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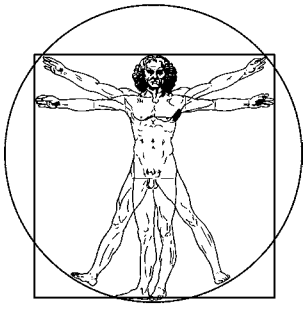
Journal of Liberal HISTORY

Remembering Jo Grimond



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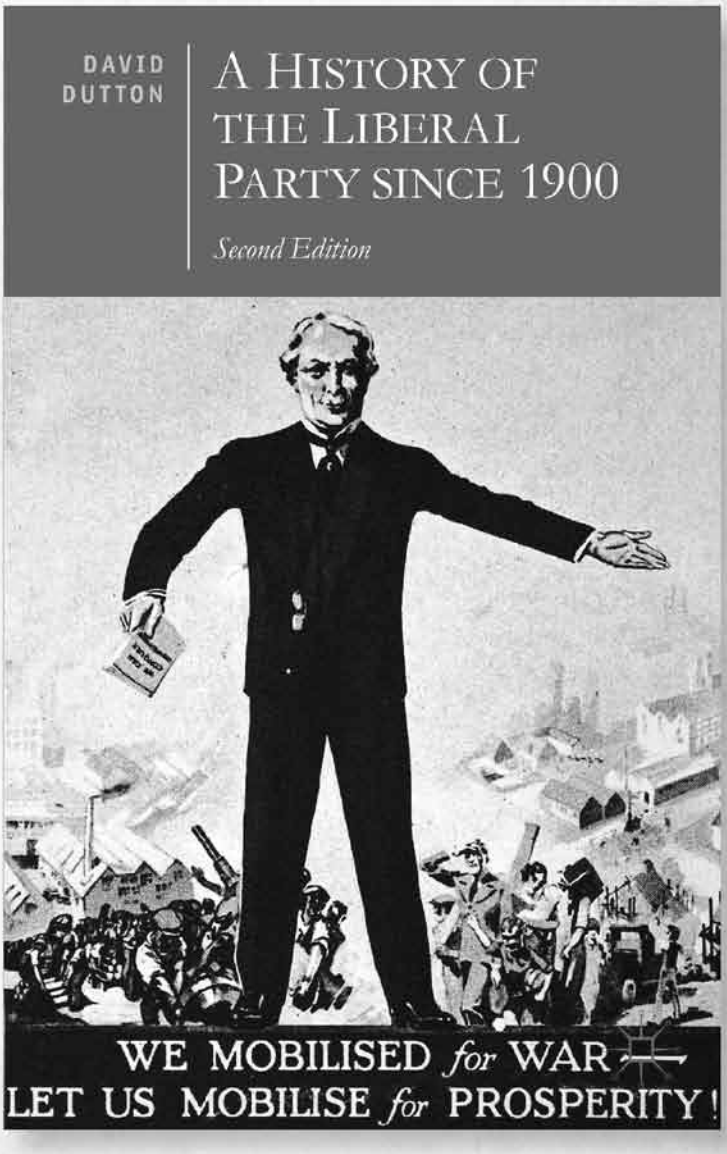

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Liberal Democrat History Group

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.

For more information, including historical commentaries, details of publications, back issues of the *Journal*, and archive and other research sources, see our website at: **www.liberalhistory.org.uk**.

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LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS AUTUMN 2013

Jo Grimond centenary: Orkney weekend, 18–19 May 2013

Mike Falchikov reports on a weekend several months in the planning. In the autumn of 2012 some members of the Scottish Liberal Club in Edinburgh (mostly veterans of the Grimond generation) wondered how the Club might contribute to commemorating the centenary of Jo's s birth (29 July 2013). Our suggestion was for a lecture or short conference to be held in Orkney the following summer. Contact was made with the three Northern Isles parliamentarians, all of whom welcomed the initiative, whilst advising that the busy schedule of events on the islands made a May date preferable to that of the actual centenary. The next contact was the local party who were delighted with the suggestion and their constituency organiser, Ruth Williams, got things moving very rapidly.

Both the organisation of the events and the welcome to a horde of visitors from the mainland could not have been bettered. The weekend had been well publicised in party circles and an indication of the success of the venture was the attendance at the Saturday evening dinner, when fifty locals sat down with seventy from the rest of the UK, including twenty from Edinburgh. Amongst those making the long journey was Catherine Fisher, Jo's long-serving secretary at Westminster, who, at 93, took part in all the weekend's activities.

