t want to become Chancellor of the Exchequer!’ I had no word to answer her with, and I had no idea at the time why the remark irritated me so much ... It never occurred to me that, or something akin to it, was exactly what, somewhere deep down inside me, I did want to become.²

Even the Women’s Liberal Federation was split into two in 1893 when the anti-suffrage female Liberals formed the Women’s National Liberal Federation.

In the Victorian and Edwardian period women were not only excluded from elected office but were expected either to bow out of political activity entirely on marriage or simply to endorse the political party of their husband. Victorian social thought placed great emphasis on what was regarded as the ‘natural’ separation of the spheres between the sexes. This in turn ensured a rigid sexual division of labour.³ Education, religion and the role models set by their mothers and fathers also reinforced this divide. Any political ambitions that women did have were dependent upon the blessing of their husbands or fathers. As a result, political development for the Welsh women Liberals was nearly always tied up closely with what males and society at the time deemed acceptable;

and, in Victorian Liberal politics, the main priority was to expand the franchise of men. Although the franchise was broadened, first to urban males and then to rural males, there always remained a strong voice, both within the Liberal Party and outside it, against extending the vote to women. Even the Women’s Liberal Federation was split into two in 1893 when the anti-suffrage female Liberals formed the Women’s National Liberal Federation – and the latter remained wholly opposed to the universal franchise and in particular the campaigning tactics of the militant suffragettes.⁴

The passing of the Second Reform Act of 1867, as well as significantly increasing the urban male electorate, also changed the way in which the political parties were run.⁵ From that point on, both general and local council elections would become more competitive and organised along more overtly political lines. This was due to the fact that parliamentary and local government elections became more regularly contested than before.⁶ Politically there was now a need to campaign on an almost permanent basis, and as a result permanent Liberal Associations were established across Wales in each constituency, rather than the *ad hoc* election committees that had existed beforehand. These constituency associations then provided a forum in female Liberals could be active.

GEORGE'S DAUGHTERS WELSH LIBERALS

Liberal politicians (1890–1988)

The majority of local associations were affiliated to the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF) and the Welsh Union of Women's Liberal Associations (WUWLA) or local branches of the Liberal Social Councils which brought both men and women together for social events. At the regional level, the South Wales and North Wales Liberal Federations also had female sections. By the mid-1890s the WUWLA comprised some 9,000 members from fifty-seven constituency associations.⁷ From 1891 they held an annual conference in Wales where they pursued their own political agenda, which did not always coincide with that of the wider party. As well as wishing to extend the franchise to women they were particularly keen on furthering employment rights for women. To this end, they campaigned that both no 'limitations should be placed on the hours and conditions of labour of women' which was not 'also imposed on men' and that female rather than male inspectors be employed to protect the welfare of women in factories and other workplaces.⁸

In 1892, Mrs Nora Phillips, as president of the WUWLA, became the first Welsh female Liberal politician to come to public prominence. She was the first wife of Sir Wynford Phillips, who was MP initially for Mid-Lanarkshire (1888–92) and later for Pembrokeshire (1898–1908). Amongst her many achievements,

Nora Phillips was a founder of the Women's Institute, Pembrokeshire president of the Welsh Industry Association and Lady President of the 1913 National Eisteddfod. Although she was English by birth, she later developed a great fondness for Welsh folk law and became an accomplished public speaker and gave recitals of music and poetry across Wales.⁹ Phillips contributed a regular column on women's interests in the Liberal *Young Wales* magazine. So prominent was Phillips in both Welsh and British Liberal Party business and campaigns that she would undoubtedly have been a Liberal MP in her own right if she had had the opportunity.

The prominence that English-born women, such as Phillips, held in promoting the suffrage movement in Wales meant that Welsh opponents of suffrage claimed that the movement was nothing more than an 'alien English imposition'. This argument was rebuffed, however, by the fact that there were also plenty of Evanses, Davieses and Thomases on the list of the suffragettes' supporters.¹⁰ The most prominent of the Liberal Welsh names were Sybil and Margaret Haig Thomas. Sybil was wife of 'D. A.' Thomas – the Merthyr Tydfil, and later Cardiff, Liberal MP and South Wales rival to David Lloyd George. Sybil, a passionate Conservative before her marriage to 'D. A.' in 1882, had now become an advocate of the Liberal

As well as wishing to extend the franchise to women they were particularly keen on furthering employment rights for women.

cause.¹¹ After Thomas was ennobled as Viscount Rhondda in 1910, Sybil became the first Viscountess Rhondda. As well as her suffrage activities, she also later took on prominent roles as chairwoman of the wartime government's Women's Advisory Committee and of the National Savings Committee.

Their only daughter Margaret also followed in the family's political footsteps and was a keen Liberal until her marriage to her Conservative husband, Humphrey Mackworth, in 1908. Social convention at the time meant that she had to resign from the Liberals and support the Conservatives; however she didn't support their cause for long, instead taking up the cause of female suffrage in the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Membership of the WSPU prohibited membership of political parties until after universal suffrage was gained for women. Margaret therefore threw herself into the heart of the protest movement, not only taking part in protest marches, but also jumping onto the running board of Liberal Prime Minister Herbert Asquith's car in St Andrews and setting fire to pillar boxes. These activities resulted in her serving a period of time in Usk prison. None of this campaigning, however, prevented Margaret, a successful woman in her own right, from becoming a politician. Upon the death of her father in 1918 she was allowed by the King (through

WELSH WOMEN LIBERALS

a Special Remainder) to become a peeress in her own right – Baroness Rhondda of Llanwern. Margaret was now one of the few peeresses for whom the title could pass down through the female line, although in the event she had no children, so the title ended with her.

By the time of her ennoblement, Margaret had already taken over the directorships of some thirty of her father's companies, as a result of his joining the wartime government as food controller. She now became an even more prominent figure and role model in the advancement of women's political and employment rights. In 1922 she led an unsuccessful campaign to allow women to sit in the House of Lords; they would not be allowed to sit there until 1958, the year of her death. In this campaign she was backed by many leading suffragettes including Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the former Liberal, and now Labour-supporting, women's rights campaigner. Had she succeeded, Baroness Rhondda would have joined Viscountess St Davids, the second wife of the now ennobled Sir Wynford Phillips, and also a peeress in her own right, as two of the first Welsh women to sit in the House of Lords.¹² However, although she was never to sit in the House of Lords, Margaret did become the first female president of the Institute of Directors in 1926, and in 1922 established and from then on edited the influential weekly paper *Time and Tide*.¹³

In the period before Viscountesses Rhondda and St Davids became prominent on the British political scene, the WUWLA was the key to expanding women's political activity. They held regular constituency meetings and weekend schools, where they were addressed by MPs and other notable figures. Beyond the WUWLA there was widespread support for women's rights throughout the wider Welsh Liberal Party – particularly around election times when the absence of female candidates and voters was at its most apparent.¹⁴ On 18 April 1895, for instance, a National Convention of Wales (of all Welsh Liberals) was held in Aberystwyth under the president of the North Wales Federation, Thomas Gee. It committed the party in Wales to campaigning for equal rights for women within the Liberal Federation.¹⁵ It was not, however, able to

help women get elected to the Westminster parliament because women would not be able to stand as candidates until 1918.

Despite being barred from election to parliament, Welsh female Liberals still played an active role in politics. Outside the WLF and WUWLA, there were women serving on the committees of constituency parties; in local government most education committees had female members co-opted onto them; and at the same time, Liberal lady mayoresses, wives of the mayors, always had a prominent role in public affairs. In addition, the constituency Women's Liberal groups acted as an important campaigning force. Just a few weeks after the 1904 council elections in Cardiff, for instance, Mrs Eva McLaren, the Women's Liberal Association chairwoman, reminded their new parliamentary candidate, Ivor Guest, that women members had played a 'vital role in canvassing and educating the ignorant voter of the correct choice, we are fighting for a Liberal majority'.¹⁶ Although Guest – a former Conservative MP and cousin of Winston Churchill – acknowledged the role that women had played, outside elections he had little time for supporting women in their campaign for a franchise; indeed, in time he would prove to be a political enemy of McLaren's. He went on to lead the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, as its honorary treasurer. Despite the personal views of Guest and some other Liberals, all candidates still held separate election meetings for women Liberal members where the candidates were endorsed by women from their local Liberal associations. No candidate seeking selection could avoid this, indicating that, although women still could not vote, their political presence was nevertheless significant.

The new Liberal government of Campbell-Bannerman started on the road to full female suffrage. The Qualification of Women Act, passed in 1907, allowed women to be elected onto Welsh borough and county councils for the first time. Women could now stand anywhere for Welsh local government. As soon as the Act was passed, local Liberals in Brecon petitioned for a well-known and active Liberal, Gwenllian Morgan, to stand for election. She was duly

The campaign for universal suffrage, which dominated female Liberal policy at the start of the twentieth century, was also supported by Margaret Lloyd George.

elected, becoming the first female Welsh councillor and, in 1912, the first female Welsh mayor, of Brecon¹⁷. These were two notable firsts; despite this promising start, however, Welsh female Liberals would make slow progress in gaining elected council office, and until the 1990s they would only ever appear in ones or twos on most Welsh councils.

The campaign for universal suffrage, which dominated female Liberal policy at the start of the twentieth century, was also supported by Margaret Lloyd George. Dame Margaret, the supportive wife of David Lloyd George, ran the households at both 11 and 10 Downing Street with a distinct Welsh overtone: many of the staff employed there were from Wales and Welsh speaking. As well as supporting her wider political family, Dame Margaret also actively supported the Liberal cause in North Wales until her death in January 1941. On 28 April 1911, many of Margaret's North Wales female Welsh Liberals visited Lloyd George to press him to vote in the second reading of Sir G. Kemp's bill on women's suffrage, which he duly committed himself to doing.¹⁸

Despite Lloyd George's support for suffrage, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) directed its members to disrupt public meetings of all Cabinet members, and therefore in Wales action was taken against both Lloyd George and the South Wales Liberal MP and Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna.¹⁹ In 1912, for instance, suffragette disturbances directed against Lloyd George at his opening of the Llanystumdwy village institute caused the national press to focus its attention on North Wales; they also did the same when Lloyd George attended the Wrexham Eisteddfod in September 1912.²⁰ McKenna, as Home Secretary, was directly involved in dealing with the hunger strikes of women suffragettes in prison and introduced the so-called 'Cat and Mouse Act'. This allowed female prisoners out of prison when they were close to starvation and brought them back in again once they had recovered. One of the mice let go by McKenna was the 2nd Viscountess Rhondda, who went on hunger strike while imprisoned at Usk Prison for a month for refusing to pay a fine imposed for

attempting to blow up Cardiff post boxes. She was released after five days but did not go back to prison because her fine was then paid.

During this period of political turmoil for women, two of Wales's most famous Liberal philanthropists, Gwendoline and Margaret Davies, were following a more sedate path. They started to develop the arts, music, education and various Liberal causes throughout Wales. The sisters' brother was the Montgomeryshire Liberal MP, David Davies. They had benefited from a multi-million-pound inheritance from their grandfather, the Liberal MP railway and coal pioneer David Davies senior. From the 1900s onwards both sisters collected mainly Impressionist paintings and made various gifts and bequests that would later form the main picture collection of the National Museum of Wales.²¹ Importantly for Welsh Liberalism, they also supported it and its many causes.

On 21 November 1918, the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act came into law and allowed women to sit in parliament as elected MPs. Much of the resistance to female suffrage had been reduced by the prominent role women had played in winning World War I. Acknowledging their wartime role, Lloyd George declared at Westminster in 1917 that the lack of a female franchise 'is an outrage, it is ungrateful, unjust, inequitable ...'.²² He was therefore able to ensure that, as prime minister, he finally enacted the legislation that enabled women to vote, albeit it initially only at the age of thirty, until it was equalised with men at the age of twenty-one a decade later. The year after the 1918 act, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 also allowed women to sit on juries and be justices of the peace.

Over the following decades, Welsh female Liberals would start to trickle into politics. Most prominent Welsh Liberal women were prevented from seeking seats in Wales by the overwhelmingly patriarchal nature of Welsh constituencies and the legacy of Victorian and Edwardian social values, and as a result they had to seek easier avenues via English seats. Leading lights such as Dr Betty Morgan, a prominent Welsh Liberal and close friend of Ramsay Muir,²³ for instance, unsuccessfully sought a

seat in Sunderland in the 1929 election.²⁴ Similarly, Winifred Coombe Tennant, the leading South Wales Liberal and art collector fought but failed to win the Forest of Dean seat in 1922. Disappointingly, despite the Welsh Liberal Federation supporting votes for all women in their conference address of 1921, they did nothing of a practical nature to ensure that any women from its own party were either selected or elected in Wales.²⁵

Despite the fact that Wales was quite clearly a patriarchal society in terms of its politics, the Welsh Liberal Women's Organisation, until it disbanded in 1988, still continued to operate and push forward the female political agenda. In the immediate post-war period, Megan Lloyd George was the president of the North Wales Liberal Women's Federation which continued to attract support from leading male and female Welsh Liberals. Rosa Hovey, for instance, the principal of Penrhos College for Girls in Colwyn Bay, was the vice president of the Northern Federation in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ She was a prominent educationalist from Denbighshire who projected a strong presence for female Welsh Liberals. Similarly, Lillian Richards from Cardiff was a prominent member on the Welsh National Liberal Council between 1923 and 1927. Unfortunately, however, the decline of the Welsh Liberal Party consigned the memory of many key female Liberals of the time to the forgotten and frequently unrecorded shadows of the party's history, of which only a few fragments have survived, mainly in the National Library of Wales Political Archives.

Wales's first and last female Liberal MP – Megan Lloyd George

Once women were allowed to stand for parliament, it would take over a decade for a female Liberal to actually do so in Wales; and then just two female candidates were put before the electorate in thirty-six Welsh constituencies in the May 1929 general election. These were Anne Grace Roberts in Caerphilly and Megan Lloyd George (daughter of David Lloyd George) in Anglesey. Although Roberts had previously been the organiser for the Asquithian Liberals in Wales,

during the election campaign itself Megan toured Britain supporting other female candidates including Roberts in Caerphilly, despite her Asquithian past. In addition Megan became the voice of the Liberals in the special BBC broadcasts 'by and for women', which were tailored to the new female voters. However, only one of the two women – Megan Lloyd George – was a victor in these Welsh elections. At the age of twenty-seven she was elected to Anglesey by 5,618 votes (21 per cent). Megan became the first Welsh female MP and one of only eight Welsh women MPs in the House of Commons in the whole of the twentieth century. Roberts failed to get elected to Caerphilly and two years later defected to the Labour Party. There she was later shortlisted for the Liberal stronghold of Cardigan in 1932, but failed to get selected and thus avoided standing against her former party. She never stood for parliament again.

