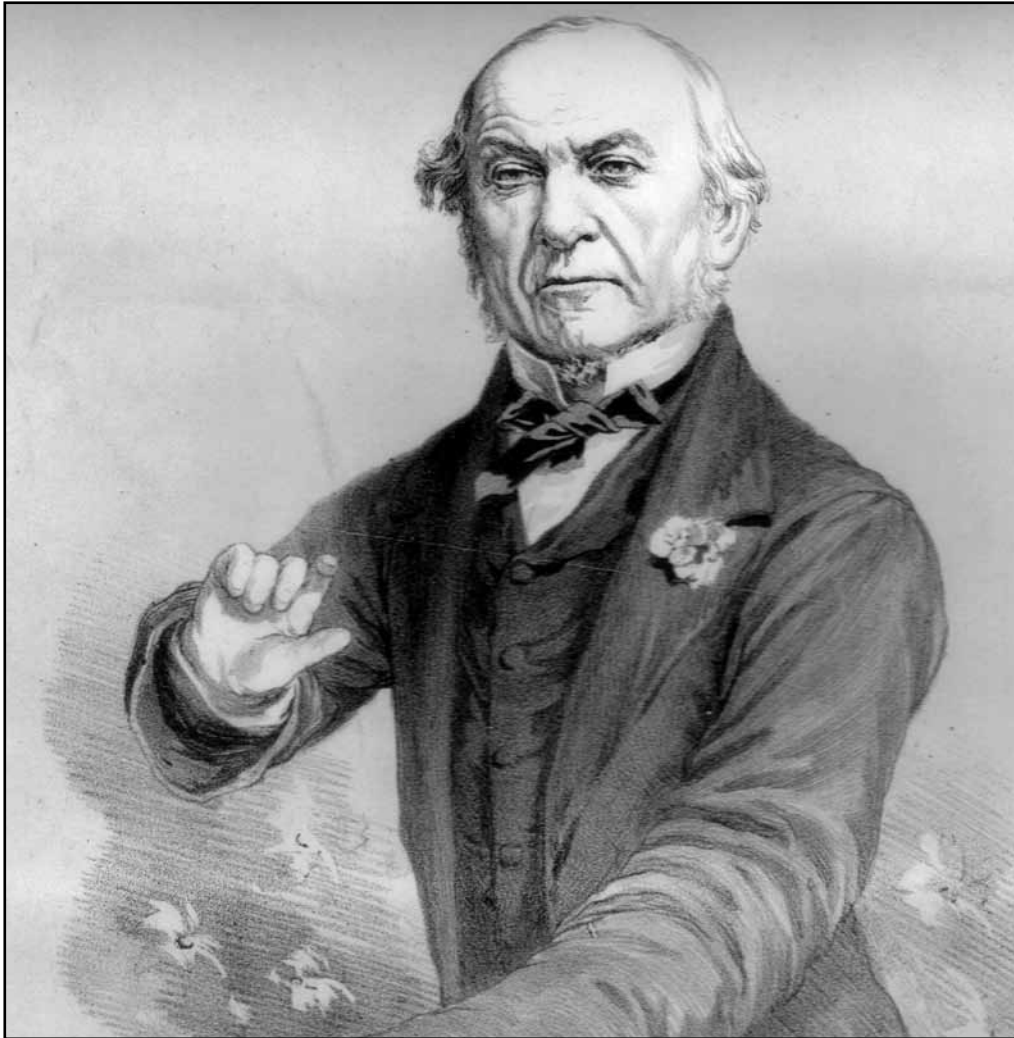


Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



The making of 'The People's William'

Richard A. Gaunt

William Ewart Gladstone A bicentary perspective

Chris Wrigley

The making of 'The People's William'

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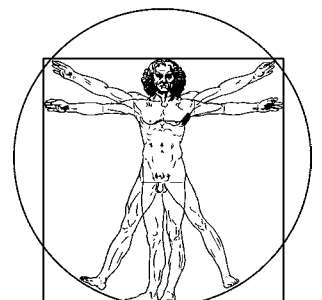
The 1936 Preston by-election Coalition tensions

Michael James

John Sutton Nettlefold, Liberalism and the early town planning movement

Ian Ivatt

Liberal Party fortunes in the Isle of Wight 1900–1910

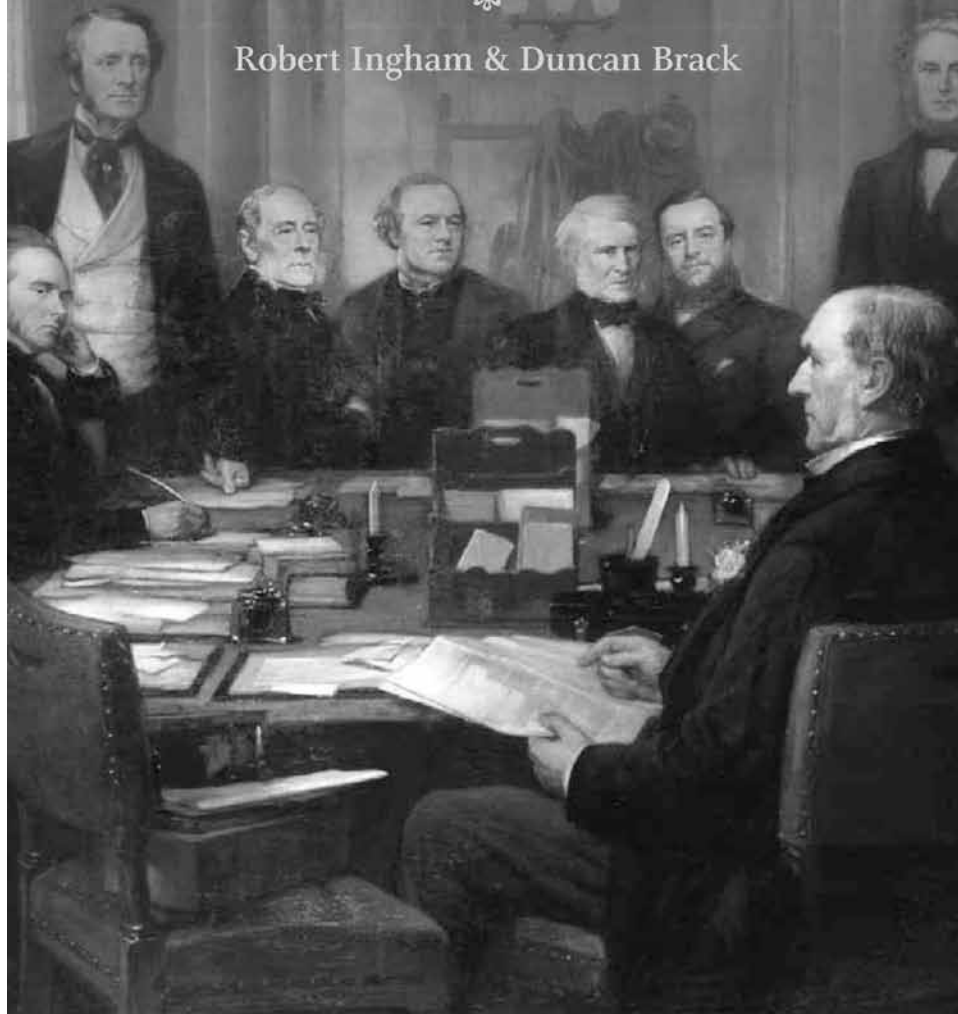


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William Ewart Gladstone: A bicentenary perspective 4

Richard A. Gaunt explores Gladstone's connections with Nottinghamshire.

The making of 'The People's William' 14

Chris Wrigley analyses Gladstone's transformation into the most popular politician of his age.

The 1936 Preston by-election 20

David Dutton looks at the tensions a by-election caused for Liberal National and Conservative coalition partners.

Discovering Berwick's Liberal history 27

Sir Alan Beith MP explores the Liberal history of his native town.

John Sutton Nettlefold, Liberalism and the early town planning movement 30

The contribution of the chair of Birmingham's Housing Committee, 1901–11, to the debates on slum housing and town planning; by Michael James.

Liberal Party fortunes in the Isle of Wight 1900–1910 38

Ian Ivatt looks at the political and electoral history of a Liberal–Conservative marginal seat.

Report 45

Winston Churchill: Liberal or Tory? with Sir Alan Beith and Professor Martin Pugh; report by Mark Pack.

Reviews 47

Fry, And Fortune Fleed: David Lloyd George, The First Democratic Statesman, 1916–1922, reviewed by J. Graham Jones; *Dostaler, Keynes and His Battles*, reviewed by Richard Toye; *Shepherd and Laybourn, Britain's First Labour Government*, reviewed by Michael Meadowcroft.

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The Liberal Democrat History Group **promotes** the discussion and research of topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the *Journal of Liberal History* and other occasional publications.

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WILLIAM EWING A BICENTENARY

From December 2009 to March 2010, the University of Nottingham held an exhibition – ‘W. E. Gladstone: The “Grand Old Man” in Nottinghamshire’ – to commemorate the bicentenary of the birth of the great nineteenth-century Liberal politician and statesman. The exhibition had two major objectives: first, to illustrate some of the larger themes of Gladstone’s life (in particular, his transformation from Macaulay’s ‘stern, unbending Tory’ of the 1830s to the ‘People’s William’ of the 1850s and 1860s, feted and adored through – amongst other things – a remarkably modern-looking exploitation of his public image); second, to highlight the hitherto unexplored connections between Gladstone and Nottinghamshire. Here we reprint two of the lectures given at the time; by **Richard A. Gaunt** and **Chris Wrigley**.



AT FIRST GLANCE, the second objective might seem an incongruous undertaking. Gladstone was, after all, the Lancashire-raised and Oxford-educated son of a wealthy Scottish merchant; his wife – Catherine Glynne (1812–1900) – was a member of a Welsh gentry family which was raised to a hereditary baronetcy; Gladstone’s

constituencies ranged from Newark in Nottinghamshire (1832–46) through the University of Oxford (1847–65), South Lancashire (1865–8) and Greenwich (1868–80) to Edinburgh Midlothian (1880–94). Gladstone himself spent most of his active political life in the heart of Westminster, first as a Conservative MP (1832–46), later as a Liberal

WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE: A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

(1859–94). Ascribing to Gladstone a particular local attachment was problematic in his lifetime: as one contemporary observed, in 1865, Gladstone was ‘Oxford on the surface, but Liverpool underneath’. Yet there are good reasons for remembering the strong and continuing connections which Gladstone forged with Nottinghamshire throughout his life: connections which, in many ways, mirrored the political journey which he took from Conservative to Liberal over the course of his remarkable life.

The exhibition was supported by a series of lectures, from which the following two articles derive. Whilst the first concentrates upon Gladstone’s connection with Newark, his first parliamentary constituency, in the unashamedly Tory period of his life, the seeds of his future Liberalism emerge as the crucial reason for his departure from the constituency in 1846. Gladstone’s continuing connections with the county – the result of social and family ties to the Dukes of Newcastle-under-Lyne – are explored in the remainder of the article. The second article considers how it was that Gladstone, the opponent of parliamentary reform in 1831–2, emerged as the ‘People’s William’ of popular acclamation during his period as Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer (and then prime minister) after 1852, prepared to concede ever more in the way of reform. Together, the articles demonstrate that, even after two hundred years, what Lord Jenkins memorably described as the ‘galumfurious’ nature of Gladstone’s mind, continues to provide rich pickings for historians and political biographers.¹

From Conservative to Liberal: Gladstone as MP for Newark (1832–46)

Although there are many biographies and monographs studying Gladstone’s role in national political life, as the man who became Liberal prime minister four times between 1868 and 1894, Nottinghamshire was in many respects the cradle of his parliamentary career. As Gladstone commented in 1882, on the golden jubilee of his first election to parliament as Conservative MP for Newark, the county had provided him with the ‘first link of connection with political life’.²

It was the ‘High-Flyer coach’ from London to York which brought Gladstone to Newark, on Monday 24 September 1832, on what proved to be the first of his many visits to the county. The coach’s title – a reference to the great distance it covered at relative speed – was appropriate, given that Gladstone was already proving to be something of a ‘high flyer’ himself. At the time of his first appearance in the county, Gladstone was twenty-two years of age. He had been expensively schooled at Eton and Christ Church College, Oxford, where he attracted attention as a serious moralist and notable debater. Gladstone graduated from the university with a prized double-first-class degree in Classics and Mathematics. His father, John Gladstones, had silently dropped the final ‘s’ from the family name during his steady rise to social and political eminence amongst the Liverpool merchant elite. It was in Liverpool (at 62 Rodney Street) that William Ewart, his fifth and final son, was born on 29 December 1809. John Gladstone proved to

be a pivotal influence determining his son’s early career and a principal reason for his association with Nottinghamshire.

Two things pre-occupied the mind of the High-Flyer’s eminent young passenger as he arrived at Newark: one was the ‘painful sacrifice’ he had made, in travelling on the sabbath from Torquay to Newark for the purposes of electioneering. The second was the reception he was likely to receive upon arrival:

I had heard much of the extreme violence of [the opposing] party in Newark and on seeing a man waiting, evidently on the lookout for me, at the hotel gateway [of the Clinton Arms], I was in no way inclined to suppose him a friend but thought ... that he might be a spy stationed there for any purpose whether of violence or of fraud. He addressed and shook me cordially by the hand, proving to be the landlord of *our* hotel, Mr Lawton, and assuring me that the three days’ canvass which had already been completed [for my candidacy as the town’s MP] were of the most successful character.

With that warmer than anticipated reception at Newark, at the hotel which still bears the name of Newark’s most prominent political patron (Clinton being the family name of the Dukes of Newcastle), Gladstone commenced on all ‘the noise, the animation, and the aims, of a contested election’. Late in life, Gladstone recalled that he looked back on this as ‘the most exciting period of my life. I never worked harder or slept so badly, that is to

William Ewart
Gladstone (1809–
98) in 1833

WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE: A BICENTENARY PERSPECTIVE

say so little'. The Clinton Arms provided both the headquarters for Gladstone's parliamentary campaign and the venue from which he later addressed the crowds as its victorious MP.³ [Figure 1]

The Newark whose streets Gladstone traversed in the autumn of 1832 was a constituency which had come to the forefront of national attention during the preceding two years during the battle to achieve the passage of the Parliamentary Reform Act (the 'Great Reform Act'). As a constituency, Newark was relatively unusual in combining wholesale aristocratic influence with a remarkably wide franchise. Before the Reform Act, Newark returned two MPs under a franchise which gave votes to those who paid their annual household and poor rates (known as 'scot and lot'). This made the constituency a remarkably large one of nearly 1600 electors. The Reform Act abolished the scot and lot franchise, whilst allowing existing voters to retain it for their lifetime. The vote was now vested in owners and occupiers of property valued at £10 per year. This actually served to decrease Newark's mid-nineteenth-century electorate, before the effects of economic growth, inflation and further reform acts (notably those of 1867 and 1884) expanded the franchise from one vested in property owners to one enjoyed universally by men (and, eventually, women) alike. After 1885, Newark became a single-member constituency: a status it has continued to enjoy ever since.⁴

Gladstone was introduced to political life through the recommendation of the Earl of Lincoln, the eldest son and heir of the 4th Duke of Newcastle. This was the foundation of Gladstone's subsequent relationship with the duke himself. Newcastle relied almost entirely upon the high praise of Lincoln, who was Gladstone's contemporary at Eton and Oxford. Through a mixture of personal observation and an appeal to his father's vanity, Lincoln assured Newcastle that Gladstone would prove an asset to 'a most *unornamented* House, and an honor to the patron who shall introduce him to public life'.⁵ At a time of almost universal despondency amongst Conservatives about the possible impact of the Reform Act, this was

a potential crumb of comfort. Nor could Newcastle have been in any doubt of Gladstone's position with reference to the Reform Act for he had denounced it roundly in the debating rooms of Oxford, having memorably stated that there was 'something of anti-Christ' about it. Lincoln's unimpeachable credentials as Gladstone's referee made Newcastle's choice of him certain, when he was invited, in the accepted language of the day, to 'recommend' a candidate to the Newark Conservatives, in advance of the 1832 general election. As Newcastle commented in his diary, Gladstone was 'a friend of Lincoln's and a very talented & highly principled young man, as he tells me, for I do not know him'.⁶ Newcastle approached John Gladstone, who responded with qualified approval and an offer to share the costs of the election, which were estimated to be no more than £1000.

Whilst fully aware of the opportunity being held out to his son, John Gladstone knew that William was seriously torn between a career in politics, the church or the law. However, the matter was to all intents and purposes settled, even before Gladstone himself was approached. With the whole-hearted support of his family, Gladstone accepted the offer of Newcastle's electoral support and 'recommendation' at Newark. The terms upon which he did so were significant: 'if it should hereafter at any time appear, that any personal or political predilections which I entertain are such as to impair that general concordance, I am fully aware your Grace will find ... an adequate reason, why ... the [offer], now made upon a different supposition, should at once be withdrawn'.⁷

Newcastle's reputation as an electioneer and 'borough-monger', who enjoyed the majority of political influence in Newark because of the amount of property he possessed, both as owner and landlord, meant his name was public currency during the highly charged campaign for parliamentary reform in the period 1830–32. Gladstone later commented on the difficulty of saying anything in justification of Newcastle, during his election campaign, for fear of being accused of 'the most extreme tyrannical feeling'; although (to his credit) this did not prevent him from doing

Right, from top:
Figure 1: The Clinton Arms, Newark, Gladstone's headquarters in 1832
Figure 2: Gladstone's calling card in the 1832 election
Figure 3: Ticket for supper with Gladstone, 1 November 1832

so. To Newcastle, it was a perfectly sensible proposition to find a promising young talent with similar political views to represent his interests in the borough where he enjoyed the greatest level of personal interest as a property owner.

Newcastle's choice was intimately related to his position in Newark. From the time of the infamous Newark by-election of 1829 – when Newcastle had evicted those of his tenants who would not vote for his chosen candidate, Michael Thomas Sadler – until Gladstone's election in December 1832, his influence was under almost continual assault. Newcastle's assertion of the right to 'do what I will with my own' in the borough attracted national attention and drew a local response. In 1830, an attempt was made to revoke Newcastle's lease of the 960-acre Crown Estates in the vicinity of the town. Newark kicked against the duke's electoral influence in the general election of May 1831 by rejecting his preferred candidate, Sir Roger Gresley, and returning in his place the radical lawyer Thomas Wilde. Wilde had first appeared as an 'Independent' candidate in the 1829 by-election and proceeded to contest every Newark election thereafter up to 1841; he was later raised to the peerage as the Liberal Lord Chancellor Baron Truro. Newcastle's electoral reverse in 1831 proved to be the final straw: 'I shall not try Newark again upon speculation or to spend money – if they solicit me, I will send somebody but I will be guaranteed against expense – in the mean time I shall raise my rents to the double and see how they like that'.⁸

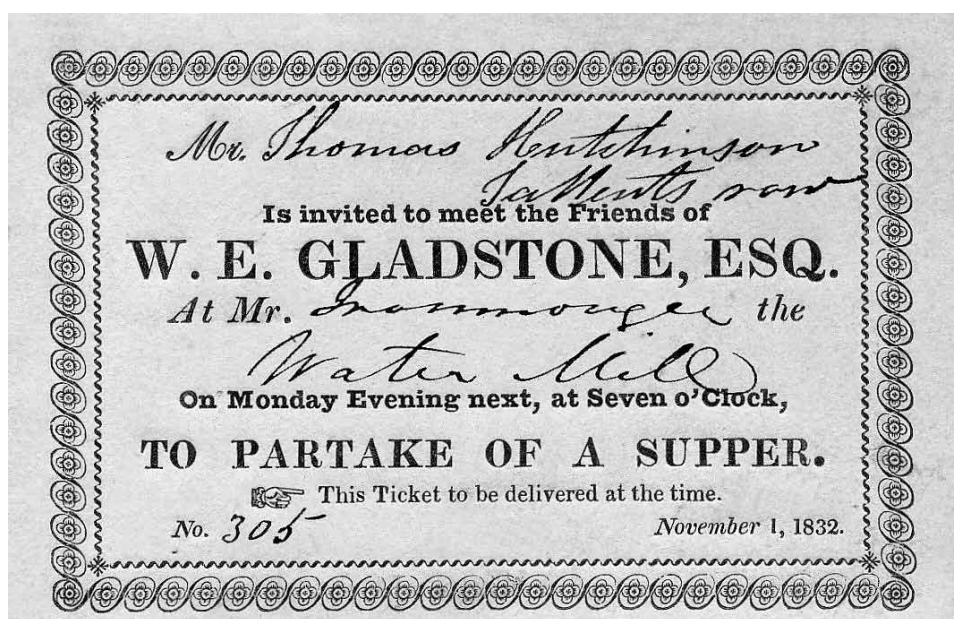
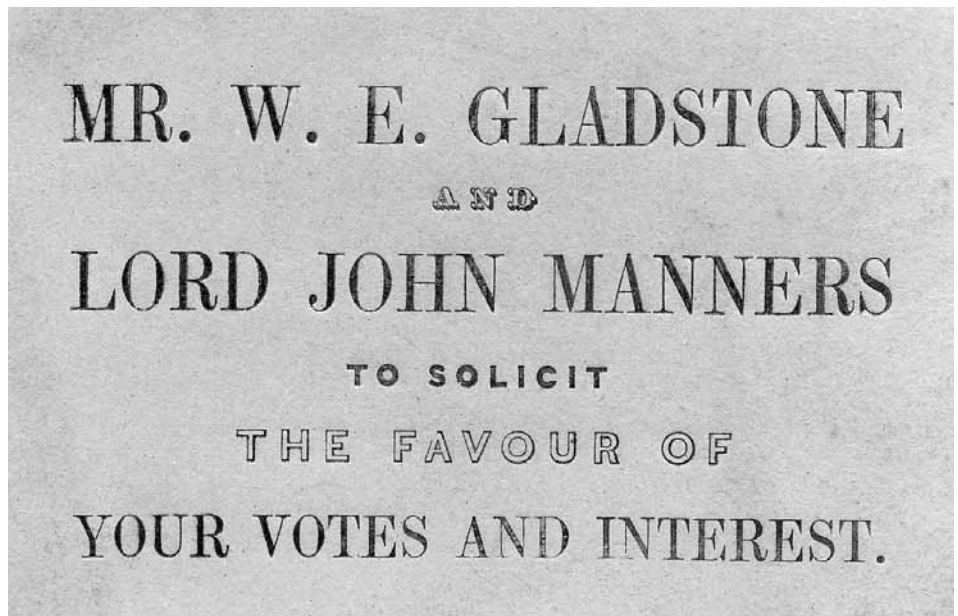
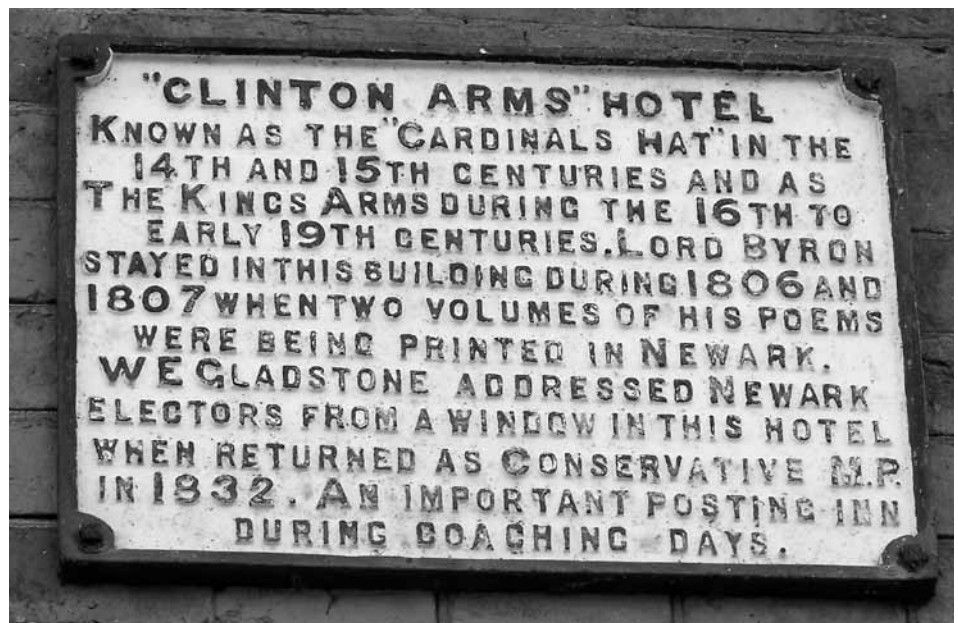
Punitive tactics of this sort were Newcastle's means of whipping the people of Newark back into obedience to him and ones which raised an understandable degree of public criticism. There was no secret ballot until Gladstone introduced it, as Liberal prime minister, in 1872, which meant that polling was held in public; the votes of every legitimate elector were recorded and published in poll books, thereby providing the duke, his agents and their opponents, with excellent material from which to identify supporters and expose malcontents. Surviving maps of the period, used in the distribution of coal from the duke to his tenants, show that those

designated to receive this boon had proved electorally obedient. The various political parties in Newark each had their own electoral colour: red was the Tory or Conservative colour, blue represented the independents or Whig-Liberals and yellow was used for the moderate or Liberal Tories.⁹

Gladstone was, at this period, a keen Tory; he later called his Newark election address 'that of a warm and loyal Tory who was quite unaware that it contained in it the seeds of change to come'. Consequently, he was 'in no degree ashamed of votes given through attachment to a landlord'. Rather, he saw it as:

... every way natural and proper, that [tenants] should look to those from whom [they have] received kindness [for] their recommendation ... the relation therefore between [the Duke of Newcastle] and those who hold [his tenancies] is one ... of favour on his part, of gratitude on theirs.

Whilst the election campaign was reported regularly to Newcastle, day-to-day management rested with Gladstone's local election committee. However, Newcastle was advised by Lord Lincoln to 'keep an eye upon our friends at Newark – Gladstone is they think raw'.¹⁰ These 'friends' largely consisted of Newark's Conservative establishment from amongst its leading professional, business and retail families. Pre-eminent amongst them, at this time, were Edward Smith Godfrey and William Edward Tallents, both of whom were prominent in the administration of the town's affairs. Both acted, in succession, as Newcastle's land steward and political agent in the town. In the aftermath of the election defeat of May 1831, it was men like Godfrey and Tallents who spearheaded the Conservative revival in the town – a revival which Gladstone would both serve to accelerate and profit from. On Waterloo Day (18 June 1831), a Red Club was established, taking its name from Newcastle's electoral colour. Ultimately, the club grew from the parent body to encompass some 650 members, convened in branch Red Clubs of fifty members each. Gladstone's election committee was formed from its ranks,



WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE: A BICENTENARY PERSPECTIVE

headed by Godfrey as President of the Club.¹¹

Although the Reform Act became law in June 1832, electioneering still had some way to go towards the standards of propriety expected in a modern representative democracy. It was still conducted very much in the manner in which William Hogarth had portrayed it in his famous series of mid-eighteenth-century election prints, in terms of its colour, violence and symbolism. Campaigning was extremely sociable in nature, ranging from polite teas and election suppers to convivial and drink-fuelled gatherings at clubs, public houses and in the streets. Teas and suppers were important occasions used by Gladstone's campaign team to gather support for his candidacy. As 'ticket only' affairs, they expressed favour towards those who were invited to attend. 'Calling cards' were an important means of soliciting 'the favour of votes and interest' at election time, although they were not always well received. [Figures 2–3] 'One saucy body shut her door and rowed us from an upper window,' Gladstone recorded, 'another tore my card and flung the pieces at my feet – a third on hearing "Well Ma'am, shall we have a vote here?" – "I wouldn't give you one to save your life if I'd a hundred".' Meanwhile, Gladstone was swept up in an almost nightly parade of sociability amongst the branch Red Clubs of Newark. Amongst the many survivals of electioneering activity in Newark, during this period, are songs especially composed for the occasion:

Oh the Newark Red Club is a
glorious thing;
For freely, when there, we can
chat, laugh and sing;
Without any fear of the slightest
commotion
While turning our views to
[young] Gladstone's promotion ...
Sing Gladstone for ever hurrah
Reds!
Gladstone for ever hurrah Reds!
Gladstone for ever hurrah Reds!
For he is the Man of our choice!¹²

A particularly sensitive election issue, insofar as Gladstone was concerned, was the emancipation of West Indian slaves. Britain had finally abolished the slave trade in

1807, after a hard fought campaign led by William Wilberforce. But the condition of slavery continued to exist in the British Empire until 1833. Public interest made the question a key issue in the general election of 1832. John Gladstone had extensive property interests in the West Indies and had publicly defended slavery as recently as 1830. Election handbills were issued in which charges were made against Gladstone because of these views. Gladstone responded with a handbill of his own in which he based his opposition to the immediate emancipation of the slaves upon passages in the Bible. Gladstone argued that slaves could not be given their freedom immediately but first had to prove their fitness to use that freedom responsibly. He supported schemes of education and apprenticeship in order to prepare slaves for a future state of independence. He also suggested that the living conditions of factory workers in England and the Irish poor were as deserving of attention as the plantation slaves in the West Indies.¹³ Gladstone was closely questioned on the issue at the election, especially by members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society who were keen supporters of abolition. Gladstone respected their opposition as being 'moderate and conscientious ... they acted as men who had a duty to fulfil, and knew it, and who discharged it'. Gladstone's maiden speech in the House of Commons was delivered during the debates on the abolition bill in 1833 and, the following year, after reports of riots in the West Indies reached England, Gladstone remarked that it was a natural consequence of the expectations which the Whig government had raised by their abolition bill, when what continued to exist in the West Indies was a form of 'modified slavery'.¹⁴ There is little doubt of the moral anguish which the issue caused Gladstone as it was intimately bound up with the financial fortunes of his family. It is tempting to speculate that the large amount of money which Gladstone subsequently spent (from the 1840s to 1880s) in attempting to 'rescue' prostitutes derived from the products of John Gladstone's West Indian operations.