The official part of the weekend began in Finstown, close to the Grimond family home, on the Saturday afternoon. Lord Steel of Aikwood delivered a superb address (reproduced on pages 8–14), outlining Jo's life and career in politics and his significance for our party today. David suggested five legacies which Jo Grimond left us – his devotion to his constituency, his success in dragging the Liberal Party back from the brink of oblivion, his rejection of post-war British imperialism in favour of a more modern form of politics, his unwavering support for Scottish home rule and, finally, his own engaging personality. The address – often moving, sometimes humorous in recalling anecdotes about Jo – reminded many participants of why they had come together in Orkney, and reinforced their beliefs. This was followed by a lively panel discussion, chaired by Liam McArthur MSP and involving David Steel, (Lord) Jim Wallace, Willie Rennie MSP and Baroness Jane Bonham Carter, with plenty of contributions from the floor.

The evening dinner was in Kirkwall, followed by speeches from Alistair Carmichael MP and the principal guest, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg. In his speech, Nick stressed the continuity of the party from Grimond to the present day and also powerfully reminded us that the Lib Dems are and will remain a European party. The dinner was also attended by Jo's three surviving children, Johnny, Magnus and Gelda.

For the Sunday – a second day of sunshine and blue skies – there was a coach tour of the Orkney Mainland, including a stop at Skara Brae, followed by a visit to the Grimond house, the Old Manse above Finstown, where we were entertained to drinks and snacks and a tour of the house and garden by the Grimond family. The weekend came to an official close with a lunch at another Old Manse – at Evie, the

Guests outside the Old Manse (Nick Clegg centre, in front of window; David Steel second from right) (photo: Nigel Lindsay)

David Steel delivering the lecture (photo: Nigel Lindsay)

home of Alistair Carmichael, the piece de resistance being a gigantic fish pie, cooked by the MP himself.

Viscount Bryce blue plaque unveiled In Belfast

It is not every day that notable Liberals are commemorated in Belfast, but 10 May 2013 was an exception, as **Berkley Farr** reports. It was the 175th anniversary of the birth, in 40 Arthur Street, Belfast, of James Bryce in 1838. An Ulster History Circle plaque was unveiled by Ian Crozier, CEO of the Ulster Scots Agency.

Bryce might well be described as a great polymath – author, classicist, historian, jurist, politician, diplomat, traveller and mountaineer. He attended Glasgow High School and Belfast Academy before going to Glasgow University and Trinity College, Oxford, where he graduated in 1862. He was called to the bar but soon returned to Oxford as Regius Professor of Civil Law, in 1870. His reputation as an historian had been made as early as 1864 by his work on the Holy Roman Empire. Along with Lord Acton, he founded the *English Historical Review* in 1885.

In 1880 Bryce was elected Liberal MP for Tower Hamlets and from 1885 to 1907 represented South Aberdeen. He served as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (1886), Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1892), President of the Board of Trade (1894–95) and Chief Secretary for Ireland from 1905 to 1907.

In 1897, after a visit to South Africa, Bryce published a volume of impressions of that country, which had considerable weight in Liberal circles when the Second Boer War was being discussed. He was one of the harshest critics of British repressive policy against Boer civilians in the South African War, condemning the systematic burning of farms and the imprisonment of old people, women and children in British concentration camps.

In 1907 Bryce was appointed British Ambassador to the United States of America, where he served until 1913, successfully strengthening the Anglo-American friendship. As an author, Bryce became well known in America for his 1888 work, *The American Commonwealth*. The book thoroughly examined the institutions of the United States from the point of view of a historian and constitutional lawyer, and it became a classic.

On his return to Great Britain he was raised to the peerage as Viscount Bryce, of Dechmont in 1914. Following the outbreak of the First World War, he was commissioned by Prime Minister, H.H. Asquith, to prepare the official Bryce Report on alleged German atrocities in Belgium. The report was published in 1915, and was damning of German behaviour against civilians. Bryce also strongly condemned the Armenian genocide that took place in the Ottoman Empire and later, with the assistance of the historian Arnold J. Toynbee, produced a documentary record of the massacres, published by the British government in 1916 as the Blue Book.

During the last years of his life, Bryce served at the International Court at The Hague. He supported the establishment of the League of Nations and in 1921 published a book that was critical of post-war democracy; specifically, he strongly opposed the new right of women to vote.

In earlier life he was a notable mountain climber, ascending Mount Ararat in 1876. 'Mount Bryce' in the Canadian Rockies was named in his honour in 1898 and he was president of the Alpine Club in 1899–1901.

In 1907, King Edward VII made Bryce a Member of the Order of Merit. He became a fellow of the Royal Society in 1894 and was also President of the British Academy from 1913 to 1917. Bryce died on 22 January 1922 in Sidmouth, Devon and was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium. The viscountcy died with him.