Megan, on the other hand, always enjoyed the support of her famous family. Her father, brother Gwilym and his brother-in-law (Major Goronwy Owen) were all MPs, and her sister Olwen, although never an MP, nevertheless played an important part in the smooth running of 10 Downing Street during World War I. Fluent in both French and German, Olwen was used as her father's personal translator and in meetings of generals, presidents and prime ministers was frequently the only female present.²⁷ The sole presence of Olwen in key war meetings illustrated the fact not only that this was still a very male-dominated society but at the same time that, if women had particular skills, knowledge or family connections, they could still find a position of some use to the Liberal government or party.

Megan's selection for the Anglesey seat, which was then one of the safest in Wales for the Liberals, was not without controversy. The sitting Liberal MP, Sir Robert Thomas, was a David Lloyd George loyalist who was stepping down due to financial problems and he was more than happy to endorse another Lloyd George as his successor. However, there were allegations by the other Liberal candidates that Megan's supporters had created new branches in order to enhance her chances and, most damagingly, the

Most prominent Welsh Liberal women were prevented from seeking seats in Wales by the overwhelmingly patriarchal nature of Welsh constituencies and the legacy of Victorian and Edwardian social values, and as a result they had to seek easier avenues via English seats.



Daily Mail published a story that she had taken part in a 'Pyjama bottle party'. For teetotal Nonconformist Anglesey voters this was shocking behaviour and the story was only laid to rest after a series of denials by Megan and statements of support from leading Liberals.²⁸ Nevertheless, despite these problems, Megan was selected for the seat and duly elected for it.

Until her death in 1966 Megan enjoyed a high profile, due not only to her status as Lloyd's George's daughter and the only female MP in Wales but also to her own abilities as a politician. She loyally followed her father into what ever faction of the Liberal Party he went in to, until his death in 1945. Her father's earldom in 1945 meant that from then on she was referred to as Lady Megan Lloyd George. Consistently a pro-devolutionist, supporter of a Welsh Secretary in the Cabinet and later the chair of the Campaign for a Welsh Parliament, Lady Megan constantly pursued the cause of Home Rule for Wales. In 1944, as chair of the Welsh Parliamentary Party, she secured a 'Welsh Day' in the House of Commons. It was not the Welsh parliament that Welsh Liberals longed for, but it did mean that, in future, parliament would spend at least one day a year debating Welsh issues. In the general election of 1945, after her father's death,

Megan Lloyd George (1902–66) in 1929.

Megan retained her Anglesey seat with a majority of 1,081 (4.4 per cent) over Labour.

As a 'Liberal Radical', Lady Megan in the post-war period was firmly on the left of the party and became ever closer to Labour during this period. In an attempt to appease her and her fellow Liberal Radical supporters, who talked of having her as a potential party leader, Clement Davies made her deputy leader of the British Liberal Party in 1949.²⁹ She remained a Liberal until her defeat by Labour in 1951. In November 1952, however, Lady Megan refused an invitation to stand again as Liberal candidate for Anglesey. Her main reasons given at the time were that the Liberals were moving too far to the right.³⁰ Lady Megan resigned as deputy leader of the party at the same time. On 26 April 1955, amongst much publicity, she announced her conversion to the Labour Party. This took her forever out of the list of 'Welsh Liberal heroines' and onto that of 'Welsh Liberal turncoats'. Just under two years later, Megan stood for Labour in the Carmarthen by-election caused by the death of the Liberal MP Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris. Her accomplished oratorical skills and Liberal background in a Liberal seat helped her win by a 3,069 majority over a weak male Liberal candidate. Lady Megan died a Labour MP in 1966; nevertheless, her three decades at the forefront of both Welsh and British Liberal politics means that she remains the most prominent Welsh female Liberal to date.³¹

Women of the post-war Welsh Liberal Party

After Lady Megan lost her Liberal seat there were no more Welsh female Liberal MPs, let alone any to match the national pedigree and achievements of Lady Megan. Nevertheless there were still some female politicians who played central roles in the Welsh Liberal/SDP/ Liberal Democrat parties.

The South Wales and North Wales Federations dominated post-war Welsh Liberal politics until the Welsh state party was formed in 1966; and the first prominent female Welsh Liberals to emerge in the post-war era were those who held posts in the two federations and in the numerous constituency associations. As had been the case

in the pre-war era, almost without exception they were women whose husbands or families were also deeply involved in Liberal politics or some aspect of Welsh political life. The two most prominent were Lady Olwen Carey-Evans (David Lloyd George's second oldest daughter who remained active in Welsh Liberal politics until her death in 1990) and Mrs Parry Brown (wife of the party's treasurer Major J. Parry Brown). Mrs Parry Brown was instrumental in the running of the South Wales Federation. The assistant secretary of the Welsh party's council, Jennie Gibbs, was also one of the most influential figures in the South Wales Federation. In the general election of 1966 she stood as only the third Welsh female Liberal candidate in history and the first new Liberal parliamentary candidate since 1929.³² Not only did she serve on a number of councils during the 1960s and 1970s, but she was also the conference organiser behind the Welsh Liberal meeting that took place in Builth Wells on 11 June 1966. Here the Liberal Party of Wales agreed to create a federal state party in Wales and dissolve the Welsh federations.

This was a turning point in Welsh Liberal history and it was at this same meeting that Councillor Mary Murphy, from Pontypridd, became the first chair of the Welsh party.³³ Murphy, a Maths and PE teacher and the former treasurer of the South Wales Liberal Federation, became one of the party's most well-known figures in Welsh local government. She was also a keen supporter of Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe. In 1968 she became chair of Pontypridd Urban District Council where she was able to increase Liberal representation to a level which, when combined with the Independents, was just one seat short of controlling the council outright³⁴ – an achievement that would remain the best post-war South Wales Liberal council result until the party merged with the SDP in 1988, far ahead of those in other South Wales councils. Later on, as secretary of the Welsh Liberal Party, which she ran from her own house in Pontypridd, Murphy went around Wales helping reform existing branches and start new ones. This ensured that she was well known across both the Welsh and the wider federal party.³⁵

In the constituency associations there were also other powerful female figures. In Carmarthen, for instance, Dorothy Trefor Thomas – chair of the Carmarthenshire Women’s Association – became known as the ‘Queen of Carmarthen Town’ because of the power she wielded over the local constituency association. Even the sitting MP, Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris, would have to gain her approval on various constituency issues before proceeding further.³⁶

Whereas the 1950s and 1960s had seen the rise of a number of prominent women, the 1970s saw only a handful of new female Liberal politicians arrive on the Welsh political scene. The psychiatrist Dr Jennifer Lloyd and the teacher Shiela Cutts joined Mary Murphy and Jennie Gibbs as Welsh Liberal parliamentary candidates.³⁷ None of them, however, came close to starting a political career at Westminster. In Cardiganshire, however, Cecilia Barton was emerging as a Liberal figure of some distinction. In the 1980s she became chair of the Ceredigion district council and one of the first Welsh Liberals to wield any real power in government. As chair of the Welsh party during the 1980s, she was also instrumental in the merger of the Welsh Liberals with the SDP. Another Welsh Liberal, further education lecturer Jenny Randerson, was also coming to the forefront of the Welsh Liberal Party during the 1980s. A Cardiff City councillor from 1983, she became president of the Welsh Liberals in 1988, then twice stood unsuccessfully for the Cardiff Central constituency at Westminster elections (in 1992 and 1997) before gaining the seat in the Welsh Assembly elections of 1999. Randerson went on to make political history for Liberal women in a number of ways. She served in the Lab-Lib Assembly coalition government of 2000–2003, which made her the first female Liberal Democrat government minister in history. She also served for a time as deputy first minister, and on occasions as first minister when Rhodri Morgan was either ill or overseas. This in turn made her the first Liberal Democrat leader of one of the United Kingdom constituent nations (Wales) and, after Margaret Thatcher, only the second woman to hold such a senior post in the United Kingdom.

In 2011 Randerson also became the first female Welsh Liberal to sit in the House of Lords.

The period that the SDP was active in Wales (1981–88) also brought forward two other female politicians who would later play substantial roles in the emerging Welsh Liberal Democrat party. The first of these was Jacqui Gasson, a Surrey-born child protection officer who became a South Glamorgan county councillor and later the Liberal Democrat group leader on that council. In 2005 she also became the Lord Mayor of Cardiff in its centenary year, the first post-war Liberal mayor in Wales’s capital city. In addition, Gasson held posts on a number of Welsh Liberal Democrat committees. She developed a formidable reputation for both her policy expertise and her successful, battling political style against often overwhelming odds both inside and outside the party. The second prominent SDP member was Councillor Robinia Feeley. She was a Glyndwr district councillor and held a place the SDP Welsh executive. Feeley initially refused to join the newly merged SDP and Liberal parties but did eventually come across and became one of the leading North Wales Liberal Democrats. She later became the deputy group Liberal Democrat leader on Denbighshire county council and unsuccessfully stood for a number of Welsh parliamentary and Assembly seats – nevertheless becoming one of the best-known North Wales female Liberals.

The 1980s also saw a number of other women coming into the Welsh party’s executive and holding a variety of portfolios, although none succeeded in gaining political office at Westminster. We should note, however, that even male Liberal electoral fortunes were limited to just two seats in Wales between 1956 and 1985 (Montgomeryshire and Cardigan), demonstrating that political opportunity for Liberals in Wales was limited almost everywhere, whether the candidate was male or female.

Conclusion

In the period when the Liberals were the dominant party of Welsh politics, between 1868 and 1922, women were kept out of politics by a combination of legal

discrimination and imposed social values. The social values that limited the role of married women in politics to that simply of supporting their husbands did not lessen until the 1960s; as a result, the lifting of legal and social discrimination came too late for many of those women who would today have gone into either the House of Commons, the Lords, the European Parliament or the Welsh Assembly.

Before the 1960s, only single women or those with supportive husbands could ever hope to engage in Welsh Liberal politics. Even these few women were restricted in their opportunities for advancement and rarely contested parliamentary seats in Wales. From 1931 to 1951, Megan Lloyd George was the only Welsh female Liberal candidate to stand in Wales. Between 1951 and 1966 there were no women Liberal candidates standing in parliamentary elections in Wales, which prevented any possibility of female Liberal MPs being elected. Similarly the restriction on women entering the House of Lords before 1958 prevented some notable Welsh Liberal women from gaining a place at Westminster by this route. It was therefore only in the 1960s, when the Welsh Liberal Party was a mere shadow of its pre-war glory years, that women started to fill central roles in the party and to push forward electorally. However, even though it was a slow process, it nonetheless paved the way for the significant leaps forward that occurred between 1999 and 2005. This period saw the election of four female Welsh Assembly members, one female MP and one female council leader. It provided more political achievements for Welsh Liberal Democrat women in six years than had been accomplished in the whole of the life of the old Liberal Party (1868–1988).

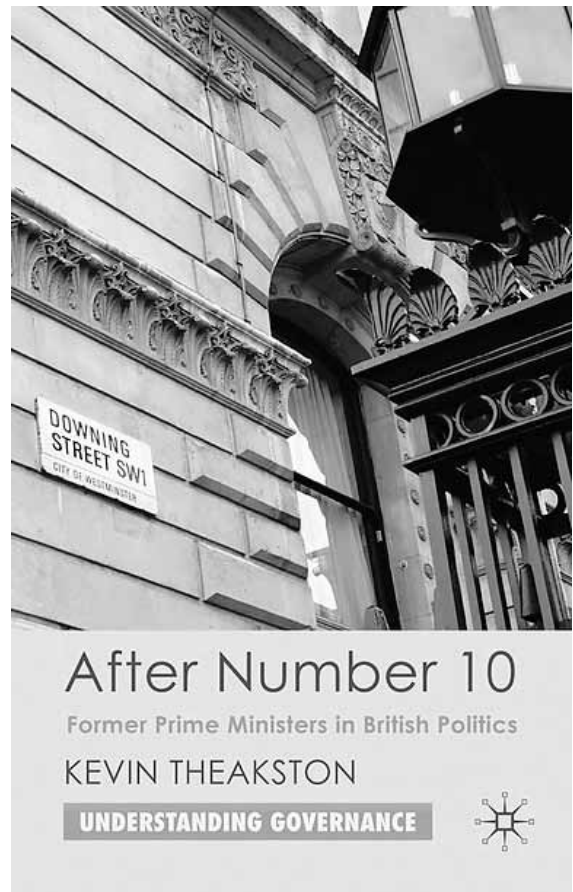
Professor Russell Deacon currently holds a chair in Welsh Political History and Governance at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff. He has written numerous articles and books on Welsh history and politics and his History of the Welsh Liberal Party is due out in spring 2012.

Before the 1960s, only single women or those with supportive husbands could ever hope to engage in Welsh Liberal politics.

¹ The references for this article unless otherwise cited come from Russell Deacon, *A History of the Welsh Liberal Party* (Welsh Academic Press), forthcoming.

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undertaken previously. As the author rightly points out, there has never been any defined role for former British PMs, and there have never been more than five of them alive at any one time. When Margaret Thatcher was first elected in May 1979, there were indeed five such incumbents: Macmillan, Douglas-Home, Wilson, Heath and Callaghan. How former prime ministers have reacted and responded to the sudden loss of high office (and all its attendant prestige) and coped with the challenge of retirement has varied enormously from one individual to another. This impressive tome goes right back to the first PM Sir Robert Walpole, who resigned in February 1742.

Relatively few of the figures carefully delineated in this book chose wholly voluntarily the precise moment of their departure. The one exception certainly was Stanley Baldwin in May 1937 who reported ‘an enormous relief’ when the time eventually came to cast aside the burdens of responsibility of high office. Baldwin is also reported to have decided ‘to make no political speeches, neither to speak to the man at the wheel nor to spit on the deck’ (pp. 2–3). To a

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Walpole to Blair in retirement

Kevin Theakston, *After Number 10: Former Prime Ministers in British Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

Reviewed by Dr J. Graham Jones

THIS IS a most fascinating, superbly readable book. It is indeed surprising that

no survey of the role of former prime ministers in British public and political life has ever been

large extent, he succeeded for the next decade, but few other former prime ministers have displayed equal charity and consideration towards their successors. Even fewer were able to return to high office under their successors. The most obvious exceptions were A. J. Balfour under Asquith, Lloyd George (in war time) and Baldwin, and, more recently, Douglas-Home, who served with some distinction as Foreign Secretary under Ted Heath.

