Gaut’s paper on Peel’s inheritance shows that Gladstone was not the automatic inheritor of Peel’s mantle that is implied in the title of the first volume of Richard Shannon’s two-part biography. Gladstone was a great advocate of austerity — the ‘retrenchment’ in the Liberal slogan ‘peace, retrenchment and reform’ (another topic of great current relevance). But that did not make him the unthinking proponent of small government; under Gladstone, government began the gradual accretion of responsibilities such as education and entrepreneurial local government. Two essays here use the complexity of his ideas about retrenchment to explore his relationship with Ireland before he became Liberal leader, and the ambiguities of his attitudes to slavery in the context of a debate on the use of the navy in the suppression of the African slave trade.

Gladstone’s participation in theological controversy, the fervour which he generated among the working class and his skirting of personal controversy in his charitable work, would probably damn him in today’s tabloid press. But in his own time no one was better at the management of his image. This book contains essays on his nuanced relations with organised labour, how cartoonists saw him and on the survival of campaign paraphernalia idolising him, from the 1884 electoral reform agitation which assisted in the longer-term Liberal narrative of coherent progressive politics and built on the enthusiasm of popular support. Where is the equivalent support and material for reform of the House of Lords?

Two of the essays in the Personal section would not have been possible without the Gladstone Diaries, and demonstrate just how useful their preservation has been. Peter Sewter has written on Gladstone’s tree-felling, making clear just how vigorous the GOM was, and how this was a positive conservationist activity rather than destructive. Jenny West’s exploration of Gladstone’s health adds considerably to Roy Jenkins’ focus on the stress-related and psychosomatic illnesses of a long career, but she also draws attention to the difficulties of diagnosis at this distance in time and with Victorian medical knowledge only just moving from the comfort of custom into the practically scientific. The remaining paper in the Personal sections tracks two of Gladstone’s friendships to their close, illustrating the price paid by politicians for their public career.

In the final essay, Eugenio Biagini reviews on a 1992 Economist front cover describing Gladstone as ‘a prophet of the left’. Biagini reviews the ways in which Gladstone has continued to exert an influence beyond the grave. For example, in the last few years, Gladstone’s legacy has been appropriated by Thatcherites who over-simplify the Victorian Liberal view of the roles of government and private enterprise. Tony Blair cited Gladstone in his enticements to Paddy Ashdown over ‘the Project’, and to justify overseas intervention. This poses the question as to why, despite Ashdown’s best efforts, the party that descends from Gladstone makes the least effort to safeguard his legacy of humanitarian Liberalism.

It is hard to do justice to such a disparate collection in a limited space, but these fourteen essays prove that there is much still to be discovered about Gladstone and much that is pertinent to current debates, particularly those concerned with international affairs.

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group

Lifelong campaigner

Bill Cash, John Bright: Statesman, Orator, Agitator
(L. B. Tauris, 2011)
Reviewed by Anthony Howe

When politicians turn to political biography (Powell on Chamberlain, Hurd on Peel, Jenkins on Gladstone) they often tell us more about themselves than they shed new light on their subjects. Bill Cash on John Bright is no exception, for we soon learn that Bright was his great-grandfather’s cousin, both belonging to that generation of Quaker businessmen who contributed so much to the wealth and public spirit of provincial Victorian England.

Although Cash in fact tells us little about Bright the businessman (Rochdale cottonmaster and carpet manufacturer) he stands out as one of those successful entrepreneurial Quaker radicals whose sense of justice to his own order pushed him into the 1840s campaign against the Corn Laws (for which in this account read the Common Agricultural Policy) and to a lifelong crusade devoted to upholding ‘justice and freedom’, a message in which Cash finds a fitting template for the twenty-first-century politician. Several elements in Bright’s subsequent crusades earn Cash’s approval — not only his lucid ‘case for global trade’ but his opposition to any form of proportional representation, balanced by his powerful advocacy of democracy, not least at the time of the Second Reform Act, which proved ironically counter-productive, allowing instead Disraeli to promote the Tories as the party of democracy. Bright’s opposition to home rule for Ireland, which separated him politically if not personally from his long-standing friendship with Gladstone, is interpreted as a defence of British parliamentary sovereignty, comparable to that of some recent Conservatives with regard to the European Union.

More convincingly Cash, the stalwart backbencher suffering at the stifling hands of party managers, is keen to recognise Bright, never happy in his short periods in office, as a keen defender of the independent MP, willing to assert the rights of the Commons against over-mighty Cabinet government. Cash also highlights Bright’s ambiguous approach to empire, especially India, willing on the one hand to foster its development, over ‘the Project’, and to justify overseas intervention. This poses the question as to why, despite Ashdown’s best efforts, the party that descends from Gladstone makes the least effort to safeguard his legacy of humanitarian Liberalism.

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with Bright’s imperial scepticism, akin of course to that of Eurosccep-
tics in the face of ‘Federal Europe’.

Against the imperial turn, Cash hails Bright as foreseeing a quasi-
Anglo-Atlantic free trade area, while he was one of the foremost
defenders of the (protectionist) American Union at the time of the
Civil War, although his own sup-
posed republican values diminished
guished foreign policy of his great
political friend from the anti-Corn
Law campaign, Richard Cobden. Both Cobden and Bright are little
remembered today, although they
were for a century or more yoked
together as the leading pillars of
early Victorian Liberalism.

Cash’s book, timed for the
bicentenary of Bright’s birth in
1811, will hopefully revive Bright’s
memory, although it will do little
to advance historical scholarship,
for it relies heavily on the work of
others, is not abreast of the recent
literature, and is marred by errors
of fact and questionable judge-
ments. Indeed at times it fails to do
its hero as much justice as it might — for example, it was not the Irish
Question but Bright’s exploitation
of the Orsini incident which led to
Palmerston’s fall from office in 1858.
But one is left to wonder whether historians who turn to political life
do so any more successfully than
politicians who turn to history.

Anthony Howe is Professor of Mod-
er History at the University of East
Anglia. Among his books is Free Trade
and Liberal England, 1846–1946

Cartoons galore

Alan Mumford: Drawn at the Hustings: General elections
1722–1935 in caricature and cartoon (Burke’s Peerage and
Gentry, 2011)

Reviewed by Dr Roy Douglas

C artoons have long been
used to fill otherwise blank
pages in books, or to pro-
vide light relief, and many history
teachers have found that they make
past events and personalities more
vivid to their students. But there
is today a growing recognition
by historians that cartoons are an
important historical source in their
own right, for they cast important
light on ideas and public assump-
tions in the past.

Alan Mumford, the author of
this book, has already made a sub-
stantial contribution to this devel-
opment by his cartoon histories of
the Labour and Conservative par-
ties which were published by the
Political Cartoon Society. His new
venture highlights events and per-
sonalities associated with general
elections over a period of rather
more than 200 years. Inevitably, the
exploits of Liberals feature largely
in the story. The origin of the word
‘hustings’, used in the title, is duti-
fully explained.

Some of the cartoon material is
familiar. This includes Hogarth’s
satirical painting of an eighteenth-
century election entertainment;
Gillray’s representation of Pitt as ‘a
toaststool upon a dunghill’; Tenn-
iel’s characterisation of Gladstone at

the height of his powers as ‘Pegasus
unharnessed’ and Spy’s carica-
ture of Asquith. Yet a great deal of
the material in this book will be
unfamiliar to most readers, who
will find much to inform as well as
much to entertain.

Readers will be interested in a
drawing by C. J. Grant, which was
produced in 1831, at the height of
the ‘Reform’ debate. It includes
what is perhaps the earliest use of
the word ‘Liberal’ as a political des-
ignation in a cartoon. Strikingly,
the opinions of a ‘Liberal’ are con-
trasted not only with those of a
‘Tory’ but also with those of both a
‘Whig’ and a ‘Radical’.

The drawings range from the
lightly satirical to the grim. Just
one of the many subjects treated
will illustrate that point. W. K.
Haselden, in the Daily Mirror
of 1909, features a suffragette who
protests that she has smashed win-
dows, smacked a police inspec-
tor’s face and knocked his cap off;
furthermore, that she has tried to
pull a policeman off his horse and
has used the whip. ‘And yet,’ she
complains, ‘they won’t give me
the vote!’ By contrast, Will Dyson
in the Daily Herald of 1914 takes
a darker view of the suffragette
question. He reflects on the fate of