However, as a candidate, Gladstone repaid Newcastle's faith (and

that of the Red Club), by unstinting campaigning in the 1832 election contest. This went a substantial way to returning him at the head of the poll, with 887 votes to his opponents 798 and 726, at the election itself. Elections frequently ended with the successful candidate being 'chaired', or paraded around the constituency. Flags played an important part in the procession and several election flags, dating from Gladstone's time as MP for the town, are still extant; given the frequency with which they were used, waved and marched about the town, their survival is truly remarkable. In 1832, the competing flags of the contending parties were the subject of a tremendous 'flag fight', as one local resident noted:

The fight and row was tremendous, on having secured them, they called out 'down with the Yellow flags', the Reds immediately rushed on to attack the Yellows who had 4 Orange and 4 Yellow flags, after a severe contest we captured 3 Orange and 3 Yellow Flags, the other two escaped much damaged. The poles of the others were broken to pieces.¹⁵

However, the election had an unexpected and (for Gladstone) unfortunate aftermath. Election expenses and the problem of rewarding electors with free liquor were perennial problems in campaigns of the period and ones from which Newark was not immune. The election expenses for the 1832 contest came in at almost double the £1000 agreed by John Gladstone and the duke. Gladstone blamed his election committee for the excessive financial costs of his return, believing they had allowed the excessive distribution of free ale to supporters and ignored his express instructions against keeping public houses open. The dispute took eighteen months to settle and caused serious difficulties between Gladstone and his supporters in the town. Gladstone, the young moralist, feared that the committee would repeat the tactic of keeping open house, in future election contests, if he did not stand his ground and refuse to settle the extra election bills. The tone of frustration was revealed by a resolution which Gladstone's

**'One saucy
body shut
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on hearing
"Well Ma'am,
shall we have
a vote here?"
– "I wouldn't
give you one
to save your
life if I'd a
hundred".'**

committee passed in July 1833 in which they expressed their 'extreme dissatisfaction' with Gladstone's position and observed that 'such a state of affairs is calculated most seriously to injure the Interest by which Mr Gladstone has been returned to parliament as well as his own individual Character with his Constituents'.¹⁶

The election accounts were ultimately revised and settled but the issue cast an early – and decisive – pall over the formation of good relations between Gladstone and his chief political supporters in Newark. For many of them, customary electioneering tactics of the liquid variety were a given, and any disruption of them entailed the fracturing of a careful network of local political and social relationships. The Newark Reds felt themselves as much the guardians of a cherished principle as Gladstone; one, moreover, founded on an intimate knowledge of the constituency and long experience of its character. When Gladstone continued to press his claims for the election committee to make specific pledges against treating, in advance of the 1835 general election, Newcastle finally intervened decisively to assuage both sides and offered to put £500 towards the costs of any future contest. This intervention was decisive enough for Gladstone to enter that election – at which he was returned unopposed – with his committee behind him. Nevertheless, Gladstone remained doubtful of putting his reliance in the 'unpledged sincerity and honesty' of his committee and was relieved that it was not tested by an election contest. In retrospect, the commemoration of Gladstone's name in more than one public house in Nottinghamshire has more than a touch of irony about it.¹⁷

Newcastle's support for Gladstone in his dispute with the committee undoubtedly strengthened Gladstone's respect for the duke; a respect which influenced his actions in 1846 when political circumstances changed, policies divided them and their roles were reversed with regard to the Election Committee. This dispute arose from Gladstone's evolving political Liberalism. Newcastle's growing irritation was recorded in his diary, where he observed that his former protégé was:

A man of extraordinary powers of speech, intellect and research – yet it always appeared to me to be a gross impropriety to exalt and place him in the Cabinet – for however clever he had no experience and consequently was made the tool and puppet of the wily Peel.¹⁸

It was Sir Robert Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws which delivered the final blow to the relationship between Gladstone and Newcastle; the same event marked the end of the strict Conservatism which had hallmarked Gladstone's youth. The price of corn was a key issue in nineteenth-century Britain because it had a direct impact on the price of bread. At times of economic hardship, crowds would take to the streets in support of lower prices. In 1815, the British government introduced a Corn Law to protect domestic farmers from the pressure of international competition by regulating prices in the face of imports. Landowners and farmers supported this 'protectionist' policy but it was deeply unpopular with the wider population. The contrasting images of a large and small loaf came to symbolise the battle between those who defended economic protection, on the one hand, and supporters of 'free trade' on the other. Gladstone was a supporter of the Corn Law, and was pledged to its maintenance at the general election of 1841. However, the Irish Potato Famine of November 1845 forced him and others to reconsider their views.¹⁹ He supported Sir Robert Peel when he decided to repeal the Corn Law in 1846 and joined the Cabinet as Colonial Secretary. At this period, the acceptance of ministerial office necessitated that an MP put himself forward for re-election. Gladstone wrote to Newcastle regretting their differences but the duke managed to leave some ambiguity in his reply. Gladstone conjectured that the duke would refrain from intervening and allow him to try his luck with the Newark electorate. After becoming aware of this misunderstanding, Newcastle responded accordingly and mobilised every possible source of support in order to defeat him. The duke secured a notable ally in the shape of the Duke of Portland. Portland's son, Lord George

It was Sir Robert Peel's decision to repeal the Corn Laws which delivered the final blow to the relationship between Gladstone and Newcastle; the same event marked the end of the strict Conservatism which had hallmarked Gladstone's youth.

Bentinck, together with his close friend and colleague Benjamin Disraeli, became the leading opponents of repeal in the House of Commons. The mid-nineteenth-century Conservative and Liberal parties emerged from the political schism of 1846.²⁰

However, since the resolution of his difficulties with the election committee over the disputed election expenses, Gladstone had built up a strong reservoir of personal loyalties at Newark. A very real possibility was now emerging of an alliance between Gladstone and his committee *against* the duke. The Newark Conservatives complained that they would not accept another candidate. A deputation was despatched to Clumber, in January 1846, with a resolution expressing their continuing support for Gladstone:

That it is the opinion of this Committee that advantage ought not to be taken of the circumstance of Mr Gladstone having accepted the office of Secretary of State for the Colonies to deprive him of his seat during the remainder of the present Parliament but that he be requested to offer himself again to the constituency and that the exertions of this Committee be used to secure his election.²¹

It was a remarkable reversal of the position over the election expenses twelve years before. Newcastle withdrew from this conversation in depressed spirits, thoroughly convinced that a candidate who was not of his way of thinking would be forced upon him. In his diary, he recorded with drama how he proceeded to open his post the same day and found that, through the intervention of the Protectionist party organisers in London, he had secured a more congenial candidate in the person of Mr John Stuart QC. The duke's relief was palpable: 'Gladstone's agent had been made over to Mr Stuart, the malcontents had been overruled, my standard again waved on the walls of Newark'. Godfrey Tallents, who had succeeded his father as the duke's political agent at Newark, was bold enough to express the hope that Gladstone might be returned for the constituency at the next general election.²² That renewal was not to



Gladstone's friend and ally, the Fifth Duke of Newcastle (1811–64)

be. For all their genuine concern at Newcastle's high-handed treatment of them, the Newark Conservatives were ultimately bound on the corn question in a way that Gladstone could never be once he had so personally committed himself to Peel's proposal and that question would not disappear overnight from the thoughts of an agricultural constituency. Though the committee continued to struggle with the resolution of its own conflicting loyalties to Newcastle, Lincoln and Gladstone, the duke continued to return his preferred choice of MP at Newark during the remaining five years of his life.

A lasting friendship: Gladstone and the 5th Duke of Newcastle (1846–65)

Whilst Gladstone himself subsequently moved beyond Newark, both personally and politically, he did not escape the orbit of the Newcastle family. Indeed, he was well placed to witness the family's social and economic decline over the course of the next two generations. Had it not been for his friendship with Lord Lincoln, Gladstone

would probably never have become MP for Newark and, were it not for that friendship, his connections to Nottinghamshire might well have dissolved after his departure from the constituency in 1846. That they did not was largely owing to the fact that the two men were close personal and political friends. The gradual dissolution of Lincoln's marriage to Susan, daughter of the Duke of Hamilton, during the 1840s, was a blow which Gladstone found distressing to observe on personal grounds. As he told the Nottinghamshire Liberal MP (and future Speaker) John Evelyn Denison, in 1849:

Quite apart from my affection for Lincoln, it would be most deeply gratifying to me on account of the Duke of Newcastle whose many and steady kindnesses I never can forget, could any thing be done towards diminishing the weight of care and sorrow which presses upon and overhangs his family.²³

As the marriage moved towards divorce, Gladstone and his wife Catherine took Lincoln's children

under their wing and helped to look after them whilst their father attended to his distressing personal affairs. This entrenched the already strong personal ties between them. Gladstone even undertook a quixotic mission to 'rescue' Lady Lincoln, which ended with him dressing up as a minstrel and rowing across Lake Como in Italy to spy upon the villa where she was staying. Gladstone's subsequent discovery that Lady Lincoln was expecting another man's child placed him in the invidious position of having to inform his friend. This was doubly distressing to Gladstone: he had helped provide the evidence for a legal divorce which his otherwise high moral standards shrank from – a fact which was thrown back at him when he later opposed the Divorce Act of 1857.²⁴

During the 1850s, Gladstone and Lincoln (who succeeded as 5th Duke of Newcastle in January 1851) were political colleagues in the Liberal–Conservative Cabinet (composed of 'Peelites' and Whigs) which fought the Crimean War against Russia. Newcastle, as Secretary of State for War, bore a large degree of public criticism for the political failures and military unpreparedness of the British forces. [Figure 4] The war, and the duke's domestic misfortunes, broke his health and led to his relatively early death, at the age of fifty-three, in 1864. Gladstone was appointed a trustee of the Newcastle estates and acted as guardian to the duke's children. This was a role he continued to take seriously and one which drew him back to Nottinghamshire time and again over the next twenty years. Mindful of the unhelpful light which an official biography might cast upon Newcastle's life and reputation, Gladstone subsequently counselled the duke's youngest son, Lord Edward Pelham-Clinton, against acceding to requests for a biography of his father – unless strict editorial conditions were imposed.²⁵ Gladstone also removed the most sensitive of the duke's personal papers (dealing with his divorce) from the family archive at Clumber, keeping them with his own voluminous correspondence at Hawarden Castle in Flintshire. Today, they continue to form a separate section of the Glynne–Gladstone family archive.²⁶

'The Grand Old Man' in Nottinghamshire (1865–98)

The 5th Duke's death opened a new chapter in Gladstone's relations with Nottinghamshire. The Dukes of Newcastle had owned Nottingham Castle and Park since the 1660s. By the early nineteenth century, the castle was no longer a principal family residence and its future was uncertain. The growing population of the town made it inevitable that the family would consider allowing use of the land for building purposes. Residential development of the park, initially around the margins of the estate, was halted after Nottingham Castle was set on fire, during the Reform Bill Riots of October 1831, in protest at the House of Lords' rejection of the bill. Subsequent poor relations between the 4th Duke and the Nottingham authorities limited further building, though plans were resumed under the 5th Duke in 1851 and the Nottingham architect Thomas Chambers Hine was commissioned to transform the park into a high-quality residential area. As a trustee of the 5th Duke's estate, Gladstone was closely involved in superintending developments in the park after 1864. His signature

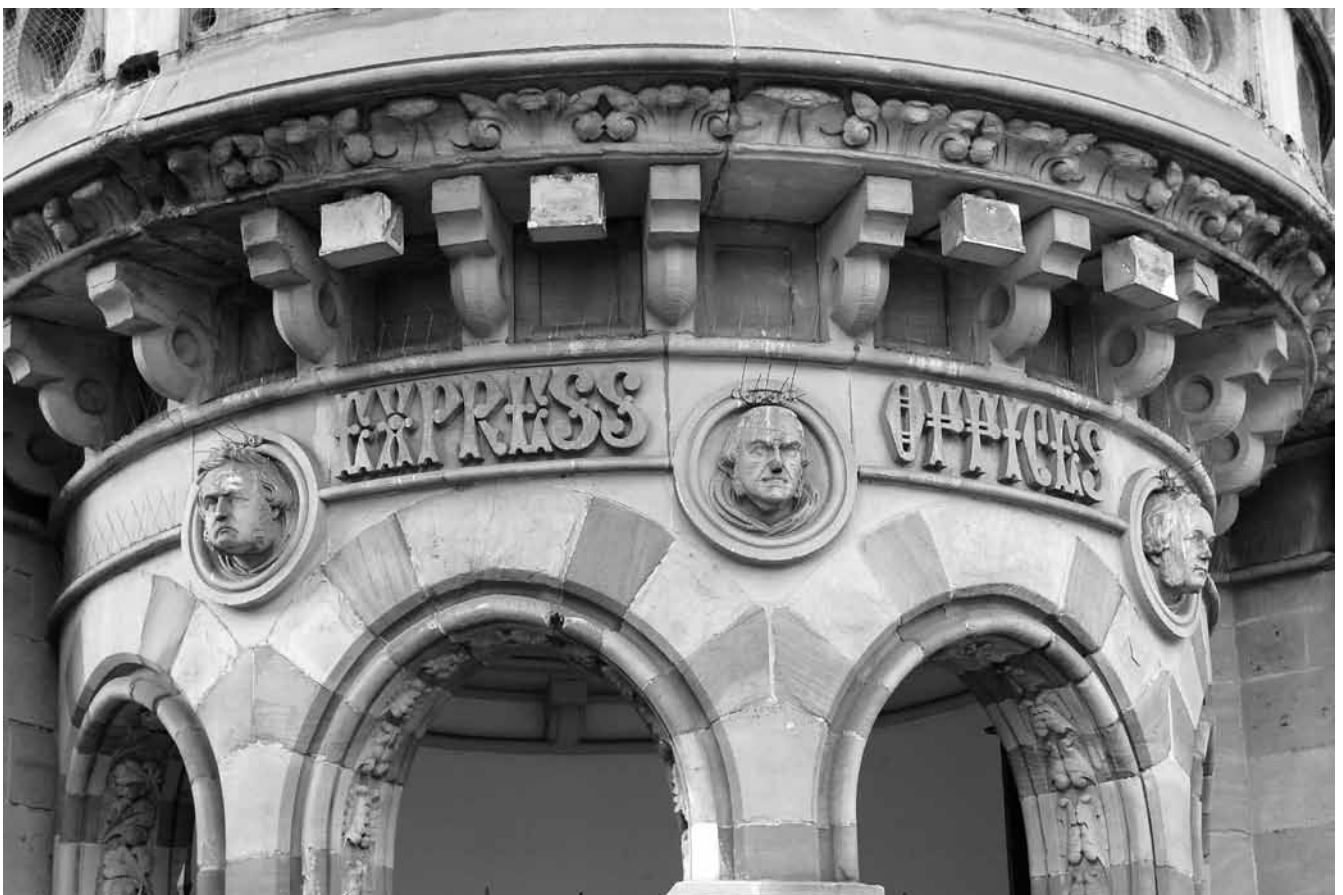
was required on all transactions regarding the lease, sale or development of property. Gladstone also oversaw the transition of Nottingham Castle from the burnt out shell left behind by the Reform Bill rioters into the country's first provincial museum of fine art, under the auspices of the Victoria and Albert Museum, in July 1878.²⁷ After a major fire at Clumber, in March 1879, Gladstone arranged for the temporary storage of items at the castle, conscious that the people of Nottingham were 'desirous to have more of the pictures and valuables for their well-regulated museum'.²⁸

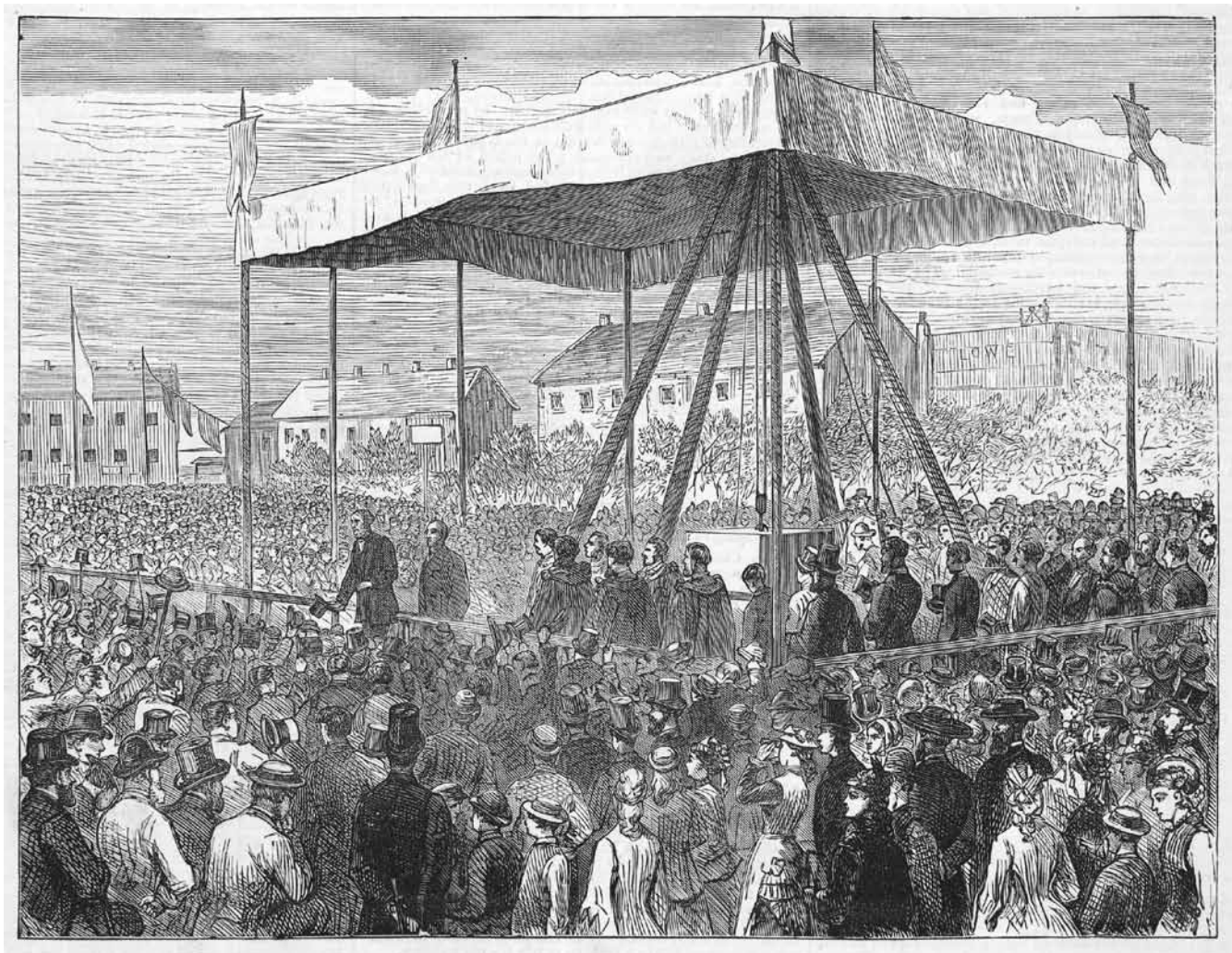
Gladstone's periodic visits to review developments at the castle and park became celebrity events which attracted newspaper comment. A notable example occurred on Tuesday 11 May 1875, when Gladstone cut down a large Siberian elm in Nottingham Park – an event which is still commemorated today by a plaque near the site. Gladstone noted that it was a 'bad axe but soft tree' and concluded operations within the hour, watched by an eager audience. By this time, Gladstone's abilities in wielding an axe (physically as well as politically) had become an

important ingredient in his evolving popular image.²⁹

A rather different form of connection between Gladstone and Nottinghamshire showed a contrasting aspect of the Grand Old Man's personality. Thomas William Bush was a journeyman baker who was born at Nottingham and lived for many years at Canal Street in the town. Bush exhibited a strong interest in mathematics and astronomy from an early age and exhibited a thirteen-inch Newtonian telescope at the Workman's International Exhibition, held at the Agricultural Hall in Islington in July 1870. Gladstone, who was prime minister at the time, visited the exhibition with his wife, paying particular attention to the Bush telescope and remarking how impressed he was by the fact that its inventor was not a professional scientist. Bush's celebrity was reinforced when he was presented with an exhibition gold medal by Queen Victoria. In appreciation of Bush's achievements, Gladstone gave him a number of scientific instruments (bearing inscriptions to this effect), including a spectroscope used to observe the operation of the spectrum. Bush continued his

Figure 5:
Offices of the
Nottingham Daily Express, with
faces of (from
left) John Bright,
William Ewart
Gladstone and
Richard Cobden





astronomical work, notably at Lord Forester's observatory at Willey Park, and subsequently became a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society.³⁰

By the period in which Gladstone met Bush, he had become the leading Liberal politician in the country and was increasingly coming to be known by the sobriquets of 'the People's William' and, later, 'the Grand Old Man'. The origins of this process are explored in Chris Wrigley's article below. During the 1870s, when Gladstone served both as prime minister and as unofficial leader of the opposition, he maintained his schedule of visits to the county. He did so as a trustee of the Newcastle estate and as a close friend of local families such as the Denisons of Ossington. Gladstone's near-celebrity status in the country's affairs was increasingly reflected in local public commemorations. From this period, street names began to record the names of 'Ewart' and 'Gladstone' and babies were even christened in honour of

the statesman.³¹ In addition to the widely retailed paraphernalia of cups, plates, jugs and bowls, bearing the images of Gladstone and his wife, vernacular architecture – such as the new offices of the *Nottingham Daily Express*, on Parliament Street, completed by Watson Fothergill [Figure 5] – incorporated Gladstone's image in to their exterior face alongside the heads of other Liberal heroes such as Cobden and Bright. Gladstone had, by now, completed the long political journey from ultra-Conservatism to high Liberalism and was celebrated as such by acceptance into the pantheon of contemporary Liberal heroes.

On 27 September 1877, Gladstone visited Nottingham to be present at the laying of the foundation stone of the new University College (the forerunner of the University of Nottingham), on Shakespeare Street [Figure 6]. This event gave rise to a major public pronouncement upon the value of higher education, which was

Figure 6: Laying the foundation stone of the new University College, Nottingham – Gladstone addressing the assembly

reported extensively in the press.³² Gladstone's unrelenting schedule for the day is reflected in the fact that, as well as speaking 'to a great concourse' at the foundation ceremony, before attending the luncheon at two o'clock, he visited the castle (to check on progress with the museum) and later:

... went to the [Alexandra] Rink & addressed near 10000 for perhaps [an hour]. They were most patient & heard well. It was a hard day's work for the voice. We wound up with ½ [an] hour at the Theatre: *School for Scandal*, very well done [then] back to Bestwood [Lodge] for dinner at [nine].³³

Similar frenetic activity, combining social and political objectives, was recorded well into the 1880s. In 1887, Gladstone visited a meeting of the National Liberal Federation at Nottingham and supported his wife in her role as President of the Women's Federation. Each return visit

to the county provided Gladstone with opportunities for recalling his earliest experiences as a young, aspiring and very Conservative politician and noting the contrast with his current situation. Rather than providing hostile material for charges of political inconsistency, the 'Gladstonian journey' became (literally and metaphorically) an important component in the forging of his political capital beyond Westminster.³⁴

A renewal of Gladstone's formal political connections with the county was never to be, but a tantalising hint surfaced shortly before the 1874 general election that Gladstone seriously considered the offer of fighting Newark once more, this time as a Liberal candidate. Given the political influence which had helped to secure Gladstone's return to parliament in 1832, there is more than a little piquancy in the fact that, as the remaining trustee of the Newcastle estates and their property interests in the constituency, he was now responsible for controlling the deployment of the family's remaining electoral influence at Newark. In this capacity, Gladstone asked Godfrey Tallents 'to make provision ... for preventing any intervention of the agents of the Newcastle Estate in the coming Election in a sense adverse to the Liberal party'.³⁵ It is one of the stranger ironies of history that the man who first made his connection with Nottinghamshire through being returned as Conservative MP for Newark, with the assistance of the Newcastle family's electoral influence, was almost returned (with similar assistance) as a Liberal MP for the borough, some forty years later. This fact alone would have been sufficient to make the 4th Duke of Newcastle spin in his grave.

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1 Two exhibition films have been released on You Tube and the exhibition boards are available to download (free of charge) in PDF format. See <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/>

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- exhibitions/online/gladstone/wegladstone.aspx.
- 2 Nottinghamshire Archives (NA), uncatalogued Newark Museum Collection, D48.74, Gladstone to Godfrey Tallents, 13 December 1882.
 - 3 All quotations from Gladstone, unless otherwise stated, come from John Brooke and Mary Sorensen (eds.), *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone, Vol. 1: Autobiographica* (HMSO, 1971), pp. 39–40 and *Vol. 2: Autobiographical Memoranda, 1832–1845* (HMSO, 1972), pp. 3–20.
 - 4 For more detail on these issues, see Richard A. Gaunt, 'A Stern Unbending Tory and the Rising Young Hope: Gladstone, Newark and the Fourth Duke of Newcastle, 1832–1846' in Peter Francis (ed.), *The Gladstone Umbrella* (The Monad Press, 2001), pp. 14–34.
 - 5 University of Nottingham Manuscripts and Special Collections (UNMASC), Ne C 5700, Lincoln to Newcastle, 15 June 1832.
 - 6 Richard A. Gaunt (ed.), *Unhappy Reactionary: The Diaries of the Fourth Duke of Newcastle-under-Lyne, 1822–1850* (Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire, 2003), p. 94.
 - 7 UNMASC, Ne C 5381, Gladstone to Newcastle, 9 July 1832.
 - 8 Gaunt, *Unhappy Reactionary*, p. 80.
 - 9 See Richard A. Gaunt, 'The Fourth Duke of Newcastle, the "Mob" and Electoral Contests in Nottinghamshire, 1818–1832', *Midland History*, 33/2 (2008), pp. 196–217.
 - 10 UNMASC, Ne C 5576, Lincoln to Newcastle, 13 August 1832.
 - 11 Richard A. Gaunt (ed.), *Politics, Law and Society in Nottinghamshire. The Diaries of Godfrey Tallents of Newark, 1829–1839* (Nottingham: Nottinghamshire County Council, 2010), covers these events from the perspective of one involved participant.
 - 12 For a modern recording of the song, see the exhibition films referenced at n. 1.
 - 13 NA, DD/NM/2/1/74–75, Election Handbills, 4, 8 December 1832.
 - 14 UNMASC, Ne C 11774, Gladstone to Lincoln, 27 September 1834.
 - 15 Gaunt, *Godfrey Tallents*, p. 42.
 - 16 UNMASC, Ne C 5405/3, 15 July 1833.
 - 17 For these events, see R. A. Preston, 'W. E. Gladstone and his disputed election expenses at Newark, 1832–1834', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire*, LXXX (1976), pp. 74–80 and Gaunt, 'Stern Unbending Tory', pp. 20–21.
 - 18 Gaunt, *Unhappy Reactionary*, p. 136.
 - 19 For Gladstone's evolving views, see John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone, Vol. 1* (Macmillan, 1903), p. 284.
 - 20 For these events, see J. B. Conacher, 'Mr Gladstone seeks a seat', *Report of the Canadian Historical Association* (1962) and Gaunt, 'Stern Unbending Tory', pp. 22–27.
 - 21 UNMASC, Ne C 7894/2, 5 January 1846.
 - 22 Gaunt, *Unhappy Reactionary*, p. 138; UNMASC, Ne C 7893, Godfrey Tallents to Newcastle, 9 January 1846.
 - 23 UNMASC, Os C 602, Gladstone to Denison, 12 August 1849.
 - 24 Anne Isba, *Gladstone and Women* (Hambledon Continuum, 2006), chapter 5; UNMASC, Ne C 11788/1–3, Gladstone to Lincoln, 28 September 1849.
 - 25 UNMASC, Ne C 13139, Gladstone to Edward Pelham-Clinton, 12 July 1887.
 - 26 The papers are accessed through Flintshire Record Office, which is situated next to Gladstone's Library, the residential library established in Hawarden as a national memorial to the statesman.
 - 27 Ken Brand, *The Park Estate Nottingham* (Nottingham Civic Society, 2009); UNMASC, MS 575/1; Ne D 556.
 - 28 UNMASC, Pw K 1756/1, Gladstone to the 5th Duke of Portland, 16 April 1879.
 - 29 H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 9: 1875–1880* (Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 35–6.
 - 30 UNMASC, Ux W, contains papers, correspondence and artefacts relating to Bush's career.
 - 31 For example, UNMASC, CU/R2/1, Membership Register for Castle Gate Congregational Church, Nottingham (1790–1912), entry for 'William Ewart Gladstone Dexter' (1904).
 - 32 *The Times*, 28 September 1877; *Illustrated London News*, 6 October 1877; *Nottingham Daily Journal*, 28 September 1877.
 - 33 Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 9*, p. 253. Also see UNMASC, Not 3.F19 NOT O/S X.
 - 34 H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 12: 1887–1891* (Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 71; *The Times*, 19, 20 October 1887.
 - 35 NA, DD TL 2/6/30–31, Gladstone to Godfrey Tallents, 25 January 1874.

THE MAKING OF 'THE PEOPLE'S WILLIAM'

William Ewart Gladstone (1809–98) attracted massive political support among large sectors of the working class, especially in the north of England (outside of Lancashire), Wales and Scotland. That Gladstone became 'The People's William' was a surprising development for one who had been a stern young Conservative and a person alarmed by the popular campaigns for parliamentary reform, which was achieved in 1832, and for the People's Charter, between 1838 and 1848, which was not achieved. **Chris Wrigley** charts the making of 'The People's William'.

THE HIGH ESTEEM – even adulation – in which Gladstone was held in the last two or more decades of his life was witnessed by the huge quantity of Gladstone memorabilia that was kept in many working people's homes. In terms both of the volume sold and of the span of the social groups who bought the plaques, mugs and plates produced in his memory, Gladstone's appeal is reminiscent of that of Napoleon Bonaparte in France and Abraham Lincoln in the United States. Such admiration was also marked by the day-trippers who went by train to Hawarden Castle (Gladstone's marital home in North Wales) in the hope of glimpsing the Grand Old Man and his wife Catherine. Gladstone's appeal crossed class and religious lines. One example of a Nonconformist day trip to Hawarden was in May 1890, when there was a mass political pilgrimage from Caernarfon. Organised by the Engedi Calvinist Methodist Chapel, a thousand people went by rail. The Liberal MP J. Hugh Edwards wrote of the journey, 'After the customary manner of Welsh people, when ecstatic in mood, they gave vent to their feelings by singing their favourite hymns'.¹

Gladstone's emergence as a highly popular politician was a complex process that was not as straightforward as he liked to suggest in his old age. In 1865 he observed of his early politics, 'the Reform Bill frightened me in 1831,

and drove me off my natural and previous bias'.² However, there is nothing to suggest that Gladstone earlier had been a crypto-Liberal, even though in 1894 he wrote, 'I do not think the general tendencies of my mind were in the time of my youth illiberal'.³ Indeed, there is much to the contrary. The Gladstone of 1886 would not have warmed to the two anti-Reform handbills he paid for in 1831, one of which read:

People of England!
Your Parliament is dissolved, for having voted on Tuesday night that the Papists of Ireland should not be permitted to return a larger proportion of Members of Parliament, than that which was solemnly established at the Union between the two countries. We add no comment: nor is any needed. Do not for a moment believe it to be an act of your beloved King. You are called on to exercise your suffrages in favour of men who wish to establish a NEW CONSTITUTION. Before you vote, ask yourselves the following questions and let no man
DIVERT YOUR ATTENTION FROM THEM.

1. What has *South America* gained by new constitutions?
Confusion.
2. What has *France* gained by a new constitution?
Disorganisation.
3. What has *Belgium* gained by a



THE MAKING OF 'THE PEOPLE'S WILLIAM'

new constitution? Starvation.

4. What is 'Old England' to gain by a new constitution?

And

5. What am I to gain by a new constitution?

Answer these for yourselves:
vote for men who are solemnly pledged

1. To redress every grievance.

2. To remove every blemish.

3. TO RESIST

REVOLUTIONS TO THE DEATH.

And may God send a happy issue!

Briton.

Gladstone thus travelled a long way from the sentiments of 'Briton' to being a friend of nationalism and, more generally, to being 'The People's William'. Looking back, Gladstone attributed his illiberal views to his 'narrow Churchmanship', resulting in the fact that his 'politics ... were tinged with religious fanaticism'.⁴

Gladstone's religious faith was the bedrock of his career. He would have liked to have been an Anglican clergyman and often appeared to think that he had a special relationship with God, much to the irritation of many political opponents. However, earlier depictions by biographers of Gladstone as a far-sighted Christian statesman with clear-cut long term aims have been undercut by the publication (between 1968 and 1994) of his diaries and by much scholarly research often involving the diaries of Gladstone's contemporaries in parliament. While the diaries have made Gladstone appear less Olympian, they also have made him more human and even more complex. The reader of the published diaries is hard put to believe Gladstone to be a brazen opportunist and humbug, although this does not exclude him being a skilful political operator, attuned to exploit short-term favourable political openings. During his lifetime, those who had the opportunity of discussion with him were similarly impressed by his character. This was famously so with John Ruskin who, after long conversations with him, wrote to Mary Gladstone of her father that he could now 'understand him in his earnestness'. He went on to ask, 'How is it possible for the men who have known him long – to allow

the thought of his course of conduct now, or at any other time, having been warped by ambition, to diminish the lustre and the power of his name?'.⁵

Not only do Gladstone's diaries reinforce the reader's understanding of the importance of religion to Gladstone, they also repeatedly show Gladstone's concern about economical and orthodox financial behaviour. The son of a very wealthy Liverpool merchant, Gladstone had instilled in him from an early age the sanctity of commercial contracts and of sound finance. In 1859 he wrote to his brother Robertson, 'Economy is the first and great article ... in my financial creed'.⁶ Financial concerns often underlay Gladstone's attitude to other issues. For instance, even with something as close to his heart as his home rule proposals, one finds Gladstone very anxious lest the Irish beneficiaries of home rule should escape their share of naval and other imperial costs.⁷

Gladstone's skills as Chancellor of the Exchequer in preparing and presenting the 1853 budget firmly established him at the forefront of British politics. It was a major step in the emergence of 'Gladstonian finance' as the dominant financial force in the second half of the nineteenth century, in its devotion to frugal state expenditure and to free trade, with a strong desire to avoid expensive foreign involvement. His 1853 budget brought more people within the bounds of income tax, but explicitly excluded 'what I would call the territory of labour' – in other words, those earning £100 or less per annum. One widely attractive aspect of his budget was the reduction of duty on thirteen foodstuffs, most notably on tea. A French commentator observed of this budget, 'The bulk of the English feel that Gladstone is their champion against certain privileged classes. They wonder at his courage, admire his skill and are determined that he shall not be beaten'.⁸

Gladstone's budgets of 1860–6 strengthened his reputation as a financier and consolidated his popular standing. With his 1860 budget, Gladstone removed the last protective tariffs (though he kept a few tariffs for revenue purposes) and attempted unsuccessfully to remove the paper duty, the House

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of Lords taking fright at working people gaining access to cheaper books and newspapers. Gladstone observed in his budget speech, 'On dear books, which are published for the wealthy, it is a very light duty; on books brought out in large quantities by enterprising publishers for the middle and lower classes, it is a very heavy and oppressive duty'.⁹ He was successful in removing the paper duty in his 1861 budget, as well as reducing income tax by a penny in the pound.

Throughout this period, Gladstone continued to extol frugality in public finance. He commented during his 1861 budget, 'I am deeply convinced that all excess in the public expenditure beyond the legitimate wants of the country is not only a pecuniary waste ... but a great political, and, above all, a great moral evil'. He also spoke of free trade finance and tax cuts as lessening class bitterness and binding the country together. He was insistent that income tax should impact uniformly on all who could afford to pay. In his 1860 budget speech, he spoke of 'laws which do not sap in any respect the foundations of duty, but which strike away the shackles from the arm of industry, which give new incentives and new rewards to toil, and which win more and more for the Throne and for the institutions of the country'.¹⁰

While Gladstone admired entrepreneurs, being himself a scion of a prosperous mercantile family, he also had growing respect for labour, especially skilled labour. In his 1863 budget, Gladstone was most enthusiastic about the behaviour of the Lancashire working class during the cotton famine brought about by the US Civil War, which saw 'one of the wealthiest portions of the country, and perhaps the very wealthiest portion of its labouring population, in a condition of unexampled prostration and of grievous suffering'.¹¹ Together with his wife, Gladstone ran and funded a small-scale relief operation at Hawarden, where some young Lancashire women were trained for domestic service and some men employed on making roads and paths on the estate. Catherine Gladstone also visited distressed cotton towns: Blackburn (where she helped instigate soup kitchens), Preston, Darwin, Ashton-under-Lyne and

Stalybridge. Gladstone paid tribute to her in his diary in 1862, 'she is a great part of the whole business with the people everywhere'.¹²

As well as being impressed by the restraint and sacrifices of the Lancashire cotton workers, Gladstone was also impressed by evidence of working-class thrift. Among the trade union deputations which he received as Chancellor of the Exchequer was one from the Amalgamated Society of Engineers on 10 May 1864 which requested to use the new Post Office Savings Banks, a request which he readily granted. He had also been much impressed by another trade union deputation on his Annuities Bill, which enabled people to buy low-cost government annuities through post offices.¹³ He was aware of similar values present in the cooperative movement, with its ethos of collective self-help and its leaders' declared opposition to members living on credit. Gladstone was delighted to find the skilled working class imbued with thrift, sobriety and seriousness, a long way from what he felt had been threatening moods displayed in 1815–20 and in the era of Chartism (when he had volunteered to be a special constable).

In pushing through the repeal of the paper duty with the 1861 budget measures – thereby making the House of Lords decide whether or not to reject all the financial provisions, as it had in 1860, by vetoing the repeal of 'the taxes on knowledge' – Gladstone scored a major constitutional success. It was a measure greatly desired by Radicals. When he was carrying it out, Gladstone urged John Bright to ensure that his procedure was not jeopardised by triumphal speeches against Palmerston (the prime minister) and the Lords: 'if we do what is right and effectual, we should all through say the very least possible about it'. Gladstone further enhanced his standing with Radicals with his famous observations on the franchise, made in the House of Commons on 11 May 1864. In his speech he said:

I venture to say that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the

constitution. Of course, in giving utterance to such a proposition, I do not recede from the protest I have previously made against sudden or violent, or excessive, or intoxicating change; but I apply it with confidence to this effect, that fitness for the franchise when it is shown to exist – as I say, it is shown to exist in the case of a select portion of the working class – is not repelled on sufficient grounds from the portals of the Constitution by the allegation that things are well as they are.¹⁴

As well as praise for his financial measures, Gladstone also won popular acclaim for his support of nationalism. Even on this, however, his route to a Liberal view was a lengthy one. One of the many turning points in his move from Conservatism to at least Liberal Conservatism (as he long liked to describe his politics) came with his visit to the kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1850–1. He described the Bourbon government there as 'one of the most Satanic agencies upon earth' and 'the negation of God erected into a system of government'.¹⁵ While welcoming Garibaldi's visit to Britain in 1864, Gladstone was uneasy about this Republican hero going in triumph around the country. Richard Shannon has even gone so far as to suggest Gladstone did not wish to be upstaged: 'There could be only one embracer of the millions at a time'.¹⁶ It is more likely that Gladstone still shared Palmerston's conservatism regarding popular loose cannons, not approving of figures outside the circle of Westminster politics speaking to audiences around the country.

Gladstone initially did not seek working class applause. After his October 1864 Lancashire tour, he was emphatic about this in his diary:

... so ended in peace the exhausting, flattering, I hope not intoxicating circuit. God knows I have not courted them. I hope I do not rest on them. I pray I may turn them to account for good. It is, however, impossible not to love the people from whom such manifestations come.¹⁷

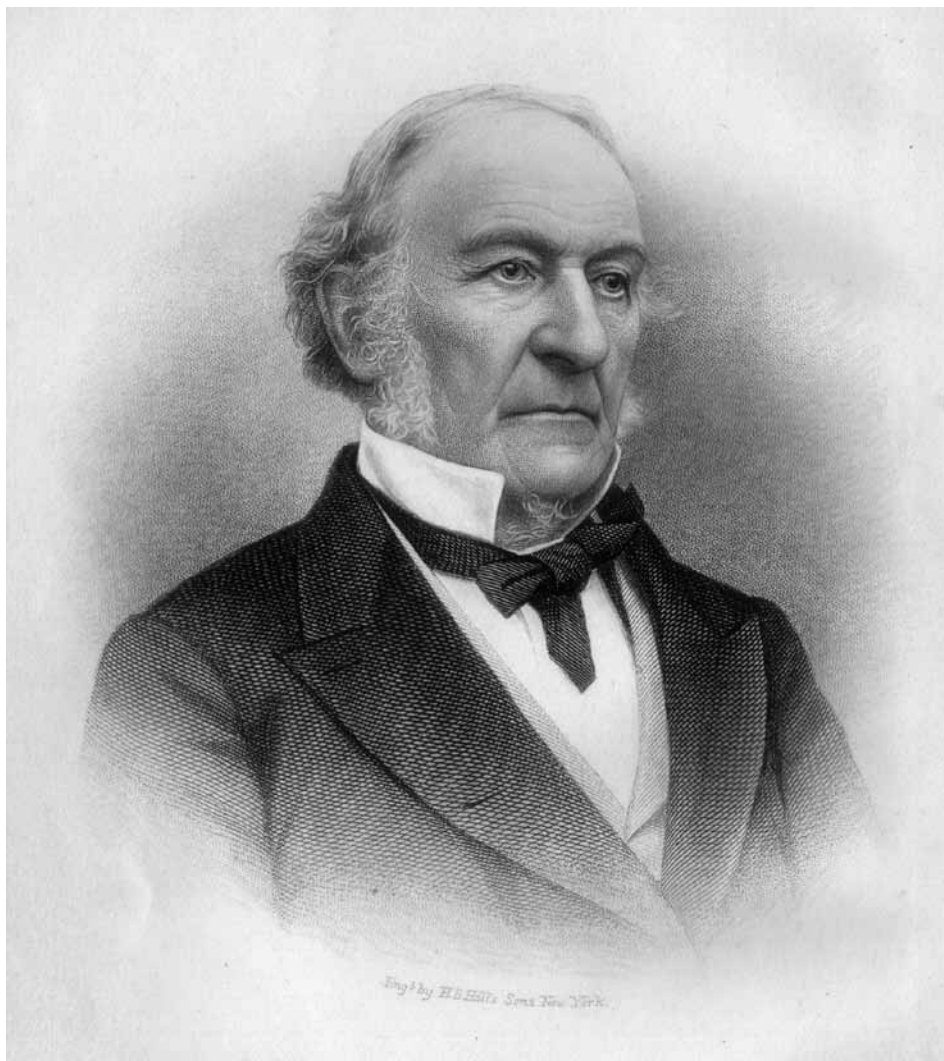
His early attitude was reminiscent of that later exhibited by Lord Salisbury towards those Whigs who were likely to join the Conservatives. Salisbury wrote to his nephew, Arthur Balfour, 'The leader even of a diminished Party must behave as an arbitrator between its various sections, and if he has fair ground for hoping to attract a new section they must come within the scope of the arbitration'.¹⁸ In Gladstone's case, he was pleased to have working-class support, but it had to be on his terms.

Gladstone had greatly appreciated working-class support when he had gone on what turned out to be triumphal trips to Manchester and the North East in April and October 1862 and Lancashire in October 1864. However, after Gladstone was defeated at the general election of 1874, he came to appreciate working-class support more, especially during the Bulgarian agitation of 1876–7. As the Whigs and much former middle-class support left him in the 1880s, so his appreciation of sober, self-improving working people increased.

Yet, from at least the early 1860s Gladstone had carefully boosted his standing outside of parliament by careful management of the press, especially in conjunction with public speaking. He was not the first to build up an extra-parliamentary reputation through public meetings. Palmerston had done so, but with mixed success. Palmerston provided John Delane, editor of *The Times*, with much information and also fed stories to the *Morning Post*, *The Globe* and the *Daily Telegraph*.¹⁹

Gladstone was equally adept, or perhaps even more so, in following this lead. In the early 1850s, Gladstone benefited from the advice of John Douglas Cook, the editor of the *Morning Chronicle*. He was closest to the *Daily Telegraph* from 1860 until he first retired from public life in 1875, after which the newspaper came to support Disraeli's imperial policies. Gladstone's contact, during this period, was Thornton Leigh Hunt, who was the *Telegraph's* leading political journalist (and son of the distinguished writer James Leigh Hunt). The *Daily Telegraph* was grateful to Gladstone for the repeal of the paper duties which

From at least the early 1860s Gladstone had carefully boosted his standing outside of parliament by careful management of the press, especially in conjunction with public speaking.



had restricted the circulation of the popular press. Indeed, it was the *Daily Telegraph* which christened Gladstone as 'The People's William'. One prominent editor and journalist, W. T. Stead, observed in his diary:

Gladstone's admiration for the *Telegraph* dates from the time that Lawson [Edward Levy Lawson, 1st Baron Burnham] used to begin and close every leading article by crying 'Hosanna to the People's William!'. That kind of support Mr Gladstone always appreciates.²⁰

Gladstone also established good relations with the Press Association. On his whistle stop tours of northern England and Scotland he would allow Walter Hepburn, the Press Association's reporter, to travel in his private railway coach. Apparently, on one occasion, when the leader of a Liberal deputation on a station platform was long-winded and the train's guard blew

his whistle before Gladstone could deliver all his speech, Gladstone dictated what he would have said to Hepburn and it was duly published. On another occasion, when in a remote area, Gladstone gave the Press Association a copy of his speech in advance with a time embargo on its publication.²¹

If Queen Victoria came to detest him, Gladstone was in several ways in tune with the Victorian age, or at least a good part of it. As well as moral earnestness, he had a strong belief in the power of rational argument, in progress and in the merits of a widening participation in parliamentary politics. The contrast between Gladstone's views and those of John Ruskin was well made by Canon Scott Holland:

The one trusted in the democratic movement, however chaotic and vulgar might be some of its manifestations: the other had learnt from his master [Thomas Carlyle] that the only hope for the great mass of mankind lay

in the strong will of the strong man who would know so much better for them than they would themselves, what it was their true life needed.²²

Gladstone's belief in self-help and his earnest seeking for knowledge resonated with many of the skilled workers who predominated in the trade unions, cooperatives and friendly societies.

While the sobriquet of 'The People's William' was bestowed on Gladstone by portions of the press grateful for his financial reforms, it did reflect the popular appreciation of his financial measures which benefited all classes. It also reflected the growing confidence that Bright and other Radicals had in him as a result both of his success in outmanoeuvring the House of Lords to achieve the repeal of the paper duty and of his expressions of support for widening the franchise. He himself developed further into 'The People's William' when, after noting working-class demonstrations against the Bulgarian massacres of 1876, he joined a wave of protests already breaking upon Disraeli's government. With the Midlothian campaigns of 1879–80, Gladstone used the politics of the mass platform to appeal both to the electorate of that constituency and to voters beyond.

Chris Wrigley is Professor of Modern British History at the University of Nottingham. Amongst his many books are studies of David Lloyd George, Arthur Henderson and Winston Churchill.

- 1 J. Hugh Edwards, *The Life of David Lloyd George*, Vol. 3 (Waverley Book Company, 1913), p. 11.
- 2 Letter to a friend, 1865, quoted in John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, Vol. 1 (Macmillan, 1903), p. 70 and also in D. M. Schreuder, 'The Making of Mr Gladstone's Posthumous Career: The Role of Morley and Knaplund as "Monumental Masons" 1903–27' in B. L. Kinzer, *The Gladstonian Turn of Mind* (University of Toronto Press, 1985), p. 2.
- 3 'Autobiographical Retrospect', 22 June 1894, printed in John Brooke and Mary Sorensen (eds.), *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone*, Vol. 1: *Autobiographica* (HMSO, 1971), p. 38.
- 4 Brooke and Sorensen, *Autobiographica*, Appendix 3, pp. 230–1 and p. 38.

- 5 Ruskin to Miss Gladstone, 18 January 1878 in John Ruskin, *Letters to MG and HG* (Privately Printed, 1903), pp. 32–33.
- 6 Quoted in Francis W. Hirst, *Gladstone as Financier and Economist* (Ernest Benn, 1931), p. 241.
- 7 Memorandum, 14 January 1893, printed in H. C. G. Matthew (ed.), *The Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 13: 1892–1896* (Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 179–80 and following.
- 8 Rémusat quoted in Hirst, *Gladstone as Financier*, p. 154. The relevant parts of the 1853 budget are printed in Rt Hon. W. E. Gladstone, *The Financial Statements of 1853, 1860–1863*, (John Murray, 1863), pp. 55 and 88–91.
- 9 Gladstone, *The Financial Statements*, p. 169.
- 10 Gladstone, *The Financial Statements*, pp. 257 and 186. See also Martin Daunton, *Trusting Leviathan: The Politics of Taxation in Britain 1799–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 97–8.
- 11 Gladstone, *The Financial Statements*, p. 339.
- 12 Thomas Archer, *Gladstone and his Contemporaries, Vol. 4* (Blackie, 1890), p. 129; Joyce Marlow, *The Oak and the Ivy* (Doubleday, 1977), pp. 110–12; Diary entry, 9 October 1862, in Matthew (ed.), *Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 6* (Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 153.
- 13 Diary entries, 5 March and 10 May 1864 in Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 6*, pp. 261 and 275; Mark Curthoys, *Governments, Labour and the Law in Mid Victorian Britain*, (Clarendon Press), pp. 58–9.
- 14 G. M. Trevelyan, *John Bright* (Constable, 1913), p. 294; *House of Commons Debates*, 175 (11 May 1864), col. 324, quoted in Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 6*, p. 275.
- 15 H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone 1809–74* (Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 80–1.
- 16 Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics* (Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 170.
- 17 Diary entry, 14 October 1864 in Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries, Vol. 6*, p. 307.
- 18 Salisbury to A. J. Balfour, September/October 1880, quoted in Blanche E. C. Dugdale, *Arthur James Balfour: 1848–1905* (Hutchinson, 1939), p. 48.
- 19 Stephen Koss, *The Rise and Fall of the Political Press in Britain, Vol. 1* (Hamish Hamilton, 1981), pp. 155–6.
- 20 W. T. Stead diary, 28 July 1886, quoted in Koss, *The Rise and Fall*, p. 293.
- 21 G. Scott, *Reporter Anonymous. The Story of the Press Association* (Hutchinson, 1968), pp. 41–5. For the reporting of Gladstone's speech at the foundation ceremony of University College, Nottingham, see 'How Mr Gladstone's Speeches were reported', *Nottingham Journal*, 29 September 1877.
- 22 Canon Scott Holland, 'Ruskin and Gladstone' in Ruskin, *Letters to MG and HG*, pp. 113–14.

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/cobdenproject). 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.

The emergence of the 'public service ethos'

Aims to analyse how self-interest and patronage was challenged by the advent of impartial inspectorates, public servants and local authorities in provincial Britain in the mid 19th century. Much work has been done on the emergence of a 'liberal culture' in the central civil service in Whitehall, but much work needs to be done on the motives, behaviour and mentalities of the newly reformed guardians of the poor, sanitary inspectors, factory and mines inspectors, education authorities, prison warders and the police. Ian Cawood, Newman University College, Birmingham; i.cawood@newman.ac.uk.

The life of Professor Reginald W Revans, 1907–2003

Any information anyone has on Revans' Liberal Party involvement would be most welcome. We are particularly keen to know when he joined the party and any involvement he may have had in campaigning issues. We know he was very interested in pacifism. Any information, oral history submissions, location of papers or references most welcome. Dr Yury Boshky, yury@gel-net.com; or Dr Cheryl Brook, cheryl.brook@port.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.

Four nations history of the Irish Home Rule crisis

A four nations history of the Irish Home Rule crisis, attempting to rebalance the existing Anglo-centric focus. Considering Scottish and Welsh reactions and the development of parallel Home Rule movements, along with how the crisis impacted on political parties across the UK. Sources include newspapers, private papers, *Hansard*. Naomi Lloyd-Jones; naomi.n.lloyd-jones@kcl.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's political communication, 1945–2002

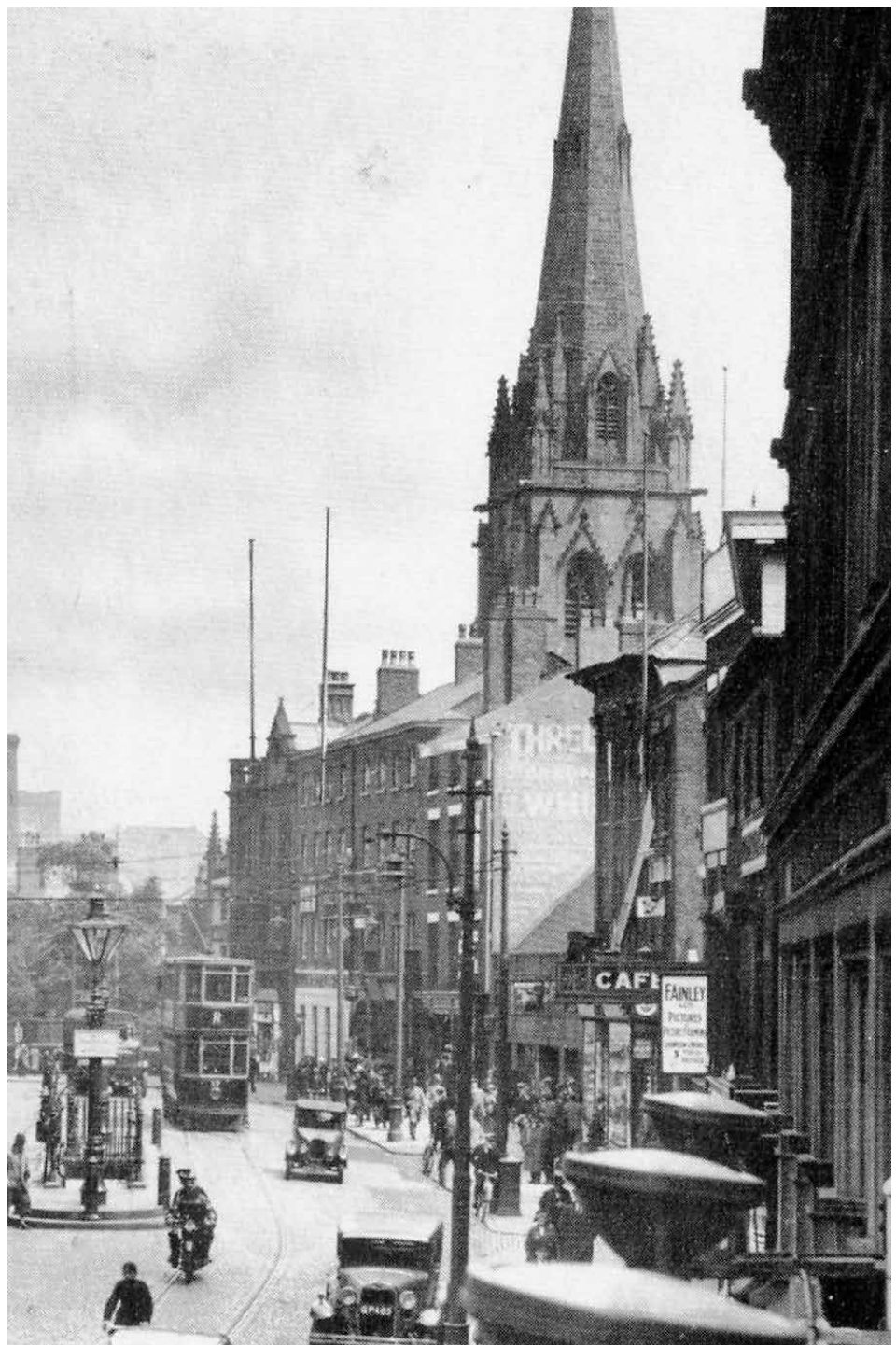
Research on the Liberal party and Lib Dems' political communication. Any information welcome (including testimonies) about electoral campaigns and strategies. Cynthia Boyer, CUFR Champollion, Place de Verdun, 81 000 Albi, France; +33 5 63 48 19 77; cynthia.boyer@univ-jfc.fr.

The Lib-Lab Pact

The period of political co-operation which took place in Britain between 1977 and 1978; PhD research project at Cardiff University. Jonny Kirkup, 29 Mount Earl, Bridgend, Bridgend County CF31 3EY; jonnykirkup@yahoo.co.uk.

THE 1936 PRESTON

The conduct of by-elections is one of many taxing problems confronting a coalition government. Governments fight by-elections in defence of policies they are already pursuing or are committed to pursuing in the present parliament. Granted that there is, or at least should be, only one set of coalition government policies, there is a strong argument for putting up just one coalition candidate at any by-election. Yet this approach too can cause problems. **David Dutton** examines the tensions generated between the Liberal Nationals and the Conservatives in the Preston by-election of November 1936.



ON BY-ELECTION

ON THE EVIDENCE available so far, the present Conservative–Liberal Democrat government appears to have concluded that its component parties should both fight by-election contests rather than uniting behind a single candidate. Such a strategy is no doubt designed to emphasise that the parties to the coalition remain separate entities and that they will resume their independent identities in time for the next general election, anticipated in 2015. It is also a gesture towards the autonomy of local constituency parties whose role in the selection of a parliamentary candidate is one of the few tangible rewards for a continuous and largely unsung round of fundraising activities and delivered party leaflets.¹ Yet there is a potential problem here. Unlike general elections, by-elections are not fought on the basis of the future policies that a particular party will pursue, if elected, in the next parliament. Governments fight by-elections in defence of policies they are already pursuing or are committed to pursuing in the present parliament. Granted that there is, or at least should be, only one set of coalition government policies, the voters at by-elections could, in theory, be presented with two identical sets of policies by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties.

In the wartime governments of the twentieth century the argument of patriotic necessity offered ample justification for the avoidance of by-election contests, even before the coalitions of May 1915 and May 1940 were formed. But in the century's longest period of peacetime coalition, the National Government that took office in August 1931, no such imperative existed

and a large number of by-elections took place. In these the chief problem facing the partners to the coalition was often the decision over which contributing party should contest the by-election on the government's behalf. The doctrine that the incumbent party should have a presumed right to stand generally applied, though there were exceptions as, for example, when it was judged urgently necessary to find a seat for Malcolm MacDonald, son of the former Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, representing the National Labour Party, after he had gone down to defeat at Bassetlaw in the general election of 1935.² Such a doctrine, however, had the disadvantage of entrenching the existing imbalance between the component parts of the coalition. The by-election that took place in Preston in November 1936 highlights the problems that could arise and the resulting tensions between the governing parties.

After the general election of November 1935 it was plausible to suggest that the National Government, constructed four years earlier as an emergency measure to save the currency and balance the national budget, was developing into something permanent. Two general elections had resulted in popular endorsements by the electorate that were unmatched in scale in the whole of the twentieth century. As John Simon, the leader of the larger of the non-Conservative components of the government, noted in his diary, 'the conception of a National Government corresponded with the outlook of ordinary citizens, who had come to believe that the best way out of our difficulties was by way of cooperation rather than of

conflict'.³ In the months that followed the 1935 election, moreover, Simon's Liberal National faction, once easily dismissed as a group of self-serving MPs representing no more than their own personal interests, took on more and more of the attributes of a traditional political party. Some of this development was already ongoing. As Simon noted, 'I have been very busy with the Liberal National organisation, which is now greatly strengthened both as regards personnel and funds'.⁴ Such activity was now intensified. A monthly journal, the *Liberal National Magazine*, made its first appearance in March 1936, designed to propagate the party's ideas and policies, while strenuous efforts were made to build up a national and regional infrastructure to cover the whole of Great Britain. The *Liberal National Magazine* carried monthly reports of the political and social activities of these local bodies. The work of consolidation culminated in the holding of a first Liberal National Convention in June 1936, attended by more than 700 delegates. By the end of the year the Liberal National Organisation had taken over additional office space in Old Queen Street. 'We shall then be in a better position', noted the *Liberal National Magazine*, 'to deal with the rapidly expanding work arising out of the development of our organisation throughout the country'.⁵

Yet a major problem remained. Though the non-Conservative elements were relatively well represented within the government – in the reconstructed Cabinet the Liberal Nationals held four posts⁶ and the National Labour group three⁷ – the balance of strength within the House of Commons

Preston in the
1930s

THE 1936 PRESTON BY-ELECTION

was overwhelmingly weighted towards the Tories. In the new parliament 388 Conservatives sat alongside 35 Liberal Nationals and just 8 National Labour MPs. But doing anything about this imbalance was no easy matter, not least because Conservative party managers could readily take refuge behind the autonomy of their local party associations. A National Co-ordinating Committee had been set up in March 1933, one of whose tasks was to find more opportunities for representatives of the two minor parties within the government. But it had few tangible achievements to its name, not least because it tended to draw back when confronted by the accusation that it was 'giving away' Conservative seats. Conservative criticism of its activities was voiced at the meeting of the party's National Union Central Council in March 1934. It was always possible that the future electoral tide would swing even more favourably towards the government, allowing Liberal National and National Labour candidates to pick up additional seats in constituencies they were already contesting. In practice, however, the election of each new Liberal National or National Labour MP would probably require an act of self-denial on the part of a well-established local Conservative organisation.

Not surprisingly, the existing imbalance was a source of ongoing concern and both a cause and a symptom of the feeling – probably universal in coalitions – that the interests and opinions of the minor partners were receiving insufficient attention within the government as a whole. The Liberal National case was underpinned by the notion of the 'Liberal vote'. The fortunes of the Liberal Party itself were in patent and probably irreversible decline; but Liberal ideas were believed to remain firmly embedded within the British electorate. The 'Liberal vote' was impossible accurately to calculate and was frequently exaggerated,⁸ but it did seem clear that the existence of a coalition enabled the government to attract substantial numbers of voters who would have been beyond the reach of the Conservatives standing alone. In the general elections of 1931 and 1935 the government had secured 67.2 and 53.5 per cent of the total vote

respectively. As recently as 1929 the Liberal Party had attracted as much as 23.6 per cent of those who went to the polls. By 1935, however, the independent Liberal vote had dropped to just 6.6 per cent. It seemed reasonable to argue that at least some of these missing Liberals were now supporting not just Liberal National candidates but also, because of their electoral partnership with the Simonite group, the Conservatives themselves.

The first prominent figure to speak out publicly on behalf of the National Government's junior partners was Earl de la Warr, National Labour Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Board of Education in Stanley Baldwin's administration.⁹ Speaking to the first Area Conference organised by the National Labour Party in Birmingham in May 1936, de la Warr declared that there were millions of men and women who were determined not to hand the country over to Attlee's Labour Party, but equally determined not to vote for a purely Conservative government. He called for the creation of a strong, fighting centre group, which would be more than a mere coalition of the supporters of the government – "fighting" because of its realism, and "centre" because it abhorred equally complacency on the Right and irresponsibility on the Left'. The supporters of National Labour should cling to the idealism that had taken them into the Labour Party and develop the realism that had taken them out of it.¹⁰ De la Warr's call was taken up by Robert Bernays, Liberal MP for Bristol North, who was at the time involved in negotiations that would soon take him into the Liberal National Party. In a letter to *The Times* Bernays argued that what was needed was 'some definite and coherent group determined to work, within the ranks of the Government's supporters, for a continuance of a searching programme of social reform and the support of Mr Eden [Foreign Secretary] in the maintenance of the greatest possible measure of collective security'. Bernays complained of a lack of organisation and leadership. 'Working in isolation as we do, we are not able to exercise our rightful influence in shaping the programme and policy of the government.' As a result, the need for an effective association

In the months that followed the 1935 election, moreover, Simon's Liberal National faction, once easily dismissed as a group of self-serving MPs representing no more than their own personal interests, took on more and more of the attributes of a traditional political party.

of the left-wing supporters of the National Government was becoming more imperative with every passing month. Otherwise, right-wing Conservatives would be able to argue that the Liberal Nationals and the National Labour group did not stand for a sufficiently definite policy and that their influence was therefore negative and their electoral usefulness doubtful. Bernays called for weekly meetings of the Liberal National and National Labour groups to decide upon a common line and an agreed spokesman on all important issues of government business. 'A really powerful group', he judged, 'would revolutionize the viewpoint of our Conservative colleagues' and perhaps ultimately attract the adherence of moderate Tories and independent Liberals. Action was urgent. With Baldwin's retirement believed to be imminent, Bernays warned that his successor might well try to take the government to the right.¹¹

Bernays's letter gave rise to a lively debate in the correspondence columns of *The Times*. The newspaper itself applauded his ideas to the extent that it recognised the importance of the National Government pursuing radical social policies, but it dismissed Bernays's fears about the future direction of the National Government, insisting that the Conservative right wing had already been marginalised.¹² Robert Boothby, the maverick Tory MP for East Aberdeenshire, did nothing to lessen the minor parties' anxiety, inviting Liberal National and National Labour members to 'drop their present obsolete and fairly ridiculous political affiliations' and join the 'only modern Liberal party', the Conservatives.¹³ But at least one correspondent got to the heart of the vulnerability of the two minor parties – the paucity of their parliamentary representation. 'As I see it', wrote John Worthington,

The Conservative Party at the last General Election would not surrender its title to any seats that it could hope to win; and now that its candidates have been returned with the help of National votes, Mr Boothby and some of his friends are assessing the minority groups not by the value of their support

in the constituencies but by their numerical weakness in the House.¹⁴

It was against this background that a parliamentary vacancy occurred in Preston when the sitting Conservative MP, William Kirkpatrick, resigned upon his appointment as Representative in China of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.¹⁵ For two reasons the resulting by-election, scheduled for 25 November 1936, offered a clear opportunity to do something to redress the interparty imbalance within the National Government. On the one hand, Preston was a two-member constituency. Although single-member constituencies had been the norm since the redistribution of seats in 1885, two-member constituencies were not finally eliminated until 1950. Fifteen such constituencies remained at the end of the First World War and offered an obvious and visible chance for coalition parties to display their cooperation and partnership to the electorate. Thus the two-member seats of Norwich and Southampton had offered a joint Conservative–Liberal National ticket at both the general elections of 1931 and 1935, while Oldham and Sunderland, having fielded two Tories in 1931, both conceded one seat to the Liberal Nationals in 1935. The second factor was that a reasonably strong Liberal tradition clearly persisted in Preston. Liberal candidates had taken one of the Preston seats at each of the general elections of 1922, 1923 and 1929. Significantly, however, and unusually, these Liberal successes had been achieved in tandem with Labour candidates. There was, therefore, apart from 1931 itself, little recent tradition of Liberal–Conservative cooperation upon which to build.

The *Lancashire Daily Post* reported the situation at the end of October 1936. The ‘interesting question of the moment’, it suggested, was whether it would be possible for an agreement to be reached between the Conservatives and ‘those Liberals who support the National Government’ to run a Liberal National candidate. Informal discussions were known to have taken place between the local leaders of the two parties, but ‘so far as can be ascertained there seems

at present to be some doubt as to whether such an understanding can be arrived at’. Meeting on 19 October, the Emergency Committee of the Preston Conservative Association considered ‘certain names’, but eventually agreed to postpone their decision.¹⁶ Their Liberal National counterparts clearly saw this delay as an opportunity to seize the initiative themselves. They believed that the case for a Liberal National candidate was compelling. According to Levi Collison, leader of the Preston Liberal Nationals and once Liberal MP for Penrith, ‘We have consistently and wholeheartedly supported the National Government since the crisis of 1931. It was only with our help that the two Conservative National candidates secured election. We consider we are entitled to select the candidate. We have been expecting this opportunity would come along and we are ready with a good man.’¹⁷

The identity of that ‘good man’ soon became known. On the evening of 20 October the Liberal Nationals decided to invite Sir John Barlow to address them with a view to his adoption as ‘National’ candidate at the by-election.¹⁸ Barlow was in some ways an ideal choice. A member of a well-known Lancashire family, he was engaged in the cotton industry upon which Preston was still largely dependent. But he was not a Conservative. With what turned out to be misplaced confidence, Collison declared that ‘we have been promised the full backing of the Liberal National Organisation in London’. Meanwhile, the Preston Conservative Association declined, for the time being, to comment on the situation that had arisen.¹⁹

A public dispute between the component parts of the National Government could only work to the advantage of Labour and, if they decided to put forward a candidate of their own, the independent Liberals. Douglas Hacking, newly appointed Conservative Party chairman, speaking in neighbouring Leyland, called for unity between the National parties. ‘They are not yet ready’, he suggested, ‘to have differences of opinion.’²⁰ The possibility of the sort of compromise that Hacking hoped for seemed to have increased when it was announced that a joint meeting of the executives of the Preston

Conservative Party and the Preston Liberal National Association had been arranged for 26 October. Collison insisted that there was no split between his party and the Conservatives. ‘We are all activated by the desire to retain the seat for the National Government and the discussions between the two sides are of the friendliest character.’²¹ The official report of the joint meeting spoke of a ‘frank and open discussion’. First accounts suggested that proceedings had been adjourned until such time as Barlow came to Preston and addressed both associations. ‘This seems to show’, suggested the *Liverpool Daily Post* ‘that there is hope of a united front against the Socialist nominee.’²² It soon emerged, however, that, at the adjournment of the joint meeting, the Conservative Emergency Committee had gone into private session and decided that they would not in fact be inviting Barlow to address them. ‘I am greatly disappointed at the decision’, commented Collison, ‘and that feeling I know is shared by every member of my executive.’²³

Now it was the turn of the Preston Conservatives to take unilateral action. Sir Norman Seddon Brown, chairman of the Preston Conservative Association, announced that a meeting of the Conservative Council would be held in the near future at which a National candidate would be recommended for adoption. Invitations would be sent to the Liberal Nationals to send representatives to the adoption meeting. Collison quickly made it known that it was ‘not likely’ that Liberal Nationals would attend such a meeting. He ‘could not say’ whether they would go ahead with a candidate of their own. Meanwhile, however, rumours grew that the orthodox Liberal Party in Preston would come forward with their own candidate in the hope of attracting the support of those Liberals and Liberal Nationals who had backed the Conservatives at the general election.²⁴

By the end of October it was clear that the Conservatives intended to nominate Captain Edward Cobb. Born in the Falkland Islands and educated at Sandhurst, Cobb had served with distinction in the First World War before becoming a member of the London County Council in 1925. There he had interested himself mainly in

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THE 1936 PRESTON BY-ELECTION

questions of education and slum clearance, serving for a time as chairman of the Council's Education Committee. An experienced platform speaker and wholehearted supporter of the National Government, he had no obvious connection with Preston apart from serving on the London County Council alongside Adrian Moreing, now the other sitting Conservative MP for Preston.²⁵

Feelings ran high among the Liberal Nationals of Preston that they had to make a stand. The outcome, suggested one activist, would provide an acid test not only of the honesty of the Conservatives' professions of good faith and goodwill towards their Liberal allies, but also of the ability of those allies to stand up for their reasonable rights. If the Tories succeeded in enforcing their will, this would mean that 'never under any circumstances' could the small number of Liberal National MPs be increased.²⁶ Collison moved quickly to dispel the idea that the nomination of Sir John Barlow had been designed to bounce the Conservatives into submission. There had, he insisted, been no intention to embarrass the Tories by putting a Liberal National into the field. Indeed, several meetings had been held between the leaders of the two parties to discuss the possibility of Barlow's candidature, and it was not until the idea was brought before the Conservatives' Emergency Committee, when they 'refused absolutely to consider any candidate but a Tory', that Barlow's name was first published and then only to the Executive Committee of the Liberal Nationals. According to Collison, ever since the general election the Liberal Nationals had been encouraged to believe that, in the event of a vacancy, the Tories would look favourably upon a Liberal National candidate in recognition of the loyal support given to Conservative candidates at both the general elections of 1931 and 1935. 'We do not think it unreasonable on our part', he concluded, 'to ask that Sir John Barlow should be the National candidate in this by-election.'²⁷ With Cobb duly adopted, there was now a grave danger, Collison predicted, that the seat would be lost. In that situation the blame would lie not with the Liberal Nationals but with 'those who have allowed themselves to

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be influenced by a few extremists who are least able to judge what is best in the interests of the National Government in this by-election'.²⁸ In response Seddon Brown merely insisted that the Conservative choice had been determined solely by the need to select a candidate capable of holding the seat. That being the case, 'the preference for Captain Cobb was inevitable'.²⁹

As Cobb opened his campaign, rifts among the Liberal Nationals became apparent. No Liberal Nationals signed Cobb's nomination papers, but one member of the local party's executive, Councillor J. J. Ward, appeared on the platform at Cobb's first election meeting and spoke on his behalf. Meanwhile it was announced that the Liberal National chief whip, Sir James Blindell, would be making an early appearance in the constituency to support the Conservative candidate.³⁰ At the same time Barlow finally withdrew from the contest 'because of the inadvisability of splitting the National vote'. He did, however, put on record his view that, granted the support given by 'Preston Liberals' to the two Conservative candidates in both the general elections of 1931 and 1935, it was 'very unfortunate that you should receive such unsympathetic treatment at the present time'.³¹ Such actions by the Conservatives 'cannot enthuse would-be Liberal supporters'.³²

Prior to his appearance in the constituency, Blindell met Preston Liberal National leaders in Manchester. He denied, however, that the meeting had been used to try to persuade him not to speak in the by-election campaign. Yet the absence of Liberal National officials when the chief whip delivered his speech in Preston on 10 November did not go unnoticed and offered an ironic commentary on his plea to maintain a spirit of cooperation between the parties to ensure that the National Government continued for many years to come. Blindell declared that that cooperation could be extended by giving the smaller parties a larger representation in the House of Commons, but had to admit that, notwithstanding the 'utmost measure of goodwill' prevailing between the Conservative and Liberal National organisations, it had not proved possible to utilise the by-election to achieve

this object. Offering an assurance that, by the time of the next general election, 'an extended list' of Liberal Nationals would be seeking the endorsement of the electorate, he insisted that the immediate need was for Conservative, Liberal National and National Labour supporters to unite behind Cobb to ensure that a candidate supporting the National Government was returned to parliament.³³

If Blindell's visit had been designed to draw a line under the spat between Liberal Nationals and Conservatives in Preston, it evidently failed. After a meeting on 17 November, the Liberal National executive announced that it had been unanimously agreed that the party would take no public part in the by-election. The only advice they were prepared to give to the 'Liberals of Preston' was to act according to their own judgement. The official statement of the meeting continued:

We consider that we have not, as Liberals, had a fair deal ... It did not seem unreasonable on our part to ask that we might on this occasion, in a double-barrelled seat, have the opportunity of nominating a Liberal National and more especially when we had offered to us the services of so able a man as Sir John Barlow, who has spent all his life in the cotton trade, and who would have made an admirable member for a constituency dependent on the cotton trade and whose only disqualification was that he was not a Tory.

The Conservatives had sacrificed a 'unique opportunity' of making the government 'more National'. In the whole of the North-West area, consisting of Lancashire, Westmorland, Cheshire and the High Peak division of Derbyshire, Liberal Nationals held just two seats out of a total of eighty-three. 'We do not question for a moment the wisdom of the National Government, but we consider that if we are expected to continue supporting the Government as Liberals we ought to have more adequate representation in the House of Commons.'³⁴ The freedom in which Liberals in the constituency were thus left was emphasised when the mainstream party, which had by now

decided not to field a candidate, also declared that it would give no guidance to its supporters on how to vote.³⁵

These developments created considerable uncertainty over the outcome of the by-election itself. As one newspaper put it on polling day, 'guessing at the verdict is rendered especially difficult, mainly because the Liberal force is an unknown quantity, both as to actual strength and as to the direction in which it will be exerted'.³⁶ The 'Liberal vote' in Preston was variously estimated at anything between 3,000 and 10,000 votes and, while both the Conservative and Labour candidates expressed confidence that they would pick up the majority of it, the *Liverpool Daily Post* suspected that 'a big proportion' would opt for Labour, 'if only "in revenge" for the rejection of a Liberal National nominee in this by-election'.³⁷

In the circumstances the result was something of an anti-climax with Cobb holding on to the seat for the government with a narrow but clear majority of 1,605 votes over F. G. Bowles, the Labour candidate.³⁸ Significantly, Miss Florence White of Bradford, standing as a single-issue Independent candidate in support of spinsters' pensions, secured as many as 3,221 votes, enough to determine the outcome of the contest. The result was a clear disappointment for Labour. 'The truth is', suggested the *Liverpool Post*, that Labour was 'in a very weak state in the country just now ... It is distracted and divided and therefore is making no progress. It looks, in short, as if it has reached its ultimate strength'.³⁹ But the result was also a blow for the Liberal Nationals. The Preston party must have hoped that their abstention from the campaign would lead to clear evidence of their crucial value to the government. This wish had not been fulfilled. The implications of this went way beyond Preston. Those Conservatives who had always been uneasy about the 'coalition' which the National Government involved could now argue that their party was fully capable of securing a parliamentary majority on its own. The Liberal National hierarchy in London had had no alternative but to disown their Preston colleagues. They knew that a serious rift with

the Conservatives involved the possibility of electoral annihilation that could not be risked. Simon himself sent Cobb an eve-of-poll message of support. Yet he too must have hoped that the Preston result would emphasise the indispensability of his party, no matter what its strength in the House of Commons. And the whole episode was grist to the mill of the mainstream Liberal Party. Writing in the *Westminster Newsletter*, Ramsay Muir claimed that the Liberal Nationals had been 'brutally turned down' by the Conservatives and now knew – or ought to know – 'what treatment they may expect from their masters'.⁴⁰

Liberal Nationals were unlikely to let the issue of their under-representation in the House of Commons drop. Bernays returned to the question at the beginning of 1937. If the National Government were to be other than a 'fraud on the electorate', he insisted, a separate Liberal National identity must be preserved. For this to be guaranteed a change in the present imbalance of forces in the Commons was a prerequisite:

The two-member constituencies afford an obvious opportunity to increase Liberal representation and a chance was lost of increasing Liberal representation at the recent Preston by-election. I realise the difficulty of persuading local Conservative associations to make any sacrifice in Party representation, but a plain and unequivocal recommendation by the Leader of the Conservative Party on occasion, when the Liberal Nationals have obvious claims to the seat, would be unlikely to be ignored.

But, Bernays argued, the Liberal Nationals themselves could not escape a share of the responsibility for their present inadequate representation. They should be far more ready than they were to take on hopeless contests. Their claim to the Preston seat would have been much stronger had they been willing to fight the earlier by-election at Clay Cross where the government had faced a Labour majority of 15,000.⁴¹

William Mabane, Liberal National MP for Huddersfield, took up the same theme a few

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weeks later. In an article in the *Liberal National Magazine* he argued that interparty cooperation would only be real if, in appropriate constituencies, the banner of the National Government was carried by Liberals and not by Conservatives. So far, Conservatives had paid lip service to this idea, but done little about it.⁴² Later that year, at the conference of the Scottish Liberal Nationals in Peebles, considerable discussion arose over a resolution moved by the chairman of the Edinburgh Area Council on the subject of the party's representation in parliament. It declared that the number of Liberal National members was in no way proportionate to the volume of Liberal supporters of the National Government throughout the country and requested that measures be taken to ensure the return of an increased number of MPs. Significantly, from the platform, Lord Hutchison, chairman of the Liberal National Council, suggested that more progress might be made by winning new seats rather than taking over existing government seats from the Conservatives.⁴³

Over the remaining years before the outbreak of the Second World War (or, to put it another way, before the anticipated date of the next general election), it appeared that some progress was being made. The *Liberal National Magazine* reported that Liberal National candidates had been selected to fight a number of constituencies at the next general election, none of which had been contested by the party in 1935. The list included Manchester (Clayton), Chesterfield, Dewsbury, Doncaster, Gower, Hackney South, Hanley, Motherwell, Sheffield (Hillsborough), South Shields and Swansea East. But the degree of Conservative concession involved in this exercise was very limited. Two of these seats had been contested by National Labour candidates in 1935 and a third by a 'National' candidate without further qualification; in a fourth the Labour Party had not been opposed. The remaining seven had previously fielded a Conservative, but in none of the eleven seats had the government candidate been successful. In other words, it would probably require a stronger overall performance by the National Government at the next general

THE 1936 PRESTON BY-ELECTION

election compared to 1935 for the Liberal Nationals to secure any increase in their parliamentary representation. Granted that the earlier contest had itself produced a government majority of 248, this was inherently unlikely.

Fighting hopeless seats as a preliminary to laying claim to more promising constituencies had, of course, been part of Bernays's suggested strategy. But it meant postponing any adjustment to the Conservative–Liberal National parliamentary imbalance into the indefinite future. Securing Liberal National nominations at the expense of local Conservative parties which believed they had themselves a reasonable prospect of electoral success was never going to be easy. The Tory MP, Cuthbert Headlam, who had captured the marginal seat of Barnard Castle in Co. Durham from Labour in 1924, lost it in 1929 and won it back again in 1931, recorded a meeting with the Conservative chief whip, David Margesson:

I had 'an interview' with David Margesson in the evening and talked to him about his 'Co-ordinating' committee (the body which gives away seats to the Nat. Lab. and Lib. Nat. candidates) – I told him exactly what would be the effect of giving away seats in Durham. He was civil enough and appeared to understand me, even admitting that he had wished he had consulted me before playing the fool.⁴⁴

When the next general election, postponed by six years of war, was finally held in 1945, many of these pre-war arrangements were honoured and Liberal National candidates duly went into battle. In the face, however, of a marked pro-Labour swing, none was successful. By that time, of course, the National Government itself was a thing of the past, at least in the sense that it had been conceived in 1931, and the electorate was ready decisively to reject that government's mantra

that the Labour Party was unfit to govern.

David Dutton's History of the Liberal Party since 1900 (Palgrave Macmillan) is scheduled for publication at the end of 2012. His book Liberals in Schism: A History of the National Liberal Party (I.B. Tauris) is to be re-issued in paperback at around the same time.

- 1 I am grateful to Professor Vernon Bogdanor for this insight.
- 2 In 1935 Sir Ian Macpherson, Liberal National MP for Ross and Cromarty, was elevated to the peerage as Baron Strathcarron. In the resulting by-election Malcolm MacDonald was elected as National Labour MP, despite the intervention of Winston Churchill's son, Randolph, as an 'Independent Conservative'. B. Roberts, *Randolph: a Study of Churchill's Son* (London, 1984), pp. 152–6; E. A. Cameron, "'Rival foundlings': the Ross and Cromarty by-election, 10 February 1936", *Historical Research* 81, 213 (2008), pp. 507–30.
- 3 Bodleian Library, Oxford, Simon MSS 7, diary 5 Dec. 1935.
- 4 *Ibid.*, diary 22 Oct. 1935.
- 5 *Liberal National Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 1, Nov. 1936.
- 6 John Simon (Home Secretary), Walter Runciman (President of the Board of Trade), Godfrey Collins (Scottish Secretary) and Ernest Brown (Minister of Labour).
- 7 Ramsay MacDonald (Lord President of the Council), Malcolm MacDonald (Dominions Secretary) and Jimmy Thomas (Colonial Secretary).
- 8 When Lord Hutchison suggested that Liberal Nationals might be attracting as many as four million votes to the government's total, his calculations were ridiculed by Archibald Sinclair, the new leader of the Liberal Party. *Liberal Magazine*, vol. XLIV, no. 513, June 1936.
- 9 Herbrand Edward Dundonald Brassey Sackville, 9th Earl de la Warr (1900–76), Lord Privy Seal (1937–8), President of the Board of Education (1938–40), First Commissioner of Works (1940), Postmaster-General (1951–5).

- 10 *The Times*, 18 May 1936.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 20 May 1936.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Ibid.*, 27 May 1936.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 30 May 1936.
- 15 The result of the 1935 general election was as follows: A. C. Moreing (Con.) 37,219; W. M. Kirkpatrick (Con.) 36,797; R. A. Lyster (Lab.) 32,225; R. L. Reiss (Lab.) 31,827.
- 16 *Lancashire Daily Post*, 20 Oct. 1936.
- 17 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 21 Oct. 1936.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 22 Oct. 1936.
- 19 *Lancashire Daily Post*, 21 Oct. 1936.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1936.
- 22 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 27 Oct. 1936.
- 23 *Lancashire Daily Post*, 27 Oct. 1936.
- 24 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 28 Oct. 1936.
- 25 *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Oct. 1936.
- 26 *Lancashire Daily Post*, 2 Nov. 1936, letter from Frederick Hindle.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 3 Nov. 1936.
- 28 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 4 Nov. 1936.
- 29 *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Nov. 1936.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 7 Nov. 1936.
- 31 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 10 Nov. 1936.
- 32 Letter from Barlow to Colli-son, published in *Liverpool Daily Post*, 10 Nov. 1936. Barlow's troubled relationship with the Liberal National Party continued. In 1943 he was passed over as candidate for a by-election at Eddisbury in Cheshire when local Tory farmers succeeded in championing the claims of Thomas Peacock. The latter stood as a Liberal National, but was not known to have had any previous association with the party. Peacock lost the seat to the Common Wealth candidate, John Loverseed. Barlow did succeed in recapturing Eddisbury for the Liberal Nationals in the general election of 1945, only to see the constituency disappear as a result of boundary changes in 1950. Perhaps sensing that life was easier as a Tory, Barlow was elected as Conservative MP for Middleton and Prestwich at the general election of 1951 and evolved into an archetypal 'knight of the shire'. He held the seat until defeated in the general election of 1966.
- 33 *Manchester Guardian*, 11 Nov. 1936.
- 34 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 18 Nov. 1936.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 20 Nov. 1936.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 25 Nov. 1936.
- 37 *The Times*, 20 Nov. 1936; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 23 and 25 Nov. 1936.
- 38 The full result was E. C. Cobb (Con.) 32,575; F. G. Bowles (Lab.) 30,970; Miss F. White (Independent) 3,221. Cobb represented Preston until standing down at the general election of 1945, at which he unsuccessfully contested Eton and Slough. At Moreing's death in 1940 he protested, to no avail, against the nomination of Winston Churchill's son, Randolph, as Conservative candidate. Churchill was duly elected, unopposed, under the terms of the wartime electoral truce, but Cobb threatened to stand down at the next general election. The two men clashed openly in September 1942 after Churchill publicly criticised the Conservative Party. Cobb now made it clear that he would not run in harness with someone who had been disloyal to the party, but he had in fact already agreed to resign his seat because he lived too far from Preston to give his constituency the attention it merited. Roberts, *Churchill*, pp. 193, 233–4.
- 39 *Liverpool Daily Post*, 26 Nov. 1936.
- 40 *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Dec. 1936.
- 41 *Liberal National Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 3, Jan. 1937.
- 42 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, no. 5, April 1937.
- 43 *Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser*, 6 Oct. 1937.
- 44 S. Ball (ed.), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Baldwin and MacDonald: the Headlam Diaries 1921–1935* (Historians' Press, 1992), p. 330.

Liberal Heritage

Sir Alan Beith MP continues the *Journal's* series in which well-known Liberal Democrats take a look at the Liberal heritage of their own locality.



DISCOVERING BERWICK'S LIBERAL HISTORY

LIBERAL HISTORY IS WRIT large on the landscape of Northumberland. Not that Liberals have had it all their own way. Historically, and even today, the Percy family, who were traditionally Tory, wield considerable influence in what is still a very feudal county. In Alnwick, both the Liberal Democrats and the Tories have their offices in premises owned by the duke's estate. And in the south-east of the county, a strong Liberal tradition in the mining communities of Ashington and Blyth later gave way to two Labour parliamentary seats. Liberal fortunes revived in local elections there, which has helped to secure a Liberal Democrat minority administration on Northumberland County Council since 2008. The modern Berwick constituency is made up of the pre-1888 Berwick Borough constituency and a large part of the old Northumberland County constituency. In 1826 W. E. Gladstone's father, John Gladstone,

was elected as a Conservative for one of the two seats in the Berwick Borough constituency. The contest was marked by so much corruption that he was unseated the following year. In the Northumberland County constituency in 1826, an ancestor of Tim Beaumont fought a duel on Bamburgh's magnificent beach with an ancestor of Lord Lambton (of whom more later). Beaumont was standing against Lord Howick, whose brother-in-law, 'Radical Jack' Lambton, challenged Beaumont on his behalf. Shots were exchanged, but Lambton declared that honour was satisfied before anyone got hurt.

Howick was the son of the great Northumbrian Earl Grey, now more regularly famous for the tea specially blended for him than for the 1832 Reform Act, or for his notable efforts against slavery, or even for his long-lasting affair with the Duchess of Devonshire, by whom he had a child. He is magnificently commemorated in

Berwick-upon-Tweed: the Town Hall across the Old Bridge across the Tweed

the city of Newcastle, not only by his monument, but by the attachment of his name to perhaps the most elegant street to be found in any major city in England. Grey's family home was in the heart of what is now the Berwick constituency at Howick Hall, a few miles from Alnwick. Despite a fire in the 1920s, Howick is still recognisably the hall which Grey knew, and although it is not normally open to the public, the magnificent gardens are. Appropriately, there is a superb tearoom housed not in stables or outbuildings but in a grand part of the Hall. There you can sip your Earl Grey tea and reflect on the immense political battle its original recipient fought to achieve the first modest widening of the franchise and the abolition of at least some of the more grotesquely unequal constituencies. In the grounds there is a small church, with the Grey family memorials.

A few miles away at Falloden is the house of the other famous



Grey, Sir Edward, who was Liberal MP for the Berwick division from 1885 to 1916. He was a distant relation of Earl Grey and was Foreign Secretary at the outbreak of the First World War. His former home is not open to the public and it, too, suffered a serious fire in the 1920s. Sir Edward Grey had a lifelong enthusiasm for nature and for birds. Local people, by whom he was much respected, speak of him sitting by the pond at Falldoden, surrounded by birds, teaching local children about the various species. He had his own railway station on the estate, which enabled him to commute to London much as I do today, although it took twice as long. He is commemorated in Embleton church.

While in Embleton, it is worth noting the former Presbyterian manse, just across the road from the parish church. Here was born the radical Liberal journalist W. T. Stead. During his editorship of the *Northern Echo* and later the *Pall Mall Gazette*, he used every kind of sensationalism as a means of progressing radical causes. He went to prison for a dramatic stunt in which he 'bought' a young girl and sent her to safe keeping in order to demonstrate the reality of child

Cartoon commemorating the duel between Beaumont and Lambton in 1826

prostitution and trafficking in nineteenth-century London. He was backed by the Archbishop of Canterbury and General Booth of the Salvation Army: the introduction of the age of consent into law was the outcome of his fight. He met his end on the Titanic, on his way to speak at a peace conference in New York. Until a few years ago the strains of 'Nearer my God to Thee' could be heard at a biennial memorial service for him in the former Presbyterian Church.

Just a few miles away we encounter another great Liberal name. Tughall Hall, near Beadnell, was the home of Sir William Beveridge, who was Liberal MP for Berwick from 1944 to 1945. He won the seat in a by-election following the death of another Grey. George Grey, a young man with great leadership potential, had been elected in 1941 but he was killed in action in France in 1944. Beveridge lost the seat in 1945 in an election in which his own report on the future of the welfare system was the main talking point. The reason is obvious from the figures – his campaign failed to stop a rise in the third-place Labour vote. A squeeze leaflet might have made the difference. His grave lies in a quiet hilltop

churchyard at Thockrington, on the way to Hexham.

A few more miles of travelling will take you to the country house hotel at Doxford Hall, which incorporates the former home of the first Viscount Runciman. Runciman worked closely with Grey, and was in the 1908 Cabinet as President of the Board of Education, although Campbell-Bannerman said he was 'a mutineer whenever mutiny was possible'. He was a vigorous opponent of Lloyd George, and was the messenger of Halifax's doomed attempt to mediate between the Czechs and the Sudetenland Germans in 1938. His contribution to the building of the 1930s Methodist chapel at Seahouses is commemorated by a plaque in the entrance porch.

Another country hotel, at Tillmouth Park, near Cornhill was the home of Sir Francis Blake, Liberal MP for Berwick from 1820 to 1835 despite two attempts to unseat him in Berwick's perennial arguments about electoral corruption. Blake, who had eight illegitimate children by two mothers, was a radical ahead of his time, publishing a pamphlet in favour of an elected House of Lords in 1838.

Closer to Berwick along the Tweed Valley, what is now

Longridge Towers School was the home of the last MP for the separate Berwick borough constituency prior to the 1888 redistribution, Sir Hubert Jerningham. He was unusual among Berwick MPs for being an ex-diplomat, a Catholic, and an author of books in both English and French. After his parliamentary retirement he became Governor of Mauritius and then of Trinidad and Tobago. He presented a statue of his late wife to the town, and it can be found in Bank Hill, overlooking the River Tweed.

The constituency has plenty of later radical Liberal connections. The village of Longhorsley was the maternal home of Emily Wilding Davidson, the suffragette who threw herself under the king's horse at the Derby in 1911, and who had previously hidden in a broom cupboard in the House of Commons during the census. Her recently restored grave can be found in St Mary's churchyard in Morpeth, where she was laid to rest after hugely attended funeral processions in both London and Morpeth.

Well worth a visit is Wallington Hall, a National Trust property given to the nation by Sir Charles Trevelyan. As a Liberal he held junior office at the Board of Education under Runciman in 1908, but he joined Labour in 1918 and served as Education Minister in the two brief

inter-war Labour governments, but became increasingly frustrated with political life. Some of his descendants are, happily, back in the Liberal fold.

Berwick's political history was turbulent. The old Borough constituency, with an electorate of less than a thousand even after the 1832 Act, was rarely free of corruption and bribery allegations, and the Commons called for a Royal Commission to examine the 'corrupt practices at Berwick upon Tweed'. The Northumberland county constituency, and the Berwick county division created in 1888, was and remains a battleground between Liberals and Tories. To the south of the constituency, the mining area returned the first miner MPs, Thomas Burt and Charles Fenwick, both of whom remained active in Liberal politics throughout their parliamentary careers and refused to join the Labour Party. Fenwick represented Wansbeck from 1884 to 1918, and Burt represented Morpeth for forty-four years. Parts of their constituencies are in the modern Berwick constituency, and more will be in the new Berwick and Morpeth constituency under the Boundary Commission proposals.

If you take the road from Wooler to Berwick you will catch a glimpse of the white-spired

The old Borough constituency ... was rarely free of corruption and bribery allegations, and the Commons called for a Royal Commission to examine the 'corrupt practices at Berwick upon Tweed'.

shooting lodge which was Lord Lambton's constituency residence when he was MP for Berwick, although his main homes were in County Durham and London. He was something of a maverick, a right-wing Tory, despite being the descendant of 'Radical Jack.' He was a nineteenth century Earl of Durham who backed parliamentary reform, married Earl Grey's daughter, tried to set up an accepted system of government for Canada, and was described by Thomas Liddell as 'a danger to the established order'. His twentieth-century descendant, the late Lord Lambton, proved a threat to the established order in a different manner. It was his resignation after what was known, in the terminology of the time, as a 'call-girl scandal' which gave rise to the fiercely contested 1973 Berwick by-election: a fifty-seven-vote Liberal victory. Liberalism was back on the Berwick constituency landscape, and was back to stay.

Sir Alan Beith has been MP for Berwick since the by-election in 1973. He was Chief Whip of the Liberal Party, and has served as Deputy Leader of both Liberal and Liberal Democrat parties. He now chairs the Justice Committee and the Liaison Committee of the House of Commons. Before his election he was a lecturer in politics at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Orpington by-election research appeal

I'm a long-standing member of the Liberal Democrat History Group, a contributing editor to the *Journal of Liberal History*, and the inspiration for the campaign to find the Greatest Liberal a few years ago.

After working as a journalist for twenty-odd years, albeit writing about history whenever I could, I'm hoping to embark on a PhD on the Orpington by-election. I plan to do it full-time over three years, doing the odd story here and there to supplement my income. However, the fees at King's College, London, are £3,900 a year, and I haven't been able to secure any funding.

Knowing this might be a subject of interest to some *Journal* readers, I wondered whether anyone might be willing to help fund my academic research. In return, I will of course make the fruits of my research available to the *Journal*, keep any funding 'angels' fully informed as to my progress and provide them with a bound copy of my thesis when completed.

I would be very grateful to any readers who could give the matter due consideration. Thank you.

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JOHN SUTTON LIBERALISM AND TOWN PLANNING

Slum housing and town planning were two of the principal concerns of the renewed Condition of England debate in the period 1880–1914. They were an important element of the reforms which were put on the statute book by the Liberal government during the period 1908–1914. **Michael James** examines the contribution of Cllr John Sutton Nettlefold, Chairman of Birmingham's Housing Committee 1901–11.



NETTLEFOLD, AND THE EARLY TOWN PLANNING MOVEMENT

AS A LIBERAL Unionist member of Birmingham City Council between 1898 and 1906 and an Independent member between 1907 and 1911, Chairman of its Housing Committee between 1901 and 1911 and one of the leading members of the early town planning movement, John Sutton Nettlefold was notable for his belief that housing and town planning were inseparable areas of social policy and that if a lasting solution to slum housing was to be found then statutory powers of town planning were essential. Despite this (unique) contribution to pioneering town planning, Nettlefold is arguably the least remembered member of this movement. This article attempts to remedy this lack of estimation and to examine the nature of Nettlefold's ideas, both as a Birmingham City councillor and as a national campaigner.

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As Professor Denis Hardy has explained in this journal,¹ the principles of the pioneer British town planning movement were an important part of the series of

reforms of the Liberal government of 1908–1914. One of the most important, though not one of the most remembered, advocates of this movement was the Birmingham City councillor, John Sutton Nettlefold.

Nettlefold was the member for the Edgbaston and Harborne ward of Birmingham City Council from 1898 until 1911, standing for election six times. He first won the seat (as a Liberal Unionist) on 28 November 1898 at a by-election and was returned (again as a Liberal Unionist) at the elections on 1 November 1900 and 2 November 1903. He was treasurer of the Midlands Liberal Unionist Association and remained a Liberal Unionist until 1904, when he broke with the party over their adoption of a policy of tariff reform. He declared that he was committed to free trade and joined forces with the Liberal Party on that issue, though he was re-elected to represent the Edgbaston and Harborne ward in the elections on 1 November 1906 and 1 November 1909 as an Independent. He also stood for election as an Independent in the new Harborne ward on 1 November 1911, but was

not elected. In the elections of 1898, 1900 and 1909 he was unopposed, in the election of 1903 he was opposed by an Independent Labour Party candidate and in the election of 1906 he was opposed by a Liberal Unionist candidate.²

From 1901 until 1911 Nettlefold was chairman of the council's Housing Committee. The setting up of the committee was a direct result of an investigation into the condition of Birmingham's slums by the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* in 1901. The newspaper sent out a special correspondent, J. C. Walters, to report on the subject and his articles led to a sustained demand for reform, culminating in a debate in the council on 19 June 1901 in which it was decided, by thirty-two votes to thirty, to set up a Housing Committee to take over from the Estates and Health Committees all of the council's powers exercised under the Housing Acts.³ Nettlefold was not just a Birmingham figure; during his time on Birmingham City Council he was also chairman of the Association of Municipal Corporations and a member of the Garden City Association. Further, he was related by

John Sutton
Nettlefold
(1866–1930)

marriage and by shared social concerns to the Chamberlains.

These positions and connections gave him a great deal of executive power and influence, which he used to great effect to develop Birmingham's housing policy and to campaign nationally for the introduction of statutory powers of town planning. He set out his very distinctive ideas in a series of books, pamphlets and speeches, all of which were forcefully and robustly argued in clear and compelling prose.⁴ This article explores these contributions to Birmingham and to the Liberalism of the Edwardian era.

Nettlefold's background and political outlook

Nettlefold was born in Highbury, London on 2 May 1866. He was the fourth son of John Nettlefold (1826–78), screw manufacturer, and his wife Frances, née Wyman (1834–1907). His family were Unitarians and he was educated at Amersham Hall School, Caversham, a boarding school for Nonconformists. In 1878, at the age of twelve, he came to live in Birmingham and on leaving school he joined the family business, the screw-making firm of Nettlefold and Co., at Broad Street, Birmingham. After being with the company for three years he took charge of their steel works at Rogerstone, near Newport in Monmouthshire. On 14 September 1891 he married, at the Church of the Messiah, Birmingham, Margaret Chamberlain (1871–1949), the eldest daughter of Arthur Chamberlain, JP, of King's Norton, Birmingham, niece of Joseph Chamberlain (1836–1914) and cousin of Neville Chamberlain (1869–1940). Subsequently, he resigned his post at Rogerstone to become managing director of Kynoch Ltd, a firm of ammunition, nail and wire manufacturers of which his father-in-law was chairman. He was also for a considerable period chairman of Thomas Smith's Stampings Ltd and a Director of Henry Hope and Sons Ltd, companies which were part of Birmingham's metal industry.⁵

Nettlefold's career in business was a major factor in shaping his political outlook, giving him a strong belief in the Victorian ideals of thrift and self-help. But this Smilesian perspective

was moderated by a second, and equally powerful, factor, his Unitarian upbringing. Unitarianism is a form of Christianity that eschews doctrines, in particular that of the Trinity, emphasising instead the practical application of the teachings of Christ in the gospels, both in personal conduct and public affairs. In attributing Unitarianism as one of the formative influences on Nettlefold's political ideas, it is important to emphasise that it is not only a religion but also an ethic. It was in this latter respect that it shaped his outlook and ideas. Unitarians were, and are, heavily influenced by the Enlightenment ideas of reason and progress; the duty of the politician is to improve the condition of life of those less fortunate than himself. Nettlefold, together with Joseph and Neville Chamberlain, subscribed to this political creed, with its distinctive trait of combining belief in self-reliance and self-improvement and adherence to the civic philosophy known at the time and since as 'the civic gospel', the belief that local government should assume responsibility for improving the conditions of life of its citizens. Nowhere more so than in Birmingham, with its radical civic past dating from the formation in 1829 of the Political Union for the Protection of Public Rights by Thomas Attwood and a dozen Birmingham tradesmen, did the civic gospel take firmer root.

The successful implementation of the civic gospel in Birmingham was due principally to the work of Joseph Chamberlain. He came to Birmingham from London in 1854 at the age of eighteen to enter the screw-making business of his father and his father's brother-in-law. Although he attended the (Unitarian) Church of the Messiah in Ladywood, Birmingham in his early years in the city, he lost his faith in later life (after the death of his second wife) and it was his intense desire to improve the lot in life of the working class, rather than religion, which was the driving force behind his espousal of social reform. This sense of duty, although not of itself religious, derived from his Unitarian upbringing and it would continue to be the motivating force of his political life. He was elected to the St Paul's ward of Birmingham

Nettlefold's career in business was a major factor in shaping his political outlook, giving him a strong belief in the Victorian ideals of thrift and self-help. But this Smilesian perspective was moderated by a second, and equally powerful, factor, his Unitarian upbringing.

Town Council in 1869 and was mayor from 1873 until 1876, during which time he persuaded the council to adopt a series of far-reaching reforms. They comprised three measures: the municipalisation of gas, the taking over of the town's water supply and the Birmingham Improvement Scheme. Chamberlain believed that, as monopolies, gas and water should be controlled by elected representatives of the people. He further believed, correctly, that a municipal gas undertaking would be a profitable enterprise, earning considerable sums for the council whilst at the same time resulting in lower prices. The benefits of the municipalisation of the water supply were dramatic improvements in public health: with a purer water supply, death rates in Birmingham had fallen by the early 1880s to only a little above the national average. The Birmingham Improvement Scheme was a large-scale civic policy to rebuild its central district, involving the compulsory purchase of land by the council, the demolition of insanitary, dilapidated and narrow streets and their replacement by wide boulevards and commercial thoroughfares. It was a controversial scheme, which meant private dwellings being demolished and their inhabitants being rehoused in the suburbs.

Chamberlain's improvement scheme was a policy which Nettlefold would strongly oppose, though his own approach to housing was well suited to the general tradition of Chamberlain municipal dynamism in Birmingham and he was an enthusiastic disciple of Chamberlain in his desire to improve the quality of life of the citizens of Birmingham.⁶ In Volume 2 of the *History of Birmingham*, Asa Briggs writes that 'Nettlefold was the most important guardian of the Chamberlain tradition in the city'. He goes on to quote an observer writing in the *Birmingham Gazette* on 20 October 1909: 'Of all Mr. Chamberlain's disciples he [Nettlefold] is the only one who within recent times has shown what the Chamberlain traditions mean. He is an enthusiast, a masterful man, with an immense stock of driving power'.⁷ His Chamberlain quality of dynamism and his urge to get things done were directed to housing and town planning and it is to

these areas of social reform that we must now turn.

The interrelationship between housing and town planning

Nettlefold's contribution to the early town planning movement was unique in one respect: more than all the other pioneers he saw town planning as the way of achieving better housing for the working class. For him, housing and town planning were not separate areas of social policy but part and parcel of one unified approach to finding a solution to the contemporary working-class housing problem – slums.

Housing figured large in the renewed Condition of England debate after 1880, which centred on the fact that, despite over half a century of economic growth and of a general rise in living standards, many parts of Britain were still characterised by slums, poverty and higher than average morbidity and mortality rates. The reason for the continued prominence of these conditions was the spectacular growth of British towns and cities in the nineteenth century. In 1851 the population of the United Kingdom was 22,259,000, 50 per cent of which lived in towns and cities; by 1901 these figures had risen to 38,237,000 and 77 per cent respectively.⁸ In other words, during the second half of the nineteenth century the numbers of United Kingdom citizens living in towns and cities rose from just over 11 million to nearly 29 million. This rapid urbanisation had a dramatic effect on the living conditions of the working class, leading to overcrowded and insanitary housing and high densities of population. Several surveys revealed that by the beginning of the twentieth century nearly one-third of the urban working class lived in, or very close to, poverty.⁹ This state of affairs was not without serious consequences for the nation. In 1899, on the outbreak of the Boer War, one-third of potential recruits for the army were found not to meet its (scarcely exacting) standards for active service.¹⁰ In 1917, when British men were medically examined en masse for military service, it was discovered that 10 per cent were totally unfit for military service, 41.5 per cent had 'marked

disabilities', 22 per cent had 'partial disabilities' and only a third were in a satisfactory condition.¹¹ These were revelations which shocked complacency.

In 1884 a Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes had been set up and their report in 1889 had led to the passing of the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890. That measure was largely a consolidating enactment, bringing together all the housing legislation dating from the 1850s. Part I of the Act provided local authorities with powers for the wholesale clearance of slums, though they were obliged to rehouse their inhabitants and to compensate the owners; Part II contained legislation enabling local authorities to compel landlords to maintain their dwelling-houses at their own expense; Part III permitted local authorities to purchase land in order to build working-class dwellings or to convert suitable buildings for this purpose. Based largely on the provisions of Part II, by the end of the nineteenth century a distinctive model of working-class housing reform had come into being: the clearance of slums in, or near to, city centres and the rehousing of their inhabitants on the outskirts of cities.

Nettlefold set his face firmly against this model. He had his own distinctive scheme for remedying the housing problem of the time – one that was radical though not socialist, involved a degree of intervention by local authorities, and was interwoven into the emerging concept of town planning. That scheme consisted of four major elements:

- rejection of large-scale slum clearance in favour of dealing with unfit houses on an individual basis;
- rejection of municipal house building;
- development of low-density housing, located on the outskirts of cities, but with good transport links to the city centre; and
- relaxation of the building bye-laws, which he believed unnecessarily inflated building costs.

The essential principles underlying Nettlefold's template were set out in his 1907 book, *A Housing Policy* and his 1908 book, *Practical Housing*. They extended to existing suburbs

and to the building of new suburbs and they were very distinctive from the increasing state intervention on socialist lines that would come to dominate British housing policy in the twentieth century.

In relation to existing suburbs, he did not favour redevelopment schemes because of the expense that they imposed on ratepayers and because they encouraged landlords to neglect their properties in the expectation of a redevelopment scheme and compensation. Instead, he supported dealing with unfit houses on an individual basis, thus avoiding the public expense of compensation whilst placing the financial burden of ensuring that houses were fit for human habitation on the landlords. In his 1907 book he illustrated what could be achieved by this method with some very professional 'before and after' photographs. Moreover, he rejected municipal house-building as a solution to the contemporary housing problem, primarily, he felt, because local authorities were able to build comparable houses at the same rents as the private sector only if they were subsidised by their ratepayers. Municipal housing, Nettlefold maintained, amounted to charity on the rates.

It is in relation to the development of new suburbs that we see most dramatically Nettlefold's radicalism. He was much influenced by the two strands of the early town planning movement – the garden city and the planned suburb based on the German concept of the town extension plan. (In town planning, as in the other parts of the Liberal reform programme of 1908–14, German influence was often considerable.) Both strands had their origins in the industrial villages built by wealthy and philanthropic Victorian manufacturers, the best known examples of which are New Lanark, built by Robert Owen (1771–1858), Saltaire, built by Sir Titus Salt (1803–1876), Port Sunlight, built by Sir W. H. Lever later first Viscount Leverhulme (1851–1925), and Bournville, built by George Cadbury (1839–1922). These villages possessed two particular characteristics: very low-density housing and generous community facilities – a school, an almshouse, a community centre and a recreation ground. As a solution to the nineteenth-century

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housing problem, their contribution was no more than a drop in the ocean. Their value lay in the inspiration that they provided to the pioneering town planners, including Nettlefold.