There is very little that is positively new or really original in this study. No archival research has been undertaken in its preparation. But the author has read very widely a positive array of biographies, memoirs and autobiographies, political and general histories of the period, the entries in the new *Dictionary of National Biography*, newspaper columns and websites. His apparent effortless mastery of the history of the period is most impressive. Also, Theakston has a good eye for relevant comparisons, and can provide helpful statistics which help guide the reader through the study. Equally useful are his references to contemporary equivalents of sums of money. The impoverished Herbert Asquith, we are told, left just £9,345 upon his death in February 1928, 'about £300,000 in today's money' (p. 124). During the long 1930s, Lloyd George pocketed a total of some £65,000 from the advances, royalties and newspaper-serialisation earnings from his six-volume mammoth *War Memoirs*, a sum 'equivalent to £2.4 million today' (p. 128).

Of necessity, the earlier entries are relatively brief – until we come to the Duke of Wellington. There are some graphic descriptions in this book, among them the depiction of Sir Robert Peel being thrown from his horse, trampled, and then lingering in great agony until his death a few days later (p. 78).

Readers of this *Journal* will have much to enthral them. Among the many entries certain to interest is that on Lord Palmerston, who died while still prime minister just two days short of his eighty-first birthday on 18 October 1865, active until the end, a serial womaniser, fully capable of eating, drinking and following avidly the course of political life even while on his

death bed (pp. 82–83). The section on W. E. Gladstone is also a good read, pinpointing his most belated retirement in March 1894 aged eighty-four, his exceptionally strained relationship with Queen Victoria throughout, his distaste for the government of his successor Lord Rosebery in 1894–95, and his general good health and vigour during most of his last years. He was indeed 'someone iconic for the century ... a man who ... had epitomised, symbolised and provided a background to an entire age' (p. 99). There is much interesting material, too, on the exceptionally long time span which Rosebery lived after resigning as prime minister in December 1898.

A distinct air of sadness surrounded the last days of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who survived for no more than seventeen days after standing down in April 1908 and actually died 'on the premises' at 10 Downing Street – the only PM ever to do so. He simply could not be moved from there after Asquith had taken over because of the gravity of his condition. This was indeed the shortest ever post-premiership in British history (p. 7). His possible desire to die 'in harness' had been thwarted by the selfish anxiety of King Edward VII not to have his holiday at Biarritz interrupted by the death or resignation of a serving prime minister (p. 120). C-B's successor as prime minister, H. H. Asquith, survived for rather longer after being unceremoniously ousted from number 10 at the height of World War I in December 1916. Theakston tells us that often thereafter, although remaining leader of the Liberal Party, he 'just stagnated and slumped into an easy life with his books, his family and the social round' (p. 121), his political career cruelly interrupted by deeply humiliating shock electoral defeats at East Fife in December 1918 (after representing it for fully thirty-two years) and later at Paisley in October 1924. Sadly, his last years were dogged by ever-escalating money worries.

The section on Lloyd George's long post-ministerial career, with 'the goat' confined to 'the wilderness' for more than twenty-two years, is truly masterly. As the last Liberal PM, Lloyd George deserves special consideration.

Like other revisionist historians, Theakston insists that LG 'remained a critical player and at the centre of British politics' at least until August 1931, 'and to a less extent after that' (p. 129). The profound antipathy towards him of three of his prime ministerial successors – Baldwin, MacDonald and Chamberlain – is rightly pointed up, as indeed is Lloyd George's key role in formulating new radical policy initiatives between 1924 and 1929. LG had certainly not been 'fossilised' by continuous membership of the Commons since April 1890 (p. 131). But, regrettably, there are one or two factual slips here. Major Goronwy Owen, the Liberal MP for Caernarfonshire from 1923 until 1945, was the brother-in-law of Major Gwilym Lloyd-George, not of Lloyd George himself (p. 132). Also, it is far from certain that Lloyd George 'fathered a child with his long-term mistress (and later second wife) when aged 66' (p. 7). It is equally likely that the father was Colonel Thomas F. Tweed with whom Frances Stevenson had a passionate affair in 1927–28.

There is much else of great interest here too. Theakston warmly commends Douglas-Home and Callaghan for settling into the role of esteemed elder statesman following their resignations in 1965 and 1980 respectively. The 'long sulk' of Edward Heath, from which he never really recovered, is well chronicled, as is the reluctance of his successor Margaret Thatcher to accept that her 'glory days' were well and truly over following her enforced resignation in November 1990: 'The telephone goes and immediately you think, oh goodness me, the United Nations is sitting. Then you realise that it's no longer you any more' (back cover). Harold Wilson, the victim of dementia, we are told, soon became 'an almost forgotten figure' after his decision to stand aside in March 1976, an apparently surprise move to many, but one upon which he had resolved two years earlier.

In a final short chapter entitled 'Comparative Perspectives', the author surveys very briefly post-prime-ministerial careers in other countries. There is obviously much more scope to expand this section

How former prime ministers have reacted and responded to the sudden loss of high office (and all its attendant prestige) and coped with the challenge of retirement has varied enormously from one individual to another.

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significantly, which has a rather 'potted history' air about it.

Perhaps the only real disappointment here is the failure to provide photographs of at least some of the prime ministers described in the volume. There is also no general bibliography of

relevant sources, but the footnote references are always full and genuinely helpful.

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Survival and revival

Mark Egan, *Coming into Focus: The transformation of the Liberal Party 1945–1964* (VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2009)

Reviewed by Malcolm Baines

LIBERAL PARTY history during the fallow years between the failure of Lloyd George's 'last hurrah' – the 1929 election campaign – and the Orpington by-election victory of March 1962, has long been neglected by academics and party members alike. What awareness there is largely revolves around Beveridge, the split between Liberals and National Liberals and Churchill's offer of a Cabinet post in 1951 to the then Liberal leader, Clement Davies. By contrast, Mark Egan's book attempts to put some organisational flesh on the party's grassroots during the post-war part of this period. He succeeds admirably, and anyone interested in the party's organisation, youth groups and local government representation will find much background not readily available elsewhere.

Coming into Focus aims to provide a different perspective on much of what has been written on the party's history in the immediate post-war period. Other historians and sociologists have looked at Liberal Party survival in that period in the context of either the high politics of its relationship with the Conservative Party or sociological explanations revolving around an antipathy to collectivism or the survival of an older form of society in the Celtic fringe where Nonconformity remained strong and the trade unions weak. Egan is unusual in concentrating on the party itself in the constituencies across the UK.

In style, it does come across as the book of the D.Phil. thesis, with lots of tables providing, for example, information about the regional

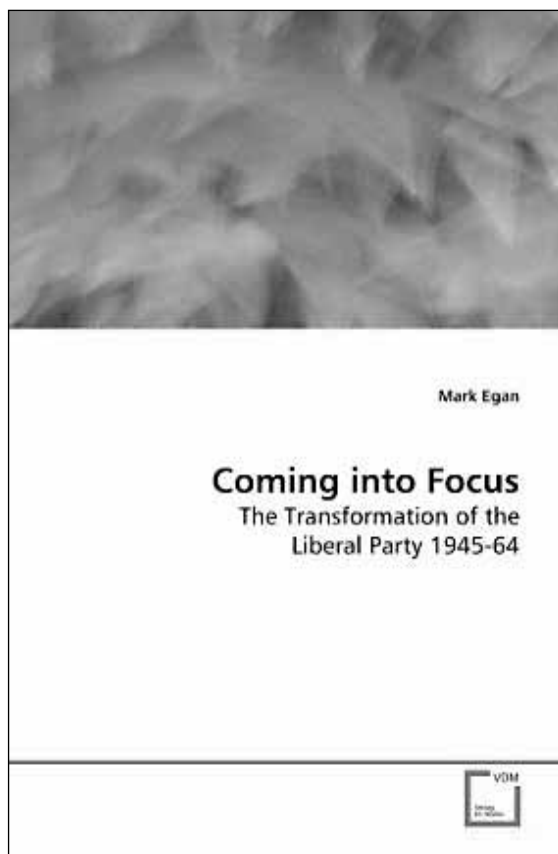
distribution of Liberal borough councillors, how interviewees joined the Liberal Party and sources of Liberal Association income, interspersed with commentary and book-ended by short essays on the historiographical background to Liberal survival and a review of how the 1945 party had changed by 1964. Egan has researched local Liberal records avidly and supplemented these with interviews with some 140 Liberal activists from the period and it is the use of this data which gives weight to the book's argument.

Coming into Focus begins with the aftermath of the 1945 election and points out that the party's representation of twelve MPs elected to Westminster was not matched again for over twenty years. The party's electoral weakness in the post-war period is highlighted by the fact that the party came first or second in only thirty-six seats in 1945, as compared to eighty-three at the previous general election in 1935. Egan compares this with the party's improved position in 1964 – highlighting in particular the growth in local government representation as well as the fact that all the party's MPs were elected in three-way contests – and asserts that 1964 did amount to a significant step on the road to revival. It leaves hanging, however, the significance of the 1970 election in which only six MPs were elected to parliament, many with only wafer-thin majorities.

Egan goes on to make the very powerful point that none of this would have been relevant without there being local Liberal

organisations in place. This is very much the focus of the book, which deals in turn with constituency and district organisations, the role of the Young Liberals, the attitudes of the party's activists and its representation in local government.

On local organisation, Egan looks at funding, candidate selection, and decisions to contest elections and by-elections. He compares what happened on the ground – as reflected in the Liberal Association records he has reviewed and his interviews with activists – to the theory of British political organisation as set out in the Robert MacKenzie's classic, *British Political Parties*, and to the results of the surveys carried out contemporaneously by the American political scientist Jorgen Scott Rasmussen and used in his book, *The Liberal Party: A Study of Retrenchment and Revival*, published in 1965. Interestingly, Egan points towards the local district parties, often based in small towns, being the key building blocks of Liberal organisation rather than constituency parties themselves. He also emphasises the importance of the Young Liberals and the Union of University Liberal Students to the Liberal Party during that period, especially as a vehicle through



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.

After reading history at Selwyn College, Cambridge and the University of Lancaster, Malcolm Baines completed a D.Phil. at Exeter College, Oxford, entitled 'The survival of the British Liberal Party 1932–1959' in 1990. He now works in taxation for a hotel and property group.

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**

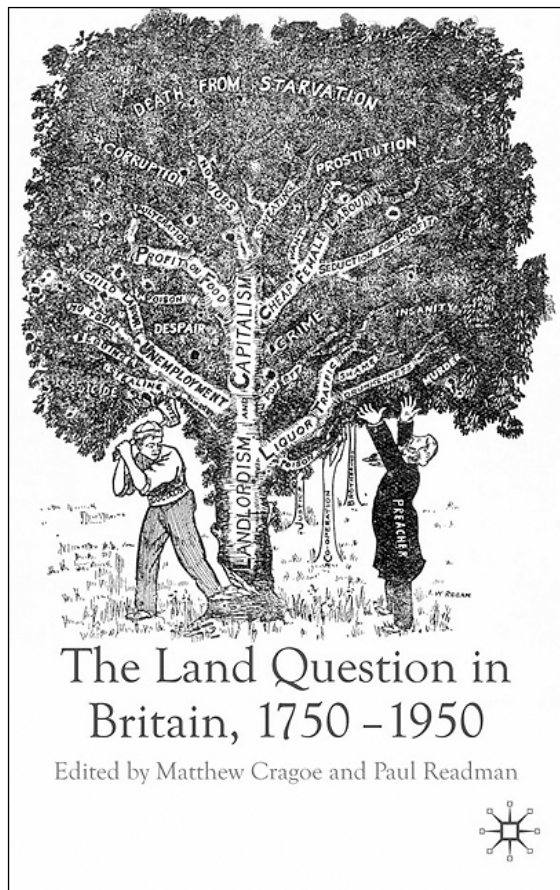
THIS IMPRESSIVE collection of essays, full of highly original material, certainly fills a distinct gap in our historiography. The ownership of the land and the use made of it was a political hot potato in all four nations of the British Isles from the mid-eighteenth century almost through to the mid-twentieth. 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



rural community that underpinned opposition to the radical critique of landownership' (p. 39). She examines rigorously the literature, songs and political polemic of this formative period.

Malcolm Chase re-examines the impact of the Chartist movement between 1838 and 1848, focusing upon the much-discussed Chartist 'land plan' – namely to settle its followers on cottage holdings extending to about four acres apiece. To the Chartists, land reform was both a practical and a moral imperative, an immediate precursor to a reformed parliament. Chartist ideology came to focus on small-scale production and access to, and control of the land rather than ownership of it. The next essay, by Anthony Howe, progresses naturally to the contemporary role of the Anti-Corn Law League which placed at the heart of its philosophy a vehement attack on landlordism per se.

It is gratifying to see Matthew Cragoe devoting a substantial chapter to examining the manifold aspects of the land question in Victorian Wales which, having been born in about 1866, was later spearheaded by Thomas Edward Ellis (1859–99), the Liberal MP for

Merioneth from 1886, and then intruded powerfully into English politics from about 1880. Cragoe examines the relationship between landlord and tenant in rural Wales, making fruitful comparisons with the far tenser situation in Ireland. He analyses landlord absenteeism in the two nations, patterns of letting, insecurity of tenure, and the low levels of agriculture. He concludes that the land question in late-nineteenth-century Wales was fundamentally more of a political issue than an economic one, and reflects on the work of the Select Committee on Small Holdings and the more prestigious Royal Commission on Land in Wales, eventually yielded by Gladstone in 1892. Cragoe's overall conclusion is that the Welsh land question disappeared from the limelight quickly because it was an essentially political question that lacked the sheer intensity of the contemporary Irish situation.

Ewen Cameron then turns his attention to Scotland, paying due regard to the cultural diversity of the land question north of the border, crystallised above all in the crofters' protests of the 1880s and the distinctive complaints of the local mining communities. He examines carefully the main points of the issue in the highlands (undoubtedly the most emphasised aspect of the land question in Scotland), reflected in eviction, famine and protest, then in the lowlands, where farming was generally more efficient and arable and livestock products of distinctly higher quality, and finally in the Scottish urban centres. Ireland forms the theme of the compelling essay by Philip Bull, worthy of close comparison with the article by Matthew Cragoe. Bull underlines the importance of the Devon Commission set up in the early 1840s to examine the Irish land question, but which, regrettably, failed to lead to legislation. The analysis then focuses on successive pieces of legislation introduced by Gladstone's administrations and looks at how the land question was influential in formulating ideas of Irish nationality.

Anthony Taylor discusses the contribution of Richard Cobden, J. E. Thorold Rogers and Henry George to views on land reform and agitation during the nineteenth century. Their combined ideas

gave the movement 'an academic pedigree' (p. 162) which helped it to increase both in numbers and in influence until about 1914. The distinctive aspects of the land question engage the attention of Roland Quinault as he examines the crucial role of the London landlords, and the political issues which formed part of leases and rates. As Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1908, Lloyd George predictably turned his fire on urban landlords, who were, in his view, 'parasites that grew rich on unearned increment created by the labour of others' (p. 174) in his famous 1909 'People's Budget'. In 1912–14 both rural and urban land attracted the attention of Lloyd George, who set up a Land Enquiry Commission (as was to happen again between 1923 and 1927).

Paul Readman, one of the volume's co-editors, writes about the land question during the first decade of the twentieth century, contrasting the attitudes of the Conservative and Liberal parties and pointing up the close association between the land question and 'the politics of patriotism' (p. 196). Ian Packer, a widely published authority on the land question, focuses specifically on the issue in an urban context, an aspect which commanded much attention during the Edwardian era when 'the land question' was often wedded to the campaign to secure social reforms – unemployment, local taxation and housing, now all important within national politics. The land market between 1880 and 1925 forms the theme of the analysis by John Beckett and Michael Turner, particularly the period of the so-called 'Green Revolution' immediately following World War I when major parts of the landed estates were broken up and sold off. Although the authors are at pains to point that the extent of these sales was not really that 'revolutionary', much land was indeed sold, often to the tenants of these landed estates – 'a major transfer not within the landed community but from the landowning aristocracy to the tenant farmers' (p. 233).

Claire Griffiths presents a scholarly re-examination of how the Labour Party emphasised public ownership and control of the land in its various policy shifts from 1918 until the 1950s – its attitudes

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



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Website

See www.liberalhistory.org.uk for details of History Group activities, records of all past *Journals* and past meetings, guides to archive sources, research in progress and other research resources, together with a growing number of pages on the history of the party, covering particular issues and periods in more detail, including lists of party leaders, election results and cabinet ministers.

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vice-president from 1956. But his uncompromising espousal of unilateral free trade, bitterly opposing the proposal that Britain should join the European Economic Community, provoked confrontation at the 1958 Assembly, and he moved away to found the Keep Britain Out campaign. The last party conference he attended was the first I went to, at Edinburgh in the spring of 1962; but he was by then a fringe figure. Meanwhile, the IEA (substantially funded from the fortune that Antony Fisher had made from introducing battery hens into the UK) had published a series of pamphlets attacking state monopoly in broadcasting. Ideological and business interests combined to draw Smedley into pirate radio as the advent of transistor radios freed listeners from dependence on BBC transmissions; he was involved at

different times with Radio City, Radio Caroline, and other shorter-lived stations.

Liberal Democrats today defend the BBC against the dominance of commercial interests in broadcasting. Fifty years ago, however, the BBC represented the 'nanny state' in all its glory, excluding popular culture from its airwaves – in spite of the explosion of popular music in the early 1960s. As the Labour government moved to ban pirate radio, a new generation of Young Liberals launched the 'Save Pop Radio Campaign', in autumn 1966. They announced their campaign a week after Smedley's acquittal.

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before World War I. Rather, McKibbin sees Edwardian politics as in a state of delicate equipoise, with an air of impermanence. This was capable of being disturbed by a what he terms 'structure' and 'contingency', the interplay of events and deeper social forces that is perhaps the key theme of this book.

In 1914, therefore, the Liberal Party may not have been already doomed, but its position in British politics was fragile: it risked offending middle-class voters through its welfare and social reforms without doing quite enough to win the adherence of working-class voters. The Liberals were dependent for continued electoral success on the informal Progressive Alliance with Labour. But Labour resented their junior role in the partnership, and were keen to escape from the Liberals' shadow. World War I provided the opportunity. It split both parties, but the Liberals more so, while Labour's fundamental sense of purpose as the party of the trade union movement held it together. As McKibbin points out, however, much of the discussion about Labour's rise and the Liberals' fall is guesswork.

What is clear, however, is that once Labour had overtaken the Liberals they were unlikely to offer them a hand up. McKibbin is far from complimentary about the Labour Party during the 1920s, arguing that it failed to adopt a clear political strategy that would give it a broad-enough basis of support to beat the Conservatives. As a result, in the 1929 general election, the Liberals appealed for votes on the basis of Lloyd George's semi-Keynesian 'We can conquer unemployment' policy. But the unemployed voted Labour, while Liberals gained votes from disgruntled Conservatives who didn't believe in Lloyd George's policy, but who defected in sufficient numbers to leave Labour as the largest party. Thus, as McKibbin writes:

The 1929 election brought into office a party which owed its victory largely to the intervention of another party which fought the election on a programme neither the majority of its voters nor its MPs believed in.

The author sees the crisis of 1931 as bringing the party system back into

Strange death?

Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People 1914–1951* (Oxford University Press, 2010)

Reviewed by Iain Sharpe

PROFESSOR MCKIBBIN'S work will be best known to *Journal of Liberal History* readers for his contributions to the 'Strange Death of Liberal England' debate, particularly through his 1974 book *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910–24*. McKibbin argued that the growth of class politics, rather than World War I, was the main explanation for the rise of Labour and the decline of the Liberal Party. Those

who have not followed his work since then may be surprised to find that his views have evolved, as he states on the first page of *Parties and People*: 'I no longer see the Edwardian system as already disintegrating.' This does not mean that he has been converted to the optimistic assessment of the Liberal Party, associated with historians such as P. F. Clarke and Trevor Wilson, that the party was in robust health

ROSS MCKIBBIN

PARTIES
and PEOPLE
ENGLAND 1914–1951

alignment with political reality. This was done by fusing a significant section of the Liberal Party (along with Ramsay MacDonald and the few who followed him out of the Labour Party) with the Conservatives in an anti-socialist alliance. Although an independent Liberal Party remained, it was no longer a significant political force. But for those Liberals, led by Sir John Simon, who served through the 1930s in the National Government, it was not a simple case of capitulation to the Conservatives. The Tory party of Baldwin was very different from the strident, aggressive opposition of 1914. As McKibbin puts it, Baldwin's party was 'primmer, calmer, more even-tempered ... less imperial'. As a result it was an anti-socialist alliance not a progressive one that dominated 1930s politics.

As its title indicates, this book is not just about the decline of the Liberal Party, and its later chapters address the causes of the 1945 Labour landslide and the record of Attlee's government through to its election defeat in 1951. If McKibbin sees 1931 as a defining date in bringing anti-socialist forces into alignment, he argues that 1940 is the key date for the collapse of their

hegemony. The failure of appeasement discredited its Conservative proponents completely, making them seem, as McKibbin puts it: 'not just incompetent, but in some way traitors'. It guaranteed that the Conservatives would have lost any election after 1940. The increased role of the state during the war, and its further expansion envisaged by the Beveridge report, helped to legitimise Labour's view of the world, but was not the cause of their 1945 victory.

McKibbin is highly critical of the Attlee government, in particular its identification of socialism with nationalisation at the expense of any interest in institutional and constitutional reform: of the House of Lords, the public schools, the ancient universities and the professions. The result, he concludes, was that for the second half of the twentieth century England became 'a society with powerful democratic impulses but political structures and habits of mind which could not adequately contain them'.