A fuller account of Bryce and the unveiling ceremony of the blue plaque appears on the Ulster History Circle website: www.ulster-history.co.uk

The James Bryce plaque in Upper Arthur Street. Belfast (photo: Berkley Farr)

On Liberties: Victorian Liberals and their legacies

The first weekend of July (3–5 July 2013) saw an eclectic mix of doctoral students, early career scholars, and permanent postholders, from a range of institutions across the UK and the USA, converge on Gladstone's Library in Hawarden, North Wales to discuss 'Victorian Liberals and their Legacies'. Report by **Alex Middleton**.

The conference sought to bridge literature and history, and

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, so as to arrive at a better understanding of what 'Liberalism' might have been, how it might have originated, how it might have been transmitted, and what consequences it might have had. This was, clearly, an ambitious agenda for three days. Luckily the sun shone throughout, and if we cannot now claim to have all the answers to these questions, all the attendees at least came away with important new questions to ask.

The conference began with a panel on the grand theme of 'Liberalism: Definitions and Mechanisms'. In the event this was composed of three political historians, who usefully opened up some key themes in nineteenth-century Liberalism. David Craig's paper on the emergence of the languages of 'liberalism' and 'liberality' around the turn of the nineteenth century, in particular, set the conference on its feet with a vigorous and compelling dissection of what people actually *meant* by the term 'liberal' before it began to be understood in a primarily political sense. Emily Jones, discussing Liberal attitudes towards Edmund Burke around the time of the home rule crisis of the 1880s, took the discussion of these important issues of chronology a stage further, suggesting that the search after political 'isms' and abstract political ideology was an innovation of the later nineteenth century. The first question period, moreover, established the tone of inquisitiveness, openness, and engagement which was to characterise post-panel discussions throughout the conference. The first dinner, and the subsequent trip to the impressively well-appointed village pub, only cemented this atmosphere of intellectual openness and general conviviality.

The number of papers delivered over the next two days, combined with the fact that many of them were arranged in parallel sessions, makes it impossible here to do anything but pick out certain themes and highlights. The panel on 'Liberals, Slaves, and Aliens' offered a fascinating set of papers on how liberalism dealt (or failed to deal) with problems of race, exclusion, and unfree labour, approaching these issues through the very different lenses of the high political debate over the forcible suppression of the slave trade in early-Victorian Britain, literary responses to the Aliens Act of 1905, and South African imperial romance novels. Liberals, it emerged, found it extremely difficult to agree on where the boundaries of the political community ought to be drawn. The methodological tensions evident in this panel between the historian and the students of literature were even more pronounced in the panel on 'Commons Ground', where two highly theoretical close readings of Anthony Trollope's political novels ran up against a much more straightforwardly historical analysis of the same, alongside a thorough biographical treatment of James Stansfeld MP, one of the leading lights in the late-Victorian campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts. The discussion that emerged, of the relationship between liberal politics and 'liberalism' as an approach to literary style, was a particularly stimulating one. The final panels focused more narrowly on literature: that on 'Literary Liberalism' threw together the Brownings, Thomas Arnold, and Ralph Waldo Emerson; that on 'Legacies' considered how far E.M. Forster was responding and/or contributing to debates over the 'New Liberal' (i.e. proto-collectivist) politics of the Edwardian era, while the final paper of the conference looked at the representation of the Victorian eccentric Henry Ashbee in two novels published in the last eleven years. In these panels we were confronted with a huge variety of approaches to 'liberalism' and 'liberty', from the 'liberties' taken with the representation of Ashbee, to Arnold's contextually specific arguments about the extent to which religious liberalism could be allowed to run, to the (implied) relationship between the Brownings' liberal social contract and Robert Browning's political poetry. Nobody could have come away from these diverse panels and papers without being forced to confront and reconsider their assumptions about what makes a 'liberal', or about the unity and historicity of the attached 'ism'. In this respect the juxtaposition of historians and literary scholars, while often challenging for at least some representatives of the former group, was one of the most intellectually productive aspects of the conference.

Each of the keynote lectures added important ingredients to this pleasantly simmering broth. Michael Wheeler's opening address on 'Religion and Science in the 1830s and 1860s' offered an orientating conspectus of some of the major intellectual contexts from which nineteenth-century Liberalism took its shape; one-time deputy leader of the Liberal Democrats Alan Beith provided an insider's view of the 'legacies' of political Liberalism, discussing the costs and benefits of possessing a 'creed' for political parties in general (and for the Liberal Democrats in particular), while providing a range of incidental insights into the contemporary politics of coalition; and Regenia Gagnier, in what must be seen as a high point of the conference, spoke compellingly on 'The Global Circulation of the Literatures of Liberalization', fusing philosