

and being thrust immediately into the uncongenial role of Chief Whip and of the disparate free spirits that made up his small team. I suspect that one underlying reason for his promotion of party policy initiatives was to find a unifying corpus of policy to shift the political focus away from parliament in which Liberal representation was capricious and largely dependent on local personalities and historical party arrangements.

As Jones points out, Grimond had already been part of the group that produced the book *The Unservile State*, edited by George Watson in 1957, the publication of which led to a series of pamphlets on separate topics, and had himself published his first book in 1959 in time for that year's general election. Other groups in the party sought to take part in the flurry of ideas. The Young Liberals and the Union of Liberal Students joined together in 1959 for what they originally called 'Operation Manifesto' until the party bosses convinced them that this would be confused with the party's official election manifesto. Between 1960 and 1968 it produced nineteen pamphlets. Finally the monthly publication *New Outlook* was launched at the 1961 party assembly as a semi-official publication in effect to fill the long gap caused by the demise of the *Liberal Magazine* in 1950.

Jones points out: 'These varied Liberal publications underlined the importance which Grimond attached to the formulation and communication of policy and ideas as an essential part of his attempt to restore the intellectual and political credibility of his party.' Further on in the book, Jones draws attention to the somewhat unpalatable fact that the later Grimond expressed support for the economic liberalism of the Institute of Economic Affairs. Grimond Liberals of the 1950s and 1960s vintages have preferred to hang on to his consistent support for community initiatives, co-ownership and a diminution of 'bureaucratic blight.'

Jones' great skill lies in allying the key events in the party's history to its policy development. He does this with great clarity but without apparent bias so that, for instance, his assessment of party leaders and their effectiveness enables the reader to make his or her

**The book sets Liberal philosophy firmly into the party's political history and as such it is a valuable addition to the literature. I hope, probably in vain, that it will be widely read by the current *Focus*-obsessed generation of Liberal Democrat activists.**

own judgements. It rightly makes those of us who have had a long involvement and, often, inside experience, take on board evidence that impinges on our prejudices! His methodology enables him, for instance, to place the community politics strategy within a broader framework of party activity and it enables him to coin the choice phrase 'Denting the Mould' for a later period. This method brings into focus the existence over the long term of a much more consistent broad body of policy than the short-term battles would have indicated at the time, provoked as they often were by internal strife – such as the problems that brought into being the Liberal Commission of 1969, chaired by Donald Wade, which produced the excellent report *Facing the Future*.

This approach is valuable, both to historians and to those activists who understand the key importance of rooting current thinking and strategy in the experience of the past and of linking consistency with innovation. Jones is exceptionally surefooted and brings a scrupulous honesty to his assessment of party writings. Speaking for myself, I would have welcomed a critic of this calibre. All too often efforts at exposition of Liberalism and at critiques of other political philosophies have seemed to attract only approbation from colleagues and otherwise to float into the ether untested. All of us benefit from debate and discussion and there is far too little of it today. And one does not have to agree with all Jones' conclusions to welcome his work.

Jones takes the party's election manifestos as his main points of

reference, rightly regarding them as the definitive expression of the party's political stance at that moment in time. He ties in with this approach the semi-official books that have accompanied the manifesto at every election since 1945, and he traces the freer expression of policy that is possible between elections. The book is an excellent compendium of Liberal publishing over half a century.

Given his thorough coverage of the Ashdown years and the subsequent twists and turns, Jones can be forgiven the long gestation period for his book. It ends tantalisingly with the election of Nick Clegg as leader and as a consequence it lacks a review of the past four crucial years of a leader who speaks always of Liberals and Liberalism and whose book *The Liberal Moment* (Demos, 2009) is as good a short statement of social liberalism as has appeared in recent years. One looks forward to a second, updated, paperback edition taking us up to the coalition, which might also be more within the affordable range of such books.

The book sets Liberal philosophy firmly into the party's political history and as such it is a valuable addition to the literature. I hope, probably in vain, that it will be widely read by the current *Focus*-obsessed generation of Liberal Democrat activists.

*Michael Meadowcroft was a Leeds City Councillor, 1968–1983, and Liberal MP for Leeds West, 1983–87. He has held numerous local and national offices in the Liberal Party and is currently the Chair of the Leeds Liberal Democrats Campaign Development Group.*

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## Secular intellectuals

William C. Lubenow, *Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture in Modern Britain, 1815–1914: Making Words Flesh* (Boydell Press, 2010)

Reviewed by Iain Sharpe

THE STARTING point for Professor Lubenow's book is that the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and the granting of Catholic emancipation the following year 'wrested

Britain from the patronage values of the confessional fiscal-military state' and 'opened political and social space by forging liberal values'. The author traces the intellectual life and social milieu

of the secular public intellectuals who emerged to fill this new social space. The intellectuals referred to in the title were not specialists in particular fields but rather those who pursued professional, academic or literary careers (indeed often combinations of these) having studied at Oxford or Cambridge. Their interests were wide-ranging, encompassing not only history, politics, science, mathematics and literature, but also travel, in particular Alpine mountaineering. What united them was an intellectual approach that incorporated acceptance of doubt and rejection of dogmatic religion – for example their interest in the study of statistics reflected an acceptance that knowledge could be a matter of probability rather than certainty.

The author outlines how the role of Oxford and Cambridge universities changed to put more emphasis on academic achievement and preparing students for the secular professions rather than the Anglican priesthood. At the same time, members of the old aristocracy ‘brought themselves into the modern world by accepting university values and its indeterminate knowledge’. For example, Sir Charles Trevelyan, assistant secretary to the Treasury and joint author of the Northcote–Trevelyan Report

on civil service reform, came from a wealthy West Country family, but pursued an administrative career. He fathered something of a literary/political dynasty. His son George Otto went on to become a Liberal Cabinet minister under Gladstone, as well as pursuing a literary career, writing a well-known multi-volume history of the American war of independence. Of his sons, one, C. P. Trevelyan became first a Liberal then a Labour MP and a Cabinet minister in the 1924 and 1929–31 governments, while another, G. M Trevelyan was both a popular and an academically eminent historian, ending up as Regius Professor of History at Cambridge University.

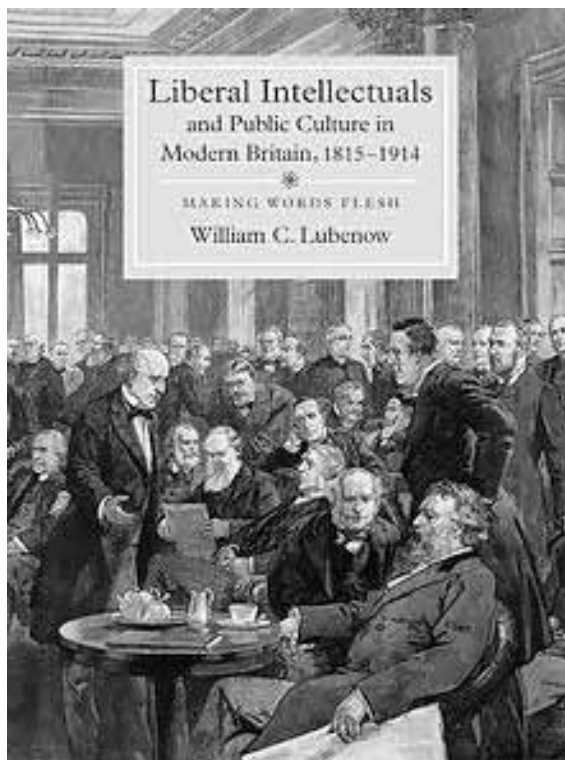
A continuing thread throughout the book is the careers and families of the brothers Sir James Fitzjames Stephen and Sir Leslie Stephen. The former was a lawyer, judge and polemicist, who stood twice as a Liberal parliamentary candidate, but who gave up party politics due to a reluctance to pander to public opinion, and who ended up as a vociferous opponent of Gladstone over home rule. His younger brother Leslie, the founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, is often cited as an exemplar of nineteenth-century intellectuals’ loss of faith. He took holy orders in order to gain a Cambridge fellowship, but later renounced them, claiming to have ‘never believed’. He is described by Professor Lubenow as belonging to a ‘metropolitan but indeterminate social world between the universities and the state’. The DNB was his ‘great history of liberalism’, which ‘measured social worth by the standards of imagination and education’ rather than social class or military achievement. Professor Lubenow also devotes considerable attention to the world of Stephen’s daughter, Virginia Woolf and her fellow Bloomsbury Group members, John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey and E. M. Forster, who in many ways continued the spirit of secular Liberal intellectualism into the 1920s and beyond.

The author concludes with two chapters highlighting the problematic relationships between liberalism and, on the one hand, Roman Catholicism and on the other nationalism. He charts the

attitudes of Catholic aristocrats, who in the early part of the nineteenth century often supported the Liberals because they were more sympathetic than the Tories to religious equality, but as the century wore on increasingly moved towards Conservatism. Two particular episodes prompted this: first Lord John Russell’s overtly anti-Catholic Ecclesiastical Titles Act of 1851; secondly, and perhaps surprisingly, Gladstone’s adoption of home rule, which they saw as pandering to ‘revolutionary’ Irish nationalism. Many secular Liberals too had problems with Irish home rule, although they had earlier supported other nationalisms, such as Italian reunification. Those Liberal intellectuals who became Liberal Unionists did so for various reasons, which can perhaps be best summed up as a fear of both the (Irish) Roman Catholic nature of Irish nationalism and its revolutionary character. To grant home rule, they believed, would pave the way for despotism, or at least a ‘demagogic democracy’.

This book will add much to our understanding of the nineteenth-century British intellectual world, its opinions and thought processes. If I have a reservation about it, other than over the author’s annoying stylistic tick of using repetition for emphasis, it is about how important the intellectuals depicted in this book actually were within Victorian Liberalism. Just as one feels that the attitudes of the Bloomsbury Group, who are also much discussed in this volume, are often given too much prominence in studies of the inter-war period, one is left feeling that the subjects of Professor Lubenow’s study were certainly clever and learned, but in the end they didn’t matter all that much.