All of which might leave readers of this journal wondering how different British political history might have been had Labour in the 1920s tried to retain the progressive alliance in some form – could it have been possible to create a

political force for which social and welfare reform went hand-in-hand with constitutional change and tackling privilege? But it is something that Labour simply would not have countenanced, and this book does not deal in such counterfactual speculation. What it does do is offer a fascinating discussion of the key developments in British party politics from just before World War I to a few years after the second. It is based on the author's 2008 Ford Lectures at Oxford University, and as a result has a more informal, conversational tone than one usually finds in academic writing. McKibbin writes with a ready wit: for example, rebutting the suggestion that people's greater interest in football than politics was a sign of apathy, he comments: 'Hardly anyone leads a purely "political" existence, and those who do are usually dangerous.' This book can be read and enjoyed by the general reader as well as the academic specialist, and it is pleasing to see that it has been priced accordingly.

Iain Sharpe recently completed a University of London PhD thesis on 'Herbert Gladstone and Liberal Party revival, 1899–1905'. He is leader of the Liberal Democrat group on Watford Borough Council.

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trenches of World War I as well the cabinet room of World War II – reminds me of something I was told in 1959.

Jeremy Thorpe was about to take the Cambridge team helping him in August to tea with Isaac Foot ('no canvassing on a Sunday – unless you pretend to be Tories'). Jeremy told us how, Viscount Thurso being ennobled, when Clem Davies was asked for a Liberal peer for the coronation honours, he nominated Isaac. According to Jeremy, Churchill replied: 'no, he has sons, I want a token Liberal peer, not a Liberal dynasty', so the future Lord Grantchester was agreed upon.

Dr Peter Hatton

Reports

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lit by the SDP? 'It is a question to which there is no conclusive answer', warns Lord Adonis – but his choice is the modern Labour Party. At 'Class of '81', he recalled a lunchtime meeting with Tony Blair in about 1993 at which the future prime minister asked Adonis, who was then a journalist and card-carrying Liberal Democrat, why it was so difficult for Labour to reach out to Middle England. Adonis suggested: 'It's the name Labour, it puts people off.' To which Blair replied: 'So what should we call ourselves?' Adonis smiled and said: 'How about Liberal Democrats?' Two years later, the name change came – Blair opted for 'New Labour' – and so, too, did ideological

Coming in September ...

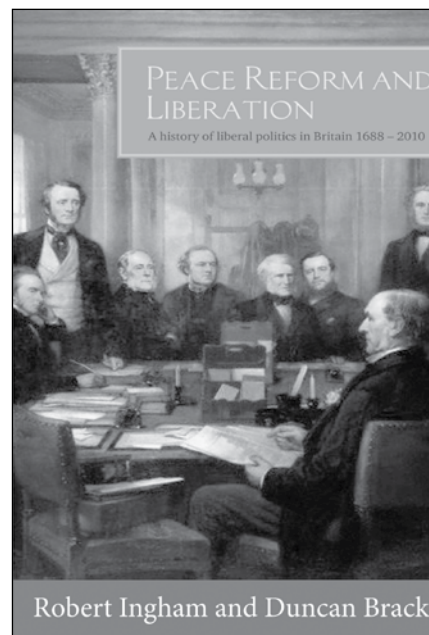
Peace, Reform and Liberation

A History of Liberal Politics in Britain, 1688–2011

A one-volume history of the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats. Drawing on the most recent scholarly research, *Peace, Reform and Liberation* examines the roots of Liberal thinking in the revolutionary tumult of the seventeenth century, the history of Whig politics, how the Liberal Party was formed in the mid-nineteenth century, the reasons for the party's calamitous decline after the First World War, and the factors underlying the party's unexpected revival in the second half of the twentieth century, culminating in the formation of the Liberal Democrats and the party's entry into government in 2010.

The most comprehensive and most up to date history of the party, *Peace, Reform and Liberation*, by Duncan Brack and Robert Ingham (eds.), will be published by Biteback in September 2011.

The book will be launched at the Liberal Democrat History Group's fringe meeting at the Liberal Democrat conference in Birmingham, on Monday 19 September. Special purchase price for *Journal* readers!



reconstruction. The transformation that Labour underwent in 1995, rewriting Clause IV and becoming a party for enterprise as well as social justice, enabled Blair to draw support from voters in Middle England. It was enough to persuade some Liberal Democrats, including Lord Adonis, to defect.

There are, however, many people who refuse to recognise New Labour as the SDP's successor party. Quite a few attended 'Class of '81', where it seemed the audience was more yellow than red. Chris Huhne, leading the charge, argued that Labour lost any claim it might have had to the SDP inheritance when the soft populism which characterised Blair's first term as prime minister was replaced with something rather more brutish – and less liberal – after 9/11. Who does Huhne think are the true heirs to the SDP? The Liberal Democrats, of course. And, in staking his party's claim before a sympathetic audience, he could not resist having a pop at Greg Clark and other ex-SDP members on

the opposite side of the coalition. The audience particularly enjoyed Huhne's remark about a 'radical' rising through the ranks of the Conservative Party only once every hundred years – to which Clark's (less well received) response was to reel off a list of Conservative ex-SDP members who have 'a taste for change', himself and Andrew Lansley included. Those in the audience hoping to hear Clark offer an explanation for joining the Conservatives would have left feeling disappointed. (But it is likely that Labour's failure to reinvent itself sooner and the Lib Dems' pre-*Orange Book* suspicion of economic liberalism were contributory factors.) What Clark did reveal before the end were his reasons for joining the SDP: a teenager growing up in Middlesbrough during the 1980s, he wasn't a socialist; he couldn't be a Tory; and so the SDP, with its modern branding and youthful membership base, was an obvious refuge.

In contrast to Adonis and Huhne, Clark did not claim

that the 'true heirs' reside in the party he ended up in. He acknowledged that the SDP can be credited with stopping the rise of the hard left, undermining the Gaitskellite wing of the Labour Party, and eventually driving Labour to reorganise under Blair. But his conclusion at 'Class of '81' was that the progress of the social democratic movement after 1988 is linked to the success of the Liberal Democrats. It is a view shared by Lord Rodgers who, in the closing minutes of the meeting, said that, while New Labour could be seen as 'step-heirs' to the SDP, the Liberal Democrats were always destined to be 'true heirs'. The debate lingers on.

Perhaps more important than the 'heirs' question, in terms of where we are today, is the fact that the appearance of the SDP helped create a less polarised political culture. It mobilised middle-of-the-road voters in the early 1980s, which led Labour to rebrand itself in the mid-1990s, which in turn led the Tories to detoxify their

image a decade or so later. As the *Independent's* Dominic Lawson recently commented, 'It is one of the conceits of British politics in the post-Thatcher era that the political parties pretend there is an unbridgeable gulf between each other; when in fact only a hop would be required to cross the divide.' Thanks in no small part to the SDP, politicians in Britain's three main parties today share much more in common than they would have voters believe. If you want proof of how far things have changed, you need look no further than the 'Class of '81' panel. Would Greg Clark have been appointed a minister in Thatcher's government? I think not.

Tom Frostick is CentreForum's press officer and executive assistant. Previously, he worked for the Department for Work and Pensions, and as a constituency organiser for South West Hertfordshire Liberal Democrats. He holds undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in history from the University of Manchester.