The idea of the garden city was first described by Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928) in his 1898 book, *Tomorrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, which was reissued in 1902 as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*.¹² He envisaged a network of such cities within a radius of 40 miles of London. They would be built on large rural estates purchased by trustees and designed to combine the advantages of town and country without the disadvantages of either. Their principal features would be: a coordinated arrangement of residential, business and pleasure areas, with only about a sixth of the land being devoted to urban uses, a maximum number of houses per acre of ten, ample open spaces and cheap transport between the various parts of town. In 1899 the Garden City Association was founded to further these aims, but in the event only two garden cities were ever built, Letchworth and Welwyn, the idea losing favour to that of the New Town.

The concept of the town extension plan derived from Germany and was made known in Britain by Thomas Cognall Horsfall (1841–1932) in his 1904 book, *The Improvement of the Dwellings and Surroundings of the People: the Example of Germany*. It was this strand that was the more relevant to the development of Birmingham's suburbs. Its decisive features (no more than ten houses per acre, a plentiful supply of open spaces, adequate amenities and good transport links to the town centre) bear a striking similarity to those of the garden city, and in a speech to a conference arranged by the Garden City Association on 25 October 1907 Nettlefold described town planning as 'the application of the Garden City idea to existing cities and their suburbs'.¹³ There was, however, one crucial difference between the two strands: garden cities would be built on land acquired and owned by independent garden city associations, whereas town extension schemes would be prepared by local authorities and built by private builders on municipally owned land.

Nettlefold's ideas on town planning were shaped to a large extent

Nettlefold's scheme was neither socialist nor laissez-faire. It involved the purchase of land by councils who would lease it to private builders for them to build houses to rent. By restricting the number of houses per acre the value of the land, and consequently the rents charged, would be kept to a minimum.

by Horsfall's writings. A whole chapter of *A Housing Policy* is allocated to *The Example of Germany*. In order to see Horsfall's ideas in practice, in August 1905 he led a deputation from Birmingham City Council to visit a number of towns in Germany: Berlin, Cologne, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Mannheim, Stuttgart and Ulm. The final report of the visit, of which Nettlefold was the author and which was presented to the council on 3 July 1906,¹⁴ was a document of seminal importance, locally and nationally. It argued for the provision of healthy, cheap and cheerful houses on the outskirts of the city, a relaxation of the by-laws and new statutory powers to enable the planning of all undeveloped land within the city boundaries. In presenting the report, Nettlefold took the opportunity to emphasise the close relationship between health, housing and town planning: '[t]he home of the individual is the most important factor in the prosperity of the nation, and the strength of the Empire. We can, if we will, arrange wholesome surroundings for every Birmingham adult, and, even more important, give every Birmingham child light and fresh air which is so essential to its healthy development'.¹⁵

Nettlefold's scheme was neither socialist nor laissez-faire. It involved the purchase of land by councils who would lease it to private builders for them to build houses to rent. By restricting the number of houses per acre the value of the land, and consequently the rents charged, would be kept to a minimum. Further, Nettlefold was firmly opposed to slavish adherence to 'inelastic' by-laws, which he believed put up the cost of houses without preventing their becoming slums. He thought that the by-laws should be relaxed, allowing houses to be built more cheaply, with the emphasis being placed on the development of the estate as a whole, rather than on detailed structural matters. In Nettlefold's system such factors as adequate light, air and ventilation, plenty of space between houses and gardens back and front were as significant as the thickness of walls and the quality of building materials.

The expansion of Birmingham in the period 1891–1911 presented Nettlefold with ample opportunity for translating his ideas on town

planning into policy. Not surprisingly, he was a strong advocate of the Greater Birmingham which occurred during this period. The biggest step in this direction was taken in October 1908 when the council set up a Boundaries Committee, with Nettlefold as its chairman. In its report of February 1909 it proposed a massive extension to Birmingham's boundaries, so that its area would increase three-fold to 40,000 acres and its population would rise to 850,000, to make it the second largest city in England. The committee's proposals formed the basis of the Greater Birmingham Bill, which, after a lengthy passage through parliament, received the Royal Assent in May 1911.¹⁶

A particular opportunity for the application of his ideas arose in the case of the development of the Moor Pool Estate on fifty-four acres of land in Harborne, two miles from the centre of Birmingham. In 1907 Harborne Tenants Ltd was established to promote the erection, cooperative ownership and administration of houses on this land and at the same time the Harborne Society was formed, Nettlefold being appointed as its chairman. A local firm of architects was appointed to develop the site, 500 houses being built at a density of 9.25 houses per acre. This development must be distinguished from town planning. It was an alternative to housing built by enlightened employers, such as George Cadbury. The occupiers were co-partners, as well as tenants, of Harborne Tenants Ltd, co-partnership being a widely practised idea at the time. The tenants purchased shares in the company and the company owned the houses. Dividends were paid to the tenants, giving them a stake in the success of the venture.

Nettlefold and the introduction of statutory town planning

A wider application of Nettlefold's beliefs, in particular those in the town extension plan, would require legislation. There was extensive support for such legislation and Nettlefold played a leading role in the campaign to persuade the government of the day of the need for the enactment of a Town Planning Bill. On 13 June 1907, at a meeting of the Planning Committee of the

Association of Municipal Corporations, it was resolved that a Town Planning Scheme, which had been prepared by a Special Committee led by Nettlefold, be adopted and presented to the government.¹⁷ The scheme was cautious. Its key provision granted local authorities powers to prescribe the number of houses per acre which could be erected on land in their areas, a provision, of course, which went to the heart of Nettlefold's thinking. The scheme went on to provide that local authorities would be given powers to determine the width of new streets and dedicate land adjoining those streets as open space. They would be able also to compulsorily purchase land in order to develop their districts, subject to compensating the owners of such land. Significantly, the scheme granted only limited powers to the Local Government Board, by contrast to the bill which emerged from the board and which eventually became law. Clearly, the scheme was drafted in the image of Nettlefold.

On 7 August 1907 a deputation from the Association of Municipal Corporations, led by Nettlefold, gave a presentation on the scheme before the (then) prime minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, and the (then) president of the Local Government Board, John Burns.¹⁸ Nettlefold took the opportunity to set out what he saw as the essential principles of town planning: restriction on the number of houses per acre and development of new districts as a whole along the lines of the German town extension plan, rather than in 'penny numbers'. The deputation was received enthusiastically by Campbell-Bannerman and by Burns, though Burns insisted that the legislation be based on a government-drafted bill, rather than on the Association of Municipal Corporations' scheme. The Housing, Town Planning, etc. Bill was introduced into the House of Commons in March 1908, but opposition in the House of Lords prevented it being passed in that session. It was reintroduced in the following session and it (eventually) became law in December 1909.¹⁹

The town planning provisions of the 1909 Act, contained in Part II, were a limited measure. Powers were granted to local

authorities to plan undeveloped land within their boundaries, but not land already developed. As was the case with most of the housing and public health legislation of the nineteenth century, the act was permissive not compulsory: i.e. it was left to the discretion of local authorities as to whether or not they used their powers under the act. The critical feature of the new statutory scheme was its complex procedure (contained in the Town Planning Procedure Regulations (England and Wales) of 1910²⁰), which placed every stage of the planning process, from the local authority having to obtain permission to prepare a scheme to submission of the final version of the plan, firmly in the hands of the Local Government Board. As a result the act was little used, Birmingham being one of the few local authorities to show any enthusiasm for it. For Nettlefold, as for many in the early town planning movement, it was a great disappointment. In his 1914 book, *Practical Town Planning*, he concluded bitterly that, 'if those responsible ... had intended to make the Act unworkable, they could not have adopted a more effective method'.²¹

Nettlefold's legacy

After losing his seat on Birmingham City Council in 1911 Nettlefold's life came more and more to be dominated by illness. He did not hold public office again, though he undertook a considerable amount of charitable and philanthropic work in Birmingham and its surrounding area. He died in Barnwood House, a private mental hospital in Barnwood, Gloucestershire on 3 November 1930. In a sense, these later years were something of an epilogue, but they should not be allowed to obscure the substantial achievements, local and national, of Nettlefold's public career.

Those achievements were threefold: his writings and speeches, his work as a Birmingham councillor and his campaigning for statutory powers of town planning. His writings are a legacy of his thinking on contemporary housing and planning issues and, in themselves, they amount to as substantial a contribution to the early town planning movement as any of its other

Primarily, Nettlefold was a man of action. As chairman of Birmingham City Council's Housing Committee, he used his powers to get things done for the good of the citizens of Birmingham.

members. Two of his books, *Practical Town Planning* and *Garden Cities and Canals*, were published as companion volumes in 1914, after he had left public life. In *Practical Town Planning* he proposed a number of amendments to the 1909 Act and to the 1910 Regulations, the most important of which were the removal of the obligation to obtain the permission of the Local Government Board before preparing a town planning scheme, the extension of the act to existing suburbs and the replacement of the Local Government Board by a new government department to oversee housing and town planning. All of these recommendations would be implemented by the 1919 Housing, Town Planning, etc. Act, often referred to as Addison's Act, after Dr Christopher Addison, who, as the first Minister of Health, was responsible for steering the measure through parliament.

Garden Cities made an original, if rather eccentric, contribution to the garden city debate by explaining how the idea could be developed on a national scale. Nettlefold, disillusioned by the 1909 Act, felt that the only way to see his views put into effect would be by building a network of garden cities linked by an improved canal network, which he argued would be cheaper than extending the railways. Drawing on the research of the Royal Commission on Canals, 1906–9, the book contains a wealth of statistics in support of its arguments and illustrates Nettlefold's grasp of technical detail. But its catholicity was in vain; only two garden cities were ever built in Britain and it would be over fifty years before the country's canals were rejuvenated and then as a form of tourism, quite unrelated to the development of new towns.

Primarily, Nettlefold was a man of action. As chairman of Birmingham City Council's Housing Committee, he used his powers to get things done for the good of the citizens of Birmingham. As chairman of the Planning Committee of the Association of Municipal Corporations, he showed that he could be as effective on the national stage as he was in Birmingham. To have played a crucial and distinctive part in persuading the (then) prime minister and the (then) president of the Local Government Board

of the need for local authorities to be given statutory powers of town planning in order to improve the housing conditions of their working-class citizens was no small achievement.

The First World War put an end to Nettlefold's model of housing reform – private building in the suburbs, cheap transport between the city centre and the suburbs, compelling owners to repair their properties and town extension plans. By the outbreak of war in 1914, this policy had by no means solved Birmingham's housing problems. On 20 October 1914 a special committee on housing, appointed in July 1913 with Neville Chamberlain as its chairman, reported that 'a large proportion of the poor in Birmingham are living under conditions of housing detrimental to both health and morals'.²² Following the passing of Addison's Act of 1919, the emphasis of housing policy shifted to the building of council houses, financed by a Treasury subsidy to local authorities to cover the difference between the capital costs and the rental income from tenants, over and above a penny rate. The act also provided for a subsidy of £150 to be paid to private builders. Nettlefold's idea of co-partnership housing also went out of fashion, as the poorest were no longer able to afford the level of rents required to provide investors with a return and to cover maintenance costs.

Nettlefold lost his seat on Birmingham City Council in the year when the Greater Birmingham Act came into effect. The act presented the council with the opportunity to implement their newly acquired powers. It would be Neville Chamberlain, however, who undertook this task, he having been elected to the council in 1911 and shortly afterwards appointed to the chairmanship of its (new-formed) Planning Committee. He oversaw the submission of five planning schemes to the Local Government Board, all of which were approved. The efforts of Nettlefold and Chamberlain ensured that statutory town planning took root in Britain. Given that few local authorities outside Birmingham showed any interest in Part II of the 1909 Act, it is no exaggeration to say that without their efforts statutory town planning might not have

The efforts of Nettlefold and Chamberlain ensured that statutory town planning took root in Britain ... it is no exaggeration to say that without their efforts statutory town planning might not have established itself as one of the pillars of British twentieth-century social policy – one which, for better or for worse, would change the face of many of Britain's towns and cities.

established itself as one of the pillars of British twentieth-century social policy – one which, for better or for worse, would change the face of many of Britain's towns and cities.

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I would like to thank Michael Simpson, Retired Reader in History at Swansea University, for reading an earlier (and much longer) draft of this article and for drawing my attention to some important points. Michael's comments helped me to broaden my understanding of this period of British social history. Richard Abbott of the Birmingham Libraries and Archives Service helped me to establish Nettlefold's party (or non-party) political affiliations. I also wish to thank the three (anonymous) reviewers of this article; their suggestions (nearly all of which I have incorporated into the text) have saved me from a good deal of embarrassment. Any remaining errors or omissions are, of course, my responsibility.

- 1 *Journal of Liberal History* 52, Autumn 2006.
- 2 These facts are based on two sources: the lists of councillors published in the *Birmingham Daily Post* following each of the elections in question, and supplied by the Birmingham Libraries and Archives Service; and information contained in 'Councillor J. S. Nettlefold, J.P.', *Egbastonia*, vol. xxvii, March 1907, No. 310, pp. 324–329. The election dates are verified by the City Council minutes. In 1909 the City Librarian wrote to Nettlefold requesting election literature; the letter was returned annotated 'No literature issued'. This response, together with the absence of newspaper reports of a contest in the Egbaston and Harborne ward, seems to indicate that he was unopposed. The list of councillors published in the *Birmingham Daily Post* after the 1909 election include him under the heading of 'Liberals, etc.', a list which

- includes Labour and Independent councillors.
- 3 The articles in question were republished in J. C. Walters, *Scenes in Slumland* (1902).
- 4 The most important of these writings are: *A Housing Policy* (Cornish Brothers, 1905); 'Housing Reform', lecture delivered in the Town Hall, Birmingham, Wednesday, 28 March 1906 (reprinted as an appendix to subsequent editions of *A Housing Policy*); *Practical Housing* (Garden City Press Limited, 1908); *Garden Cities and Canals* (The St. Catherine Press, 1914); and *Practical Town Planning* (The St. Catherine Press, 1914).
- 5 This paragraph is based on 'Councillor J. S. Nettlefold, J.P.', *Egbastonia*, vol. xxvii, March 1907, No. 310, pp. 324–29.
- 6 For an (extensive) discussion of Birmingham and the Civic Gospel see Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Penguin Books, 1968), Ch. 5.
- 7 Page 143.
- 8 The absolute numbers are taken from the Registrar General's estimates for the home population of the United Kingdom (i.e. the number of people actually in the country). They are to be found in the Central Statistical Office's Annual Abstract of Statistics. The percentages are taken from Helen Meller, 'Housing and Town Planning' in Chris Wrigley, *A Companion to British Twentieth-Century History* (Blackwell, 2010).
- 9 Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889); William Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890); and Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty, a Study of Town Life* (1901). The conditions revealed by these surveys confirmed the descriptions of the lives of the poor contained in a number of earlier and more populist publications, notably the Reverend Andrew Mearns's pamphlet, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) and Octavia Hill's series of articles published in *Macmillan's Magazine* and *Fortnightly Review* between 1866 and 1875.
- 10 Gordon E. Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900: The Rise and Fall of the Planning Ideal* (Blackwell, 1996), p. 27.
- 11 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 137.
- 12 A facsimile edition was published by Routledge in 2003.
- 13 See *Town Planning in Theory and Practice*, pp. 13–20.
- 14 The report is published in the City of

- Birmingham Housing Committee Reports, Speeches, etc. 1906–7, which are available in the Birmingham Central Library Archives.
- 15 Nettlefold's speech is reprinted as Appendix X to *Practical Town Planning*.
- 16 The act is a Private Act and its official title is the Local Government Board's Provisional Order (1910) Confirmation (No. 13) Act, 1911.
- 17 *Scheme for a Town Planning Bill*, Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of the Association of Municipal Corporations, Thursday 13 June 1907, pp. 134–36.
- 18 *Planning of Suburbs*, pp. 207–19. Available in the Birmingham Central Library Archives.
- 19 9 Edw. 7, Ch. 44.
- 20 The Regulations are reprinted in Nettlefold, *Practical Town Planning*, Appendix IX.
- 21 Page 150.
- 22 *Report of Special Housing Inquiry Committee, Birmingham, 1914*, p. 2. Copies of the report are available in the Birmingham City Archives, which are situated in Birmingham Central Library.

THE LIBERAL PARTY, UNIONISM AND POLITICAL CULTURE IN LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY BRITAIN

A one-day seminar organised by Newman University College and the *Journal of Liberal History*
Saturday 10th November 2012, Newman University College, Birmingham

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw major changes in British political culture. The gradual emergence of a mass electorate informed by a popular press, debates about the role of the state in social policy, Imperial upheavals and wars all had their impact on political culture. Political parties became more professional, labour more organised, regional identities sharpened.

To accompany this turmoil, a new political party, the Liberal Unionists, was formed to oppose Gladstone's policy of Irish Home Rule, splitting the Liberal family and causing a reappraisal of what it meant to be a Unionist.

The seminar will examine some of these key changes in political culture, against the background of the formation of the Liberal Unionists and the new political alignments this brought about.

Speakers:

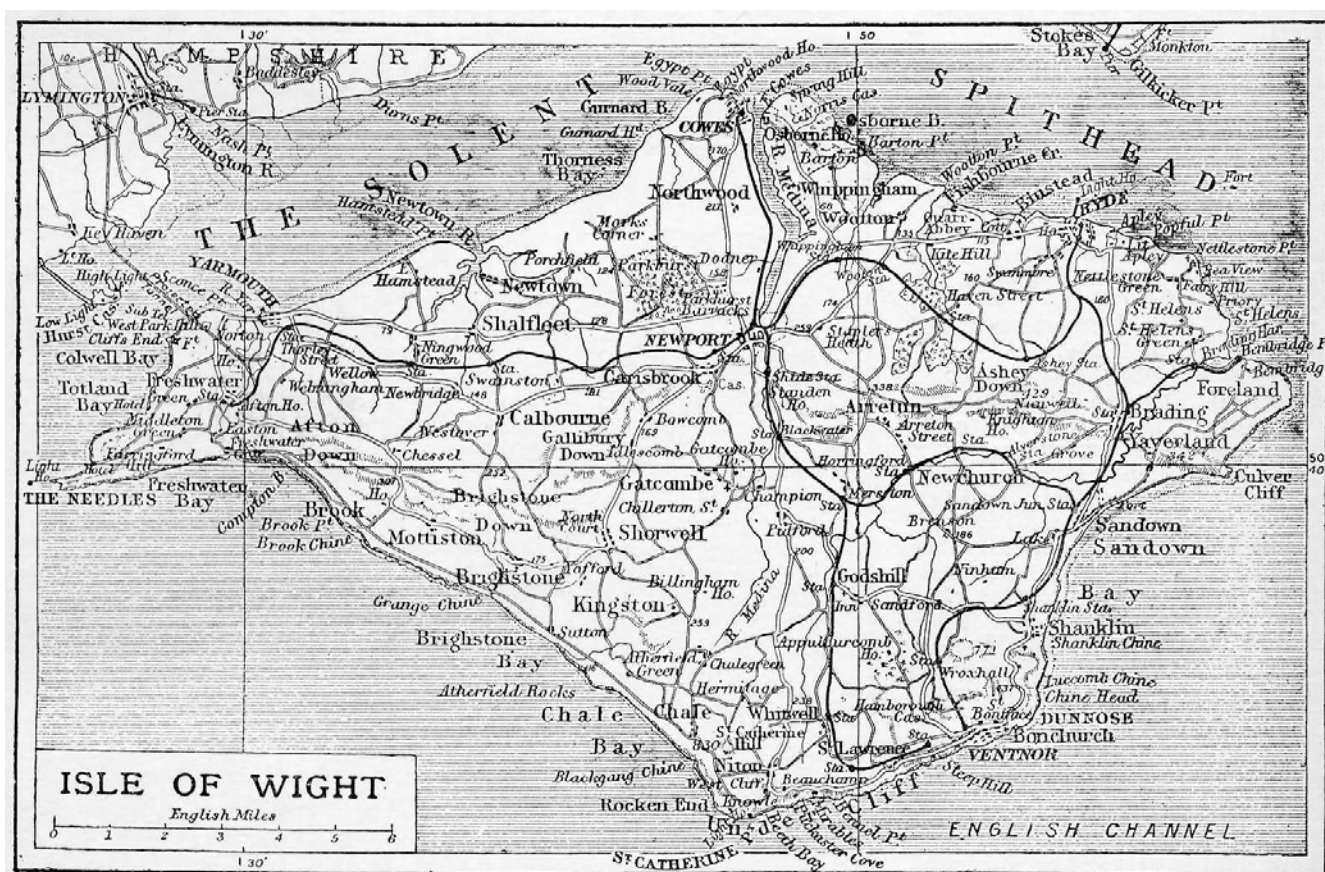
- **Professor Robert Colls, University of Leicester** Political culture in Britain 1884–1914 (Guest Chair: **Vernon Bogdanor, Research Professor, Institute of Contemporary British History, King's College, London**)
- **Dr Ian Cawood, Newman UC, Birmingham** The impact of the Liberal Unionists, 1886–1912
- **Dr Matthew Roberts, Sheffield Hallam University** A terrific outburst of political meteorology: by-elections and the Unionist ascendancy in late Victorian England
- **Dr James Thompson, Bristol University** The Liberal Party, Liberalism and the visual culture of British politics c.1880–1914
- **Dr Kathryn Rix, History of Parliament Trust** Professionalisation and political culture: the party agents, 1880–1914
- **Dr James Owen, History of Parliament Trust** Labour and the caucus: working-class radicalism and organised Liberalism in England

The cost of the seminar will be £20 (students and unwaged £10), including morning refreshments and buffet lunch.

To register please contact:

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LIBERAL PARTY IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT A STUDY OF A LIBERAL-CON



It is difficult today to appreciate the passionate interest in politics displayed by the Edwardians. The great political issues of the time were often debated against a background of social and industrial unrest and penetrated to the semi-rural and offshore division

of the Isle of Wight. The island had had a chequered political history since 1832, with the Conservatives and Liberals sharing the parliamentary victories. **Ian Ivatt** looks at the Island's political and electoral history between 1900 and 1910.

TY FORTUNES IGHT 1900 – 1910 SERVATIVE MARGINAL SEAT

THE ISLE OF Wight was something of an electoral enigma: in some ways it resembled Unionist territory, but the island mentality had isolationist and individualistic traits which favoured Liberalism, while Non-conformity was well entrenched, particularly in the villages.¹

Both the Conservative and Liberal parties had traditionally polled quite highly in this seat. Indeed, since the great Reform Act, Conservatives had been elected no fewer than twelve times, two of which were unopposed. The Liberals were victorious on ten occasions and would gain their largest majority in 1906 when Sir Godfrey Baring was elected with a 1,561-vote majority. Yet, in the January 1910 general election, this majority completely melted away to let in the Conservative (now called Unionist) candidate, Douglas Hall, from the mainland, by a relatively modest 291 votes. By this time, the registered electorate had increased by about 5 per cent as compared to the 1906 level; whilst the Liberal vote share had decreased from 55.8 per cent to 49 per cent. Did this merely reflect the general lessening of Liberal support in southern England plus the nationwide upsurge in Unionist fortunes? Or was the loss of the island Liberal seat in 1910 due, at least to some extent, to local factors? A case will now be made to establish this theory, or something close to it. The certainty is that

there were no Labour candidates to influence the results.

In his social and parliamentary studies (for 1900), Henry Pelling reported that nearly 17 per cent of the island electorate were home ownership voters.² Undoubtedly, the island's economic mainstays were tourism and leisure events, especially Cowes yachting regatta week each August with its increasing royal and international patronage. Important as it was, agriculture played a minor economic role, essentially confined to the inner part of the island. One pointer to the social structure of the island in the Edwardian age is that, in 1901, 8,163 people on the island were involved in one area or another of domestic service. This equates to 10 per cent of the working population, the national average being 6 per cent.³

Most especially, the 'Wight' in 1900 was home to the rich and famous. In addition to Queen Victoria and her daughter, Princess Beatrice, other island residents, at least in Victorian times, included Alfred Lord Tennyson, Algernon Swinburne, and the scientists John Milne and Guglielmo Marconi, the latter of whom undertook his early radio experiments from Niton in the south of the island. Dickens and Macaulay were regular visitors as, later on, was Winston Churchill. In addition, distinguished statesmen and a good number of Members of Parliament had second homes

there. Domestic work, already referred to, was plentiful, particularly in hotels and guesthouses. The broader employment situation tended to reflect that in Portsmouth just across the water – such as the dockyard work that was experiencing some redundancies by early 1906. Nevertheless, work was to be found in White's Shipyard (established in Cowes in the early nineteenth century and eventually closed in 1981), which specialised in destroyer construction.⁴ Across the Solent, in Portsmouth was the main 'Dreadnought' battleship yard.

The patronage (and presence) of Queen Victoria at Osborne, Barton, and Cowes, up to her death in early 1901, made the island, as evidenced by the above, a fashionable place to live. Edward VII, whilst ignoring Osborne, continued the trend by his personal interest in and membership of the Royal Yacht Squadron, based at Cowes. This royal interest might suggest some consolidation of Conservative support, yet voters in the smaller island towns and villages seem to have been largely Liberal. Pelling's assessment of the island's electoral demography confirms this by pointing out that although the major towns on the island were Conservative, 'in the villages, which were predominantly agricultural, non-conformity was very strong, and here the strength of Liberalism was also to be found'.⁵

The Isle of Wight
in 1906

LIBERAL PARTY FORTUNES IN THE ISLE OF WIGHT 1900 – 1910

Historically, the seat was 'marginal'. There was, much to Liberal chagrin, a sizeable proportion of outvoters (i.e. those who lived outside the island but owned a property there) – a point that would be much debated and theorised upon in 1910. Otherwise, a total registered electorate of 14,494 in 1900, as compared to a total island population that year of 83,434,⁶ was not especially unusual (at 17.4 per cent). By comparison, according to the 1901 census, Brighton, admittedly a 'Borough' seat, had a total population of 153,386, of which only 12.2 per cent were registered voters.⁷ Despite the restricted number of voters, political meetings in the Edwardian era were generally very lively affairs, and no less so on the island, with catcalling and heckling very evident. Newspapers too could play a part, and the island's main Saturday publication, the *Isle of Wight County Press*, tended to be pro-Unionist, whilst also covering selected Liberal stories that it judged to be newsworthy. As 1906 approached, the Liberals had their own newspaper, the *Isle of Wight Leader*, which somewhat redressed the political imbalance.

Fortunately, the island's Liberal endeavours (essentially the call for peace, retrenchment and reform, following national thinking) have been well documented in Walter Roberts' private publication, *A Centenary worthy of Celebration – The Fortunes of the Liberal Party in the [Isle of] Wight since 1877*.⁸ In these papers Roberts clearly pinpoints those mainstream Liberal issues that were equally of vital local interest both by 1900 and beyond. These included the free trade argument, the emerging case for old age pensions, and contesting the inbuilt Anglican bias later maintained in the 1902 Education Act. The proposed licensing bills and the 1909 budget, particularly the taxation of land values, also merited serious discussion and had appeal as debating material for the island's electorate. Liberals and radicals, furthermore, already had concerns over the Boer War, the question of Chinese indentured labour, economic failures, and government mismanagement. These early years of the twentieth century sharpened the focus for change.