The author acknowledges in the introduction to the book that Liberal ideology also owed much to ‘Whig aristocracy’, ‘Manchester markets’ and ‘religious groups such as Unitarians’, although the latter were hardly typical of the nonconformist churches whose members were so important to Liberalism. It is a pity that the book makes so little attempt to engage with these different crosscurrents of Liberal thought. Similarly, it is curious (and the author admits as much)



that Conservatives such as Arthur Balfour, George Curzon and the fourteenth Earl of Derby are also roped into the ranks of Liberal intellectuals because they illustrate 'processes and procedures associated with liberalism'. This does leave the problem however, that they were not actually Liberals. For all its undoubted merits, perhaps

the book would have been better titled 'Secular intellectuals' rather than 'Liberal intellectuals'.

*Iain Sharpe recently completed a University of London PhD thesis on 'Herbert Gladstone and Liberal Party Revival, 1899–1905'. He is a Liberal Democrat councillor in Watford.*

## For Gladstone and Henry George

Paul Mulvey, *The Political Life of Josiah C. Wedgwood: Land, Liberty and Empire, 1872–1943* (Royal Historical Society, 2010)

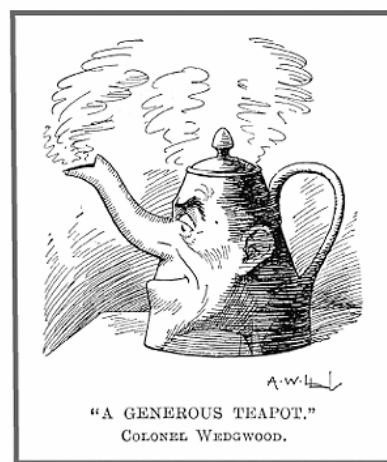
Reviewed by Richard Toye

WHEN JOSIAH C. Wedgwood died at the age of seventy-one, the Canadian journalist J. F. Sander-son recalled an episode he had witnessed four years earlier, at the outbreak of the Second World War. After Neville Chamberlain made his formal declaration of war, the air-raid warning sounded. Wedgwood, at that time a Labour MP (he was ennobled in 1942), refused to follow the crowd into the parliamentary bomb shelter. 'He calmly announced that it was a practice raid because no bombs would fall on London for six months' (*Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 30 July 1943). Other members argued with him, but he put his money where his mouth was and in due course won his bet. The story illustrates Wedgwood's capacity for independent-mindedness and (at times) sound judgement but also his foolhardy and obstreperous qualities. These help explain both his ability to maintain a longstanding, uninterrupted and quite high-profile parliamentary career (as a Liberal MP from 1906 and as a Labour one from 1918) and his failure to make it to the front rank of politics. He did at one point become a member of the Cabinet, as a Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the short-lived Labour government of 1924, but, as Paul Mulvey notes in this excellent book, he had 'little status and little to do' in this role (p. 138) and, as was his habit, showed little collegiality. He was above all an

individualist, making him difficult for historians to place; Mulvey's achievement is, without making exaggerated claims for his significance, to show why he should be taken seriously.

Wedgwood is probably best remembered for his association with three ideas: land reform, progressive reform in India, and Zionism. He remained faithful to the first of these causes after it went out of fashion, adopted the second before it came into fashion, and began advocating the third during the First World War, exactly as it came into fashion. His combination of beliefs, some of which were 'extreme and marginal' (p. 204), may have been idiosyncratic, but Mulvey places him convincingly as one of the last exponents of a once-powerful British tradition: 'He never ceased to believe that the Gladstonian radicalism of his early years, suitably developed by the ideas of Henry George, was the key to human progress and prosperity' (p. 208). Indeed, we are encouraged to believe that it may have been Wedgwood's difficult personality rather than the peculiarity of his ideas that kept him away from positions of greater prominence. Mulvey's judgements on his behaviour are robust, occasionally verging on the brutal. Thus Wedgwood's fruitful efforts between the wars to establish the History of Parliament project is recognised his 'greatest legacy' but also as 'one of his greatest failures'. Mulvey explains: 'while his great

## THE POLITICAL LIFE OF JOSIAH C. WEDGWOOD



LAND, LIBERTY AND EMPIRE, 1872–1943

Paul Mulvey

STUDIES IN HISTORY

energy and enthusiasm created it, his carelessness, bellicosity and sheer lack of management talent alienated the very people that he needed to make it a success' (p. 177). The balance of this assessment, though, is perhaps not quite generous enough, given that History of Parliament Trust, freed from Wedgwood's eccentric methodology and Whiggish ideological proclivities, carries out excellent work to this day.

The book is billed as a political life, but sufficient information on Wedgwood's private affairs is included to illuminate his public career. The book is meticulously researched, enjoyable to read and, at just over two hundred pages, exactly the right length for the subject matter. It can be recommended warmly to anyone interested in the politics of the period.

*Richard Toye is Professor of Modern History at the University of Exeter. His most recent books are Lloyd George and Churchill: Rivals for Greatness (2007) and Churchill's Empire: The World That Made Him and the World He Made (2010).*