The Liberal Union and Liberal Clubs on the island held

enthusiastic meetings, and emphasised the need for an efficient party structure to combat the better-organised Tories with their eleven Tory Primrose League Habitations that emerged between 1883 and 1914 (most especially in 1888). Membership numbers vary, but according to Martin Pugh's analysis, Sandown had as few as 100 or so names listed, rising to 1002 in the north of the island at West Cowes.⁹ Conversely, between 1888 and 1905, Liberal Club numbers were around 120 at Ventnor (where the Secretary was a Mr H. G. Tory!), 180 at Sandown, and 600 at Newport, with Cowes and Ryde equally attaining several hundred members.¹⁰ It should be remembered when simply comparing membership list numbers that Liberal Clubs tended to be at a disadvantage due to the 'temperance' policy on club premises and at club activities. Nevertheless, 'social' events on the island, such as Liberal garden fetes, recitations and cycling, which would attract female support, began to become increasingly popular. Wight Liberals realised, albeit slowly, that influence was a valuable political asset. Baring, the island's Liberal MP from 1906 to January 1919, was frequently a guest speaker at local functions such as the Carisbrooke Bowling Club AGM Dinner in 1907.¹¹

Island Liberal opinion had strong views on the plural voting system. After 1900, Isle of Wight Liberals claimed there were as many as 600 plural (outvoter/second home) electors, some coming to the island to vote from as far away as Leeds, Barrow, and Birmingham.¹² The new age of early motorcars and even steamboats, with the staggered election days, made this duplicate voting process possible. Despite the 1906 victory, Liberals on the island (and nationwide) wanted more than ever to end the plural voting anomaly. It was widely believed that these multiple votes had a crucial impact, particularly after the 1910 general election results were known.

During the Edwardian period, island parliamentary politics were dominated by two men: Sir Godfrey Baring (1871–1957) and John (Jack) Seely (1868–1947). Baring, who lived at Cowes in Nubia House, a substantial ivy-covered, three-storied mansion, was an old

Etonian and a member of the eponymous banking dynasty.¹³ Seely was the third son of Sir Charles Seely of Brook, Isle of Wight, and was educated at Harrow. Up to 1904, they were divided politically, yet they were to continue a lifelong friendship both on the island and on the mainland. Seely's political and private life has been thoroughly documented by his grandson, Brough Scott, in Seely's modern biography entitled *Galloper Jack* (2003), and earlier by Cath Cooper's 2001 thesis *The Political and Military Career of Major General J. E. B. Seely*. Moreover, the present Lord Mottistone's (Seely's sole surviving child) encyclopaedic knowledge of his family history has provided additional information. However, Baring's role in politics has received less attention – a matter hopefully to be rectified within this article.

Baring, already High Sheriff of Hampshire (1897) and Chairman of the Isle of Wight Council, was affectionately dubbed the 'Prime Minister of the Island' by friend and foe alike. He endeared himself to many by being a keen yachtsman, local Magistrate, National Chairman of the Lifeboat Institution, Chairman of Cowes Urban District Council and Deputy Lieutenant of the island, amongst his numerous and varied occupations and offices. He was punctilious by nature although on one occasion in the 1890s, Baring had kept Queen Victoria waiting, when she was about to cross from Cowes to East Cowes by ferry. He was summoned to Osborne the next day, when he received a reprimand for keeping Her Majesty held back for ten minutes!¹⁴

Godfrey Baring's parliamentary electoral baptism was to contest the May 1900 by-election, under Liberal colours, caused by the elevation of the sitting Unionist, Sir Richard Webster, lately appointed to the position of Master of the Rolls. His Unionist opponent was Jack Seely (his coalmine-owning family had been Liberals until the home rule split of 1886 and several had been MPs) who won the seat, achieving 54.5 per cent of the vote in a result that was the worst for Liberals since 1885, save for 1886.¹⁵ Oddly enough, this was despite Liberal claims that the party organisation on the island was 'in perfect condition'.¹⁶ Local Liberal activists

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Sir Godfrey
Baring
(1871–1957)

decided not to contest the 'khaki' general election later that year – an opportunity lost, as the Unionist opponent, Seely, remained in South Africa, embroiled in the Boer War, and his wife, Emily 'Nim' Crichton held the fort. Seely's biographer Brough Scott concludes that 'back home there was an angel working in his absence; she was called Mrs Seely'.¹⁷ Seely, a prominent Unionist free trader, later crossed the floor with Winston Churchill and fifteen other Unionist free traders in protest at Chamberlain's tariff reform proposals. He claimed that his conversion to Liberalism dated from 1903 and was inspired by the controversy over the importation of Chinese labour into South Africa as well as free trade.¹⁸ Thus, Seely, after resigning his seat as a Unionist, achieved re-election unopposed, as a free trader in April 1904. Baring agreed not to stand in his way, although significantly retained the Liberal candidacy in the next general election occurring in 1906.

Nationally, Unionist popularity began to decline in the aftermath of the Boer War, when the 'Chinese Coolie' scandal emerged and educational (and hence religious) sensibilities became sorely tested. Conversely, helping employment, the island's warship yards also began building in earnest. Nevertheless, after Joseph Chamberlain's challenge to free trade was put on the table, the tide began to turn and favour the Liberals. Balfour's December 1905 resignation and the January 1906 general election created an opportunity for the Liberals on the Isle of Wight as elsewhere. Colonel A. H. Morgan was adopted to fight the Unionist corner in place of the now departed Jack Seely who had decided to contest Liverpool Abercrombie – being closer to his family economic interests of iron smelting and coal mines.

The Liberals on the island were cock-a-hoop over Seely's defection and moved swiftly to confirm Baring as their 'big name' candidate for the next election. As has been seen, Baring's pedigree was first class.¹⁹ At local political and county administration level, he had an enviable record of service, and he had a reputation for fighting for all islanders' interests and identity. Liberal hopes were very much pinned on him to achieve parliamentary success once more. With the maintenance of tourism high on the island's list of concerns, and an undercurrent of pro-free-trade feeling plus ongoing Non-conformist unrest after the 1902 Education Act, it looked to be a very possible seat once more for the Liberals. Baring set about his task in earnest. He fully supported free trade, positively detested Chamberlain's ideas, and considered that the educational system should be free from denominational privileges. He was in favour of the taxing of land values, housing reform and supported the call for old age pensions.²⁰ The claims in the Unionist press that Baring had fallen under the spell of their hate figure, Lloyd George, looked more than a possibility, or so thought the *Ryde Observer*. With Parkhurst, a major national prison, on the island, Baring followed mainstream Liberal policy in expressing an interest in the rehabilitation of prisoners and the welfare of prison staff. Also, he favoured a system of smallholdings

and allotments in order to encourage men to go back to the land.²¹ Most importantly, he believed that every adult man and woman should be eligible for participation in the government of the country [this was not quite the same as equal votes for men and women]. Evidently, Lady Baring was keen to promote the passive cause for the female franchise.²²

As events transpired, the Isle of Wight provided a significant victory for the Liberal Party when the seat was captured by a 10.3 per cent swing from the Unionists in the general election of 1906. This was in line with Michael Kinnear's assertion, in his 1981 study of voting patterns, that the overall national Unionist percentage loss in that contest could be as high as 10–15 per cent.²³ Just over the Solent, by contrast, Portsmouth with two seats provided even greater mathematical permutations. In 1906, Labour fielded a candidate, with two Liberals, two Unionists and an Independent: six in all. Between 1900 and 1906, the number of eligible Portsmouth electors increased by 28 per cent, however the Unionist share of the vote decreased from 51.2 per cent in 1900 to 33.8 per cent in 1906. The Labour man took 17.6 per cent of the poll, resulting in victory for the two Liberals, with a 2.5 per cent increased share. Looked at in the wider regional context of south-east England, Michael Kinnear's 'straightforward comparison method' gives an average swing away from the Unionists of 7 per cent. A. K. Russell calculates a Unionist poll share of 68.2 per cent for the south-east in 1900, reducing to 48.4 per cent in 1906.²⁴ Whatever the mathematics, Baring, no doubt aided by his own personal charisma and prestige on the island, landed a very creditable electoral success for the Liberal Party.

Godfrey Baring thus proceeded to the House of Commons. As an individual, he was renowned as a 'natty dresser', although reportedly never happier than when wearing his nautical attire – a blue reefer coat and yachting cap. For his eleven o'clock matins at the Cowes Holy Trinity Church, ensconced in the family pew, he dressed considerably more smartly. He possessed a great sense of humour, and could invariably talk his way out of most



difficult situations. Most particularly, he was a master of procedures and the rules of debate and protocol, something which would clearly now be demonstrated to his parliamentary colleagues and opponents alike, in the House of Commons.²⁵ Upon his victory, Baring declared, 'After twenty years of Toryism, the Isle of Wight has returned to its old love. It was a victory for the workers, who are at last realising the power which the ballot confers upon them.'²⁶

Baring was tireless in his devotion to the Liberal cause and voted in every division in the House of Commons in the year 1906 – 636 in all – often arriving back at his London home at 195 Queens Gate by cab in the early morning, utterly exhausted. Sir Charles Baring Bt. his son, believed his passage through the House was 'unexceptional for his public statements', perhaps somewhat harsh, as his Commons speeches and questions as recorded in *Hansard* ranged between his support for social and humane issues, to a whole plethora of naval matters and concerns.²⁷

Additionally, Baring was a good 'constituency man': he was well aware of the cottage-dweller's and working man's lot, and also regularly attended seasonal island dinners, to which local professionals such as doctors, headmasters, and solicitors were invited. Traditionally both of these working and professional 'classes' were the foundations of Liberal support. This was, effectively, Baring's version

Election poster for Jack Seely for the 1900 by-election

of Herbert Samuel's point: 'raising the enthusiasm of the working class without frightening the middle classes'.²⁸ It was in this context that Baring claimed, during the 1906 election campaign, that the working man 'never got a crumb from the Tory Government table'.²⁹ The press, moreover, reported that Baring suggested that the Conservatives only looked after their own – 'capitalists, landowners, Jewish mine owners (in South Africa), and brewers'.³⁰ One disgruntled Ryde resident, clearly of Unionist persuasion wrote to the island's *County Press* in July 1906 suggesting that the 'Radical government was placed in power by the unpatriotic and the ignorant'.³¹

As one could expect, the island's press provided local insight into Baring's 1906–9 progress. During 1907, for example, Baring was much in demand throughout the island for his stance on changes to the 1902 Unionist Education Act; his Nonconformist listeners were delighted. Subsequently, in 1908, Baring's support for the Liberal government's Licensing Bill was substantial (he described it as a just, honest and fearless measure of temperance reform), his convictions so much so that he was quite prepared to 'lose votes by it, or indeed his seat'; there would be no compromise and no surrender.³² In that same year (1908), Baring's fervent enthusiasm for the Smallholding and Allotment Act was rewarded by the island's County Council receiving applications for

more than 1,000 acres of allotment land.³³

In late 1908, whilst remarking that his Unionist opponents were ever active, Baring nevertheless claimed that the 'Liberal Party in the island was never in better heart or courage than at the present time'.³⁴ Debatably so, but the Unionists were not as this might suggest, merely idly standing by. Walter Roberts, in his centenary private publication asserts that the island's Liberal Union in their well supported gatherings 'were well aware of the need for efficient [local] administration, in readiness for strong Tory counter-attacks', which certainly did come in 1910.³⁵ These counterattacks included, from early 1908, tariff reform meetings that were held throughout the island, by courtesy of Unionist van tours.³⁶ Although initially it was claimed as a non-political movement, once price increase examples were brought into play with their attendant work-related aspects, and illustrative lantern slides shown, little evidence of political neutrality remained. Indeed the resultant Unionist electoral tactic was to place foodstuff costings above all other factors at the next general election.

Nevertheless, Baring was undismayed – no doubt because his political career had been enhanced by his appointment (1908–10) as unpaid Parliamentary Private Secretary to his fellow island resident, Jack Seely, now at the Colonial Office. The two Isle of Wight men were working together now! Oddly enough, Sir Charles Baring once remarked, 'as he [Godfrey Baring] never went into the Smoking Room [of the House of Commons] the Speaker seldom called him and when Prime Minister's appointments came up, Asquith overlooked him'.³⁷ Godfrey Baring later (1911–15) went on to be the Parliamentary Private Secretary for J. A. Pease, when Pease was President of the Board of Education. All this looked good for Baring – but what of local matters?

In 1906, the previously overlooked influence of the local Party Agent came to the fore, which might have raised some doubt as regards Baring's 1908 claim about the island's Liberal Party being in good shape. At the close of 1906, the local Liberal Executive Committee

decided to dispense with the services of their vastly experienced agent, E. W. Vincent, by a 5–4 vote. Vincent did not go quietly and consequently vowed (incorrectly, as he briefly returned to help in 1908) that he would have no further dealings with the Liberal Party.³⁸ Reading between the lines of the Isle of Wight newspaper, there might well be a connection with Vincent's departure and the fact that, during 1906, Vincent lost most of the appeals heard on the island by the visiting electoral Revising Barrister.³⁹ Not that his replacement, T. V. Pretty, who came from Hastings (another marginal seat), did much better between 1907 and 1909. Additionally, a further but equally devastating blow befell the island's Liberal organisation, namely the death, reported on 1 December 1906, of Miss Martin, keen activist, and lady Treasurer of Newport's Women's Liberals.⁴⁰

Whilst there is clear evidence of Baring's Liberal credentials over the 1906–09 parliament, a drawback was, as Sir Charles Baring explains, that Sir Godfrey (his Baronetcy was granted in 1911, in recognition of his service to Liberalism with a separate non-political KBE in 1952) 'was [regrettably] not really interested in administration, which he

tended to take for granted. His great strength lay in dealing with his fellow colleagues and councillors'. Sir Charles adds, 'He was blessed with an infallible memory and with being a great judge of men'.⁴¹ Contrastingly, Seely has been described as 'an issue and not a party man ... a man of wide and cross-party fellowships'.⁴² Arguably Baring's good qualities, in the final analysis, could override all else. One might even speculate that his absolute faith in his local party members and administration was flawed simply because the consequences of the dismissal of the experienced party agent, E. W. Vincent were not viewed as seriously as this situation might have suggested.

Baring attempted to retain his seat in the January 1910 general election, only to be defeated, by 291 votes, by the new Unionist candidate, Douglas Hall, an Oxford graduate and landowner hailing from Petworth, West Sussex. Hall undoubtedly secured more votes not just on the back of generally increased unionist patriotic appeal, but by focusing on food costs, local unemployment concerns, home rule and the 'dangers of Socialism – as embodied in the 1909 Budget'. Hall's emotive campaigning themes

were to support a strong naval presence, sovereignty of the seas and to bind the Empire together.⁴³ To emphasise the point, Hall's electoral vehicle was decked out as a Dreadnought battle ship.

Baring may well have made the mistake of glossing over the islanders' German invasion fears. Such fears were particularly strong along the south coast and were inspired both by Britain's deteriorating relations with Germany (and its considerable military and naval strength), and by the novels of Erskine Childers and William Le Queux. These novels were hugely popular at the time and were woven around mass German spy operations and hidden arms caches. Island Liberals could have tried to calm these worries by more open and specific support for the Territorial Army, created by the Liberal government in 1907. However, the Unionists effectively took the lead here and played on voters' invasion fears, emphasising the difficulties in organising sufficient regular Army coast-watching as there were 'many places at which it would pay an enemy to land'.⁴⁴ Local press reports take up this theme, especially in the columns devoted to 'letters to the editor'. Indeed, that eminent Unionist, Admiral Charles

Isle of Wight elections 1895–1910

Election	Electors	Turnout (%)	Candidate	Party	Votes	%
1895 GE	13,816	80.9	Sir R. E. Webster	C	5,809	52.0
			Hon. A. Wodehouse	L	5,363	48.0
				<i>Majority</i>	446	4.0
<i>Resignation on appointment as Master of the Rolls and elevation to the peerage as Lord Alverstone causes by-election –</i>						
1900 by-election	14,494	81.4	J. E. B. Seely	C	6,432	54.5
			G. Baring	L	5,370	45.5
				<i>Majority</i>	1,062	9.0
1900 GE			J. E. B. Seely	C	Unopp.	
<i>Seeks re-election on leaving the Conservative Party and causes by-election –</i>						
1904 by-election			J. E. B. Seely	Ind. C (L)	Unopp.	
1906 GE	15,193	87.8	G. Baring	L	7,453	55.8
			A. H. Morgan	C	5,892	44.2
				<i>Majority</i>	1,561	11.6
1910 (Jan) GE	15,969	91.0	D. B. Hall	C	7,414	51.0
			G. Baring	L	7,123	49.0
				<i>Majority</i>	291	2.0
1910 (D) GE	15,969	88.7	D. B. Hall	C	7,192	50.8
			C. Scaramanga-Ralli	L	6,969	49.2
				<i>Majority</i>	223	1.6

Beresford, had set on record his belief that a foreign army could arrive in England ‘like a bolt from the blue’. Interestingly enough in the publication *The Isle of Wight at War* (a private collection of papers), there is a photograph of infantrymen defending, presumably in the way of practice, Sandown seafront on the east of the island, against a possible seaborne attack.

Baring, like other Liberals attacked the House of Lords for the loss of Liberal legislation, particularly the Education and Licensing Bills, and, locally, promised support for even more work in the dockyards, to counter some earlier lay-offs. However his campaign was somewhat lacklustre and his usual reasoned electoral analysis and inbuilt charm were found to be wanting. Furthermore, with a larger registered electoral base in 1910, the Liberals had a new set of problems in Wight, such as ongoing employment worries and the effects and counter-effects of the free trade issue. In addition, the Unionist party agent’s work in ‘elector seeking’ tended to be superior, and with increased ownership and usage of motor vehicles to transport voters to the polls, the Unionists enjoyed a clear advantage. The plural voting issue also received a good airing, a point that Liberals, often justifiably, firmly believed gave the Unionists a clear net advantage.⁴⁵

In Sussex, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, no Liberal seats remained at all after the January 1910 contests, with a much-reduced share of poll figures for all Liberal candidates. Nevertheless, the Isle of Wight Liberal vote share came down from the 1906 level by only 6.8 per cent, whereas the average Liberal vote elsewhere in this particular area of Britain dropped by more than 10 percentage points.⁴⁶

Baring was not the Liberal candidate in December 1910 election. Local press reports give an indication why Baring did not go on to contest the Isle of Wight seat that December. Although he was still on the island in June 1910, newspaper articles reveal that he subsequently left for America and the search began for a replacement.⁴⁷ The Liberals vigorously contested the Isle of Wight again but with a new candidate, Constantine Scaramanga Ralli, an author and banker of Greek origin, who lived both on

the island at Shanklin and on the mainland in London. The island Liberals narrowly lost again by 223 votes (in a slightly increased 49.2 per cent share of the poll – possibly assisted by Winston Churchill’s visit and support). The old arguments about plural voting resurfaced amidst a number of conflicting claims and counter-claims as to what might have been. Ralli’s comment on defeat was confined to his assertion that ‘600 plural votes [realistically two-thirds of this figure is more likely] came over to the island to vote against me’. Not all of these would have added to the Unionist total, but theoretically most would. Letters from readers on this subject were published in the following week’s island newspapers, with one correspondent actually calculating the ‘plural’ vote figure at 293, after deducting deceased out-voters from the total. Whichever is correct, or nearest to the truth, the situation does underline the marginal status of the seat.⁴⁸

Surprisingly, in the December 1910 contest, Baring suddenly reappeared and stood for (two-seat) Devonport, for the Liberals, to finish with 24 per cent of votes cast, whilst the two Unionist victors achieved winning totals of 26 per cent and 25.7 per cent respectively. Undeterred, Baring went on to successfully retain the prestigious Barnstaple Liberal seat in Devon, from 1911 to 1918. He left the House for good after unsuccessful attempts at the Isle of Wight (1918) and Islington East (1922).⁴⁹

Subsequently, the Conservatives attained virtual mastery on the island. The Unionists, whilst revelling in their win, acknowledged that their vote would have been greater but for Baring’s reputation and personal popularity. A local Ryde-based newspaper editorial read, ‘There is not a person in the Isle of Wight who does not respect and esteem him and would be content to see him MP for the rest of his days, but popularity is one thing principles another – Mr. Baring has chosen to enlist under the banner of Mr. Lloyd George’.

remained convinced that the much hated plural vote system was the prime reason for the island seat loss in 1910. This is most likely, but weight should also be given to Baring’s marginally weak endeavours (as distinct from his past enthusiasms) in the first 1910 election. This was despite a reputation that was envied by all shades of political opinion, together with the longer-term effects of less effective local support as a result of the local party agent fiasco.

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REPORT

Winston Churchill: Liberal or Tory?

Conference fringe meeting, 9 March 2012, with Professor Martin Pugh and Sir Alan Beith MP; chair: Baroness Maddock

Report by **Mark Pack**

ONE OF my history teachers at school used to joke that the secret to someone's reputation amongst historians is to die at the right point. He was thinking in particular of the comparison between Cavour and Bismarck, one dying triumphant and the other living on to an old age that soured their reputation.

Certainly Winston Churchill's reputation would have been very different had he died at a younger age. If he had died young, he would have been a Horatio Bottomley character – a talented, maverick figure of curiosity in the margins of history and only occasionally remembered. Died a bit later, and he would have been one of the great 'if only' people of Liberal Party history, up there with Charles Dilke as

someone who could have become party leader and led it to glory, a favourite subject of alternative histories.

Had Churchill died shortly after reintroducing the gold standard policy, he would have been remembered on a sour note as someone whose last and greatest contribution to the country was also the worst; an unconventional politician undone at the end by following the conventional wisdom. A few more years on and his death would have been that of the tragic prophet, warning against the rise of Nazism but dying before he was proved right.

As it turned out, he not only lived on for his time as a Conservative prime minister to thoroughly overshadow his years as a successful Liberal politician, but he was also

so triumphant in that role during the Second World War that his reputation survived him hanging on in active politics for too long afterwards. His unsuccessful final years in 10 Downing Street would have wrecked the memories of a lesser man; for Churchill however they are but a small epilogue to his years of greatness.

All this illustrates how any attempt to classify Winston Churchill is prone to problems, given his varied career and wide range of views, many of which still resonate today. Great nationalist friend of Euro-sceptics or pro-European Union man? Supporter of electoral reform or defender of first past the post? Many mantles are claimed for him, which is what made the choice of subject for the latest Liberal Democrat History Group meeting all the more intriguing: Winston Churchill – Liberal or Tory?

Churchill himself once said, 'I am an English Liberal. I hate the Tory Party, their men, their words and their methods.' Strong words, but rather undermined by his two periods of political service in the

REPORT

Conservative Party, before and after his time as a Liberal. Liberal Democrat peer Diana Maddock reminded the audience of this quote when introducing the meeting. She then handed over to the long-standing MP (and her husband) Alan Beith.

Beith highlighted how Churchill was most consistently a maverick. During his time as a Liberal, he was a Liberal with some Conservative views and many views of his own; during his time as a Conservative, he was a Conservative with some Liberal views and many views of his own. The real answer, therefore, to Churchill's political personality therefore lies in looking at those maverick views which he held consistently through his life, Beith argued.

He went on to say that Churchill would have found himself more at home in David Cameron's ideology-light and more inclusive version of the Conservative Party than in the Thatcher version. In his own lifetime, it was often clearer what the Conservative Party was against rather than what it was for – anti-trade unions, anti-socialism and anti-free trade.

'English liberalism has been through many wanderings and much tribulation in the last twenty years and it is today confronted by a powerful federation of vested interests. Yet it is a weapon and an instrument which in the hands of Mr Gladstone would easily smash to pieces these pantomime politics and this cheapjack imperialism with which we are inflicted and insulted today,' said Churchill at one point. 'Thank God we have the Liberal Party'.

Churchill was a Liberal, and as he was such a strong believer in individual freedom, appropriately so given how individualistic he was himself. Moreover, Churchill had a strong strain of social liberalism – freedom was not real unless you had an education, your health and the opportunity to support yourself. In this he differed from the Tory democracy of his father and Churchill was zealous in seeking to help the poor and disadvantaged during his time in office as Liberal. This continued through his later Conservative period, including seeing Beveridge's proposals as being right even if he was slow to embrace them, letting the

political initiative on them pass to Labour.

Consistent too was the nature of his social activism and its not taking a socialist form – concern for society, but based on individual support rather than socialist collectivism. 'Socialism seeks to pull down wealth. Liberalism seeks to raise up poverty,' said Churchill – a view easily adaptable to a Conservative outlook too, as was his belief that enterprise needed rescuing from vested interests and privilege: 'Liberalism attacks monopoly'.

Despite the enforced wartime collaboration with Joseph Stalin, anti-Bolshevism was another strong and consistent theme of Churchill's. This was a view comfortably at home in the Conservative Party but also, as Beith pointed out, was derived in Churchill's case from liberal principles.

So too on free trade, support for permitting the immigration of those fleeing oppression abroad, belief in a capital levy on property and support for home rule in Ireland (along with devolution on the mainland). On all these Churchill had views that were liberal, even if also held whilst being a Conservative.

Alan Beith did not, however, go so far as to claim Churchill's support for a united Europe as evidence of a liberal internationalism. Churchill's views on foreign affairs were too rooted in nostalgia for empire and a desire for unity amongst English-speaking peoples to count as liberal.

As Beith expanded on in answer to a question, for all Churchill's flowery language of European cooperation at times, he was very keen on links with the US and never really bought into anything that would reduce British sovereignty. (Although Beith did not mention it, even Churchill's offer of an indivisible union with France fits this pattern. It was made during the depths of the Second World War and was a desperate attempt to stave off French surrender in the war. It was an attempt to save Britain and its sovereignty by keeping an opponent of Germany in the war.)

Even conceding that, it is a long list of Liberal Party principles that Churchill subscribed too. Beith added of course that there are issues on the other side of the balance sheet – non-liberal ideas

that Churchill subscribed to. His 'crazily stubborn romantic imperialism over India' came top of that list, especially considering his opposition to democracy for Indian people or the right of self-determination for them. Beith then went on to talk about Churchill's lack of restraint when it came to using force, both at home and in war, such as in the Siege of Sydney Street and the tragedy of the Dardanelles. He was an enthusiast for physical force rather than a reluctant user of it. (Although not explored further in the meeting, this was Beith's weakest point, as the willingness of others such as Paddy Ashdown to support the use of force for liberal international aims makes this not a particularly non-liberal attitude.)

The shortness of this second list led Beith to conclude that at heart Churchill was a Liberal, helped perhaps by the life-long Liberal allegiance of his beloved Clementine. Beith also pointed out that even after becoming Conservative prime minister, Churchill retained affection for the Liberal Party. After 1945, for example, he offered the Liberal Party deals rather than trying to wipe it out, remaining a personal friend of many key figures and indeed staying close friends with Lloyd George all his life. 'Churchill could never quite get Liberalism out of his system ... When his [ministerial achievements] were good, they were Liberal', concluded Beith.

Following on from him, Martin Pugh agreed with much of what Beith had said, arguing that Liberals had been far too hesitant to claim the mantle of Churchill. Pugh highlighted how uncertain many Conservatives are about him, reminding the audience that Churchill's 1951–5 government, his only peacetime one, was all about upholding the post-war consensus. It is a government skipped when Conservatives look to their past, and helps explain why they do not talk about 'Churchillian Conservatism'. Its legacy is not one they are comfortable with.

Pugh mentioned the importance of ambition to Churchill. In both of the instances that he chose to switch parties, it was a good time to leave that party behind. However, there was some consistency, such as in his views on free trade. He may have used them as a justification

Churchill himself once said, 'I am an English Liberal. I hate the Tory Party, their men, their words and their methods.'

for leaving the Conservatives for the Liberals at an opportune time, but he stuck to his free trade views subsequently.

Martin Pugh also talked of Churchill's instrumental role in Edwardian state-financed social reform, at least once Churchill discovered an enthusiasm for it. 'He is full of the poor, who he has just discovered,' was how Charles Masterman put it at the time.

He also discovered Germany, urging Britain to learn from its social policies, including expansive state industries. As Pugh pointed out, this enthusiasm for Bismarckianism is not something usually linked to Liberalism, but instead it is more obviously linked to some strands of Conservatism, which saw the state as a positive engine for improving the life of people. 'He was not in any way embarrassed about using the power of the state', said Pugh, but it was using the state for Liberal or Conservative ends and most certainly not to pave the way for socialism.

Turning to Churchill as Home Secretary, Pugh talked of his dislike of jail sentences for petty offences. In particular, he took up the case of a boy of twelve who was jailed for seven years for taking a piece of fish. Churchill got the sentence dismissed. When nominally charged with implementing the Aliens Act of 1905, Churchill largely declined, failing to enforce the provisions that were designed to keep Jews out. Instead, he criticised the police when he felt they were harassing refugees and was outspoken in upholding the place of Britain as the home for economic and political refugees, seeing it as something from which the country greatly benefited as well as being the correct humanitarian course. As a result, Pugh rated Churchill as second only to Roy Jenkins when judging twentieth-century Home Secretaries by their liberal nature.

Although Pugh estimated that Churchill would have been as happy to serve under Asquith as under Lloyd George, it was Asquith who demoted Churchill and later Lloyd George who invited him back into government, making Churchill a de facto supporter of the latter rather than the former. This had the significance of making Churchill a coupon Liberal, willing

Pugh highlighted how uncertain many Conservatives are about him, reminding the audience that Churchill's 1951–5 government, his only peacetime one, was all about upholding the post-war consensus. It is a government skipped when Conservatives look to their past, and helps explain why they do not talk about 'Churchillian Conservatism'.

to serve in coalition with the Conservatives and attracted by the idea of 'fusion' bringing together elements of Liberals, Conservatives and Labour. In the absence of fusion taking place, and irritated by Asquith's willingness to see the first Labour government take office, Churchill drifted further away from the Liberals.

When he joined the Conservatives, he initially took the label 'Constitutionalist' showing, Pugh said, how it was a very individualist move and not one motivated by a simple attraction to Conservatism. Moreover, as Pugh went on to say in the question and answer session at the end, Churchill had a love of new ideas, looking for fresh solutions to problems – which made him always look for a change of course in response to events and saw him taken by one enthusiasm after another. The speed with which he shifted around in these searches often annoyed more conventional, less flexible politicians. It did though provide a certain logic to his wanderings around the political spectrum.

'Every one of us is an individualist for some things. Every one of us is a collectivist for others,' Pugh quoted Churchill saying. He was

not a simple right-winger. Indeed, Pugh added, this made Churchill's move more attractive to Conservative leader Baldwin as it meant Churchill's recruitment fitted with Baldwin's desire to move to the political centre ground.

Churchill's return to the Conservatives was somewhat restrained. In 1940 a free vote of Conservative MPs would almost certainly have seen Halifax, not him, become prime minister and when he did become premier, he did not immediately become leader of the party. Even when he did, he neglected the Conservative Party machine during the war years, and, as Beith also said, after 1945 Churchill showed a generosity towards the Liberal Party, offering a small share of power to Clement Davies.

Churchill did not leave behind a coherent body of thought or a body of followers which, as Pugh concluded, leaves the space for Liberal Democrats to make the most of Churchill's liberalism.

You can watch the fringe meeting at <http://bit.ly/ChurchillFringe>

Mark Pack is a member of the History Group's committee.

REVIEWS

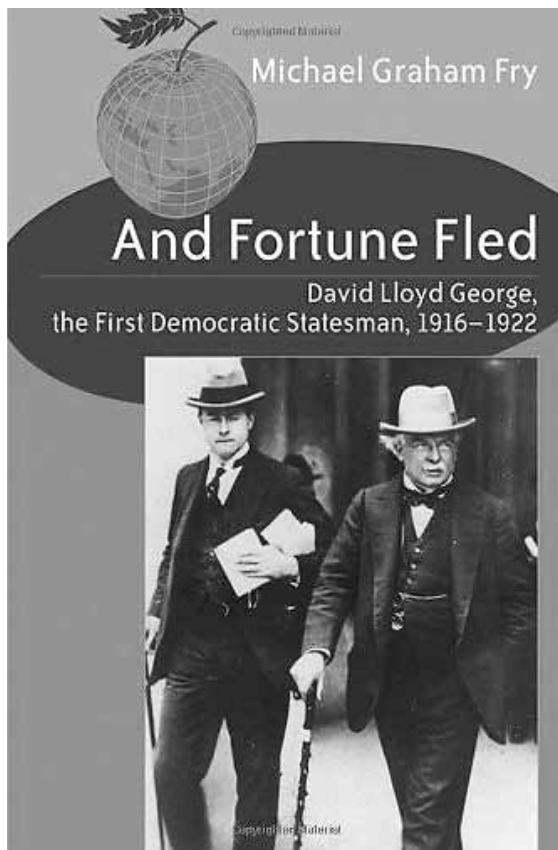
Lloyd George, diplomacy and international affairs

Michael Graham Fry, *And Fortune Fled: David Lloyd George, the First Democratic Statesman, 1916–1922* (Peter Lang, 2011)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

THE AUTHOR of this truly massive tome, positively crammed with information and references, is Professor Emeritus of International Relations at the University of Southern California. He is also a doctoral graduate of the University of London. This groundbreaking study, which has

taken the author more than thirty years to complete, is a sequel to his previous, well-received work *Lloyd George and Foreign Policy: the Education of a Statesman, 1890–1916* (McGill, 1977), widely regarded as a seminal work which traced Lloyd George's attitudes towards foreign policy from his first election to



parliament until the point at which he first became prime minister on 7 December 1916. The present study continues the theme throughout Lloyd George's premiership until the final fall of the post-war coalition government in October 1922, and it thus covers a relatively brief time span of rather less than six years.

The underlying research is certainly mind-bogglingly complete, indeed wholly exhaustive. As the author tells us, Lloyd George's two premierships have 'left behind lava flows of archival material, private and official, manuscript and published' (p. x). Indeed, the very clear, well-divided bibliography (pp. 849–63) reveals the extent of the disparate sources fully quarried over the years. They include the personal papers of an array of politicians, many within the United Kingdom, some much further afield. Professor Fry has travelled far and wide in his quest for all kinds of relevant source materials. It can truly be said that the author has left no stone unturned in his hunt for source materials and information.

The author makes especially effective use of the diaries of Lloyd George's associates who kept a detailed account at this crucial

time, among them Fisher, Hankey, Thomas Jones and Riddell. Their well-informed words largely compensated for Lloyd George's own failure to keep a diary and his reluctance to write letters. The diaries of Frances Stevenson, with their more personal dimension, have been well thumbed too. It was she who apparently coined the well-worn description of Lloyd George as 'Dictator of Europe' (the title of chapter 8 in this volume). The Lloyd George Papers at the Parliamentary Archive, which include many important official and Cabinet documents cheekily squirreled away by Lloyd George, have been heavily and effectively quarried too.

The present reviewer was gratified to see some use made of the archives of Welsh Liberal politicians in the custody of the National Library of Wales, among them Beriah Gwynfe Evans, Ellis Jones Ellis-Griffith, E. T. John and Sir J. Herbert Lewis. All were closely associated with Lloyd George. The copious footnote references, which themselves occupy pages 674–847, are crammed packed with lists of sources and references, eloquent testimony to the extent of Professor Fry's reading and research. They also include extra snippets of useful information and sometimes parallel arguments.

It is difficult to do justice to the richness of the work in a short review. To the author, the First World War of 1914–18 was 'the defining event of the twentieth century' and the Paris Peace Conference which ensued in 1919 was 'the most important such conference' (back cover). Throughout the period under consideration, Lloyd George was in a wholly pivotal position, dominating the diplomacy of the second half of the war years and subsequent international affairs to 1922. This study examines the nature of the changes instituted by the new prime minister after his succession, notably the nature of the famous 'Garden Suburb' established at 10 Downing Street in 1916–17, and the far-reaching changes instituted in British diplomacy. Throughout his wartime premiership Lloyd George was determined to avoid a premature peace settlement with Germany – a fight to the finish was, in his view, essential, an attitude potently reminiscent of Churchill's standpoint

between 1940 and 1945. Consequently, his main diplomatic policy was to attempt to detach Germany's three allies – Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria.

There is a most detailed examination of the conduct of the Paris Peace Conference, and much space is devoted to a lengthy analysis of the diplomatic relationship between Great Britain and the USA. The author suggests that the 'coupon' general election of December 1918 may have been an unnecessary and premature distraction, undermining the crucial preparations for the Paris Peace Conference. Lloyd George had apparently called for such an election even before the end of hostilities. Subsequent chapters present a searching dissection of the Cannes Conference and the Genoa Conference, the latter possibly the overture to a further general election for which the prime minister was at the time yearning. The focus is also placed on 'the chaos in the Near East' (p. 521) and its threat to stability and peace. The final full chapter examines the complexities of the infamous Chanak crisis which led in part to the collapse of the post-war coalition government. Many believed that the beleaguered premier was exploiting national security simply for the sake of political and personal advantage. A short concluding section follows which effectively pulls together the key themes and conclusions of the preceding chapters.

Throughout it is clear that Professor Fry is a fervent Lloyd George devotee. In the preface to his study, he describes his hero when he first became prime minister on 7 December 1916 as 'on trial, expendable, not preordained to survive'. In his view, although Lloyd George's government had been brought down by a Conservative grass-roots rebellion on 19 October 1922, Lloyd George had become by the time of his fall 'the nation's pre-eminent and most controversial politician. Unmatched in experience and accomplishment, he was Europe's elder statesman and most prominent public figure' (p. ix). In his concluding section, he refers to Lloyd George as a 'reluctant warrior in 1914 but unflinching after that, absolutely correct to uphold the principle of civilian control whatever the cost to civil-military relations, was the

prototypical democratic leader. He was, like Churchill in the Second World War, unwilling to settle for peace without victory, a dangerous, premature and unworthy outcome' (p. 643). Equally apparent is the author's distaste for Lord Curzon whose uneasy relationship with Lloyd George is always pointed up in the text. Much attention is also paid to the unfailingly fractious relationship between LG and the French premier Georges Clemenceau. It is also Fry's view that diplomatic historians in the past have emphasised unduly the tense negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference and the ensuing Treaty of Versailles – to the neglect of other themes.

The book is not an easy read; it pre-supposes a detailed background knowledge and the writer pens his work in a ponderous style, with an abundance of subordinate clauses. But it will certainly repay detailed

study. It may best be used alongside John Grigg's seminal *Lloyd George: War Leader* (Allen Lane, 2002), and Kenneth O. Morgan's equally authoritative *Consensus and Disunity: the Lloyd George Coalition Government, 1918–22* (Clarendon Press, 1979), which suggests that foreign policy issues rather than domestic unrest were responsible for bringing down the coalition government. The book is certainly the last word on this vital theme. One wonders whether Professor Fry may now be tempted to pen a further volume on Lloyd George's attitude towards diplomacy and foreign affairs after his fall from power in October 1922 until his death in March 1945. It would constitute an equally engrossing read.

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

philosophical milieu. Therefore, chapters on 'Money', 'Labour' and 'Gold' sit alongside ones on 'Ethics', 'Knowledge', 'Politics', 'War and peace' and 'Art'. There are also two 'interludes' – one on Keynes's membership of the Bloomsbury group and of the Apostles (an elite Cambridge student society), the other on the political history of Great Britain during his lifetime.

The book – by Gilles Dostaler, a distinguished economist who sadly died recently – serves as a useful, highly readable and thoroughly researched introduction to Keynes. For those already familiar with Keynes's life there will not be any dramatic surprises, but the thematic arrangement makes for a consistently thought-provoking treatment. Dostaler makes a strong case for the relevance of Keynes's broader worldview to his economics. Whereas some might be tempted to dismiss Keynes's patronage of theatre and painting and his key role in the creation of the Arts Council as mere extracurricular activities, this does not do justice to their importance:

Keynes's vision is fundamentally anti-utilitarian, anti-materialist and anti-economicist. Man has been sent briefly to earth to enjoy beauty, knowledge, friendship and

Keynes' world-view

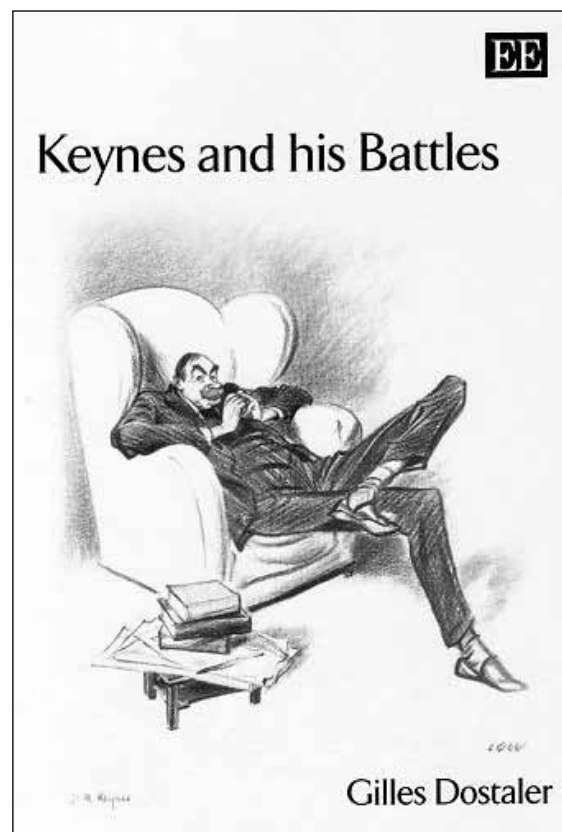
Gilles Dostaler, *Keynes and His Battles* (Edward Elgar, 2007)

Reviewed by **Richard Toye**

JOHAN MAYNARD Keynes (1883–1946) was arguably the most influential figure in twentieth-century British Liberalism, politically as well as intellectually. This might seem like an odd claim to make. After all, he was not an active politician in the conventional sense (although he did become a member of the House of Lords towards the end of his life). Moreover, during the interwar years he seemed doomed to make warnings – about the Versailles Treaty, the return to the Gold Standard, and the causes of unemployment – that were ignored by policymakers. He himself described a 1931 volume of his own essays as 'the croakings of a Cassandra who could never influence the course of events in time' (p. 3). However, during the Second World War, he held a position in the Treasury that helped him shape post-war policy both domestically and internationally. And although he is generally considered to have 'gone out of fashion' as a result of the New Right backlash of the 1970s and 1980s, he never did

so to the point that he dropped out of the discussion. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown felt compelled to at least pay lip service to him in the 1990s, and the recent financial crisis has led to a new surge of interest. Whereas discussions of Asquith, Lloyd George or even Beveridge today have a generally rather academic flavour, to invoke the name of Keynes is to walk into current controversy.

Yet 'Keynesian economics' is too often treated as an abstraction, or caricature, far removed from the views that were actually held by 'the historical Keynes' (to use Peter Clarke's term). Scholars have been trying to right the balance for many years. The book under review – which is a revised and expanded version of a volume first published in French – provides a fresh and interesting approach to the man and his thinking. It is not a conventional biography; nor is it (for the most part) a treatise on economics. Rather, it is an attempt to illustrate Keynes's world-view by locating him within his social and



love. Keynes dismissed both liberal and Marxist economists for having overvalued the economic factor in social life. He dreamed of a world to come in which the economy would play a secondary role. (p. 259.)

Economic growth, therefore, was a means to an end, not an end in itself. Keynes would thus have appreciated Douglas Adams's ironic observation that most of the proposed solutions to unhappiness on earth 'were largely concerned with the movements of small green pieces of paper, which is odd because on the whole it wasn't the

small green pieces of paper that were unhappy.' Keynes knew that money doesn't make people happy, but, as this book also reminds us, his awareness of its capacity to make them miserable – through the lack of it – was an important driving force behind his humane version of political economy.

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).

Labour and the Liberal decline

John Shepherd and Keith Laybourn, *Britain's First Labour Government* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Reviewed by **Michael Meadowcroft**

THE 1924 Labour government played a highly significant role in the decline of the Liberal Party, and a new history of its brief life is certainly to be welcomed. John Shepherd and Keith Laybourn's *Britain's First Labour Government* is the first such work for over fifty years¹ and benefits from the availability of much new material. The fact that both authors are Labour historians has not affected their impartiality and this volume provides an excellent account of a short but important period in British political history.

It has a few minor but irritating typos, an occasional error – it was, for instance, Robert Smillie who chaired the Leeds Peace Convention of 3 June 1917,² not Philip Snowden – and a surprising omission from the bibliography: Vivian Phillipps' memoirs³ which, given that he was the Liberal chief whip throughout the 1924 parliament, are important.

The basic facts are well known and are well documented here. The December 1923 general election, produced a hung parliament: Conservative 258 seats, Labour 191 and Liberal 159. Stanley Baldwin, as the new prime minister, had called an early general election and got clobbered, losing almost 100 seats. Labour had gained forty-nine and the united Liberals had gained

forty-three seats over and above their divided strength in the previous parliament.

Asquith recognised that it fell to the Liberals to determine the nature of the government. As a mirror image of the 2010 situation, it was not politically feasible to put the Conservatives back in office, having lost the election, particularly as the party had gone into the election espousing protection, an anathema to the free trade Liberals. Typically, there was no immediate forthright initiative from Asquith and, in fact, when he first met with his new parliamentary party on 18 December it was a full twelve days after polling day. He stated categorically that there had been no approaches to him by the other parties and that he had made no approaches to them. Rather different to the 'Five Days in May' last year!

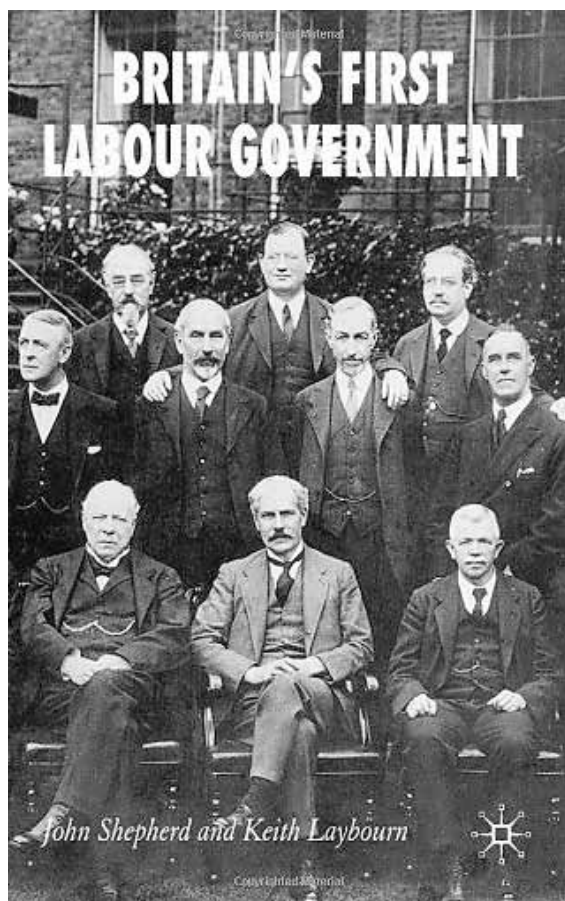
At this meeting Asquith claimed that it would be the Liberals who would 'control' affairs in the new parliament and, without any mention of the possibility of the Liberal Party forming a government, even though the subject had come up and been rejected at an earlier meeting of his close allies, he made his famous comment that 'if a Labour government [were] ever to be tried ... it would hardly be ... under safer conditions.' These two comments typified Asquith's patrician

attitude which, much more than his political decisions, would alienate the Labour Party, with fatal consequences. He was not the only leading Liberal who patronised Labour MPs in parliament and it is interesting to note Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald's comments in his diary that he found the Conservative leaders more sympathetic than the Liberals.

The book brings out the active role King George V played in the formation of the new government and, later, in its dissolution. It was the king who advised Baldwin to remain in office and to seek a vote on his King's Speech. Then, following the Commons defeat of Baldwin, the king invited Macdonald, as leader of the next largest party to form a government. This he succeeded in doing, though not without numerous vicissitudes en route, and, rather than seek any formal arrangement with the Liberals, proceeded deliberately to stick largely to a moderate programme which it would be difficult for Liberal MPs to oppose.⁴ He also accepted that the government would be defeated on minor issues which would not provoke the government's resignation. There were, in fact, eleven government defeats before the final issues designated by Ramsay Macdonald as votes of confidence.

The final collapse of the government, after only nine months and a mere 129 sitting days, was brilliantly contrived by Baldwin. The debate was on the initial prosecution and subsequent withdrawal of the summons of a Communist journalist for sedition for calling on the armed forces to refuse to fight against the working-class comrades. It was botched by the government and the Conservatives put down a motion of censure. The Liberals, anxious to avoid an election for which they had neither enough candidates nor cash, tabled an amendment calling for a Royal Commission to look into the whole issue. Macdonald, believing that his honour was being impugned, made the fatal error of stating that the government would resign were either the Conservative motion or the Liberal amendment to be carried. Baldwin, hearing this, spotted the opportunity to bring down the government, and announced that his party would support the

Politically they could not put forward a formal arrangement but speech after Liberal speech expresses frustration at the government's casual reliance on the Liberals maintaining fifty or so MPs in the House to ensure the passage of procedural motions and other very basic parliamentary processes, without any quid pro quo.



Liberal amendment. The Liberals could hardly not support their own amendment, and were therefore forced to troop through the lobbies towards their own electoral destruction. It would take forty years before the Liberals again secured more than fifty MPs.

Given that Shepherd and Laybourn provide a balanced general account, a Liberal perspective of this period needs to go beyond the strict confines of a book review. There was, for instance, Baldwin's prophetic statement in the opening debate which despatched his party from office: 'The future lies between honourable members opposite and ourselves.' Also, as the authors state, when considering why Macdonald did not want a Lib-Lab deal, [he] had a different project in mind – the destruction of the Liberal Party.³ Clearly, Baldwin had the same project in mind.

Whether Macdonald was playing a double game or was simply socially convivial is difficult to determine but it is curious that early on he fostered relations with Liberals. He was a member of the National Liberal Club for a time from 1890, and was a founder member, and the first secretary, of the

Lib-Lab discussion group, the Rainbow Circle which he even addressed after he had become prime minister.⁶

Though the authors bring out the naivety of Asquith faced with the low cunning of Macdonald and Baldwin, there is much more to add. The history of Labour in parliament in the early days was of MPs who were not seen by Liberals as extreme but rather as just rather more 'advanced' than mainstream Liberals and, therefore, were allies not opponents. Concomitant with this was considerable flexibility between the two parties: five members of Macdonald's government were former Liberal MPs and eleven Liberal MPs in the 1924 parliament later joined the Labour Party.

Such working men MPs as the Liberals had were rather tokenistic and the general attitude towards Labour was paternalistic, which was deeply resented by Labour MPs who were understandably proud of forming a government and were determined to prove they were capable of being in office. Certainly there were Liberal MPs, such as John Kenworthy, Ernest Simon and William Wedgwood Benn – all of whom eventually joined the Labour Party – who went out of their way to work with Labour and to sustain the government, but they were not the mainstream. Other Liberal MPs more accustomed to academe, including, alas, Ramsay Muir, had difficulty in coming to terms with the rough and tumble of the Commons chamber.

It is clear that throughout the nine months' life of the government, the Liberals wanted to work with Labour. Politically they could not put forward a formal arrangement but speech after Liberal speech expresses frustration at the government's casual reliance on the Liberals maintaining fifty or so MPs in the House to ensure the passage of procedural motions and other very basic parliamentary processes, without any quid pro quo. There was a growing awareness, shown by the evidence of Labour candidates being adopted in Liberal-held constituencies, in contrast with Liberal candidates being withdrawn – such as in the Burnley by-election, which enabled Arthur Henderson to have an easy return to parliament – that Labour's main

purpose was to destroy the Liberal Party.

One person who spent a great deal of time trying ensure the success of the Labour government was C. P. Scott, the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*. Scott had access to the leadership of both parties and his diaries reek of frustration.⁷ What is clear to me, as a natural whip, is the failure of the two chief whips and of the whip system itself. Scott acknowledges the poor quality of both men but did not address the crucial issue of replacing them. In a hung parliament the whips are vital in enabling survival and for doing the necessary deals. For Liberals, Vivian Phillipps presents himself well in his own memoirs but was, from all accounts, aloof and part of the Asquith style. For Labour, Ben Spoor was an accelerating disaster. He was a rather middle-class MP from Durham who started out as a Methodist lay preacher but ended up dying aged fifty in 1928 whilst still an MP, from chronic alcoholism. Before his death, in a London hotel room, he had been certified insane. From all indications he was ill through much of the 1924 parliament. It was not a good prescription for making a hung parliament work.

Shepherd and Laybourn bring out the continued tensions between Asquith and Lloyd George. Ostensibly they had buried their previous differences and were committed to presenting a united leadership from mid-1923. This had produced the good performance at the general election, but the problems continued to simmer below the surface and, occasionally, came to the fore as is chronicled in the book. With his recent record of coalition with the Conservatives, Lloyd George was not trusted by Labour and was a malign influence on relations between the parties.

The authors rather skate past a further important point for Liberals. When Macdonald went to Buckingham Palace to ask the king for a dissolution it was immediately granted, without any suggestion of calling on Asquith to attempt to form a government as might have been expected. The book states, 'there was no other course of action [for the king] as he already knew that neither Baldwin nor Asquith would take office or form a coalition government.' This suggests

OWNERSHIP FOR ALL

THE LIBERAL PARTY, CO-OWNERSHIP AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

In 1928 the Liberal Party published the 'Yellow Book', *Britain's Industrial Future*. While the report is best known for the compelling case it made for state intervention in the economy, planning and programmes of public works, it also contained detailed proposals for profit-sharing and co-partnership.

Unlike socialists, Liberals did not seek the abolition of private ownership. Unlike Conservatives, Liberals were not ideologically hostile to public control of natural monopolies or the great national industries. Liberals favoured diffused popular ownership in industry, everyone having some stake in their industrial future, and looked to profit-sharing, collaboration and co-ownership as a means to that end.

This meeting will revisit the Liberal Party's commitment to co-ownership, with **Dr Tudor Jones**, author of the recently published *The Revival of British Liberalism*, and **Professor Andrew Gamble**, Head of Politics & International Studies at Cambridge and author of the chapter on 'Liberals and the Economy' in Vernon Bogdanor's book *Liberal Party Politics*. Chair: **Chris Nicholson**, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Ed Davey MP.

7.00pm, Monday 9 July 2012

Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

that Asquith – and Baldwin – had intimated this, which would be surprising, but other authorities put the onus on to the king who stated that 'no other Party could form a government that could last.'⁸

Thus the Liberals moved reluctantly but inexorably towards an election which was bound to be disastrous. Lloyd George, who still maintained sole control of his large fund, much of which had come from the sale of honours, showed his malignity by refusing to provide the cash to enable the party to field a broad front of candidates. The party had 111 fewer candidates than at the previous

election and elected only forty-two MPs.

Ernest Simon, MP for Manchester Withington, summed up the party's situation on the eve of the 1924 election: 'What a party! No leaders, no organisation, no policy! Only a summer school! But it is still worth the effort.'⁹ He joined the Labour Party in 1946.

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP, Leeds West, 1983–87.

1 Since Richard W. Lyman, *The First Labour Government 1924* (Chapman & Hall, 1957).

2 See Ken Coates (ed.), *British Labour and the Russian Revolution:*

The Leeds Convention – a report from the Daily Herald (Spokesman Books, 1974).

3 Vivian Philipps, *My Days and Ways* (privately printed, 1946). It is a difficult book to find – it took me around thirty years!

4 Ironically, given Macdonald's determination to pursue as consensual an approach as possible, the most successful minister turned out to be John Wheatley, one of the 'Red Clydesiders', whose Housing Act was the main legacy of the first Labour administration.

5 Arguably Macdonald also had this specific aim in mind when he concluded the Macdonald/Gladstone pact of 1903 under

which each party withdrew candidates in around fifty seats and which gave Labour a bloc of thirty MPs independent of the Liberal whip. In retrospect Herbert Gladstone was alarmingly naive at the time.

6 See Michael Freedon (ed.), *Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 1894–1924* (Royal Historical Society, 1989).

7 Trevor Wilson (ed.), *The Political diaries of C. P. Scott 1911–1928* (Collins, 1970).

8 David Marquand, *Ramsay Macdonald* (Jonathan Cape, 1977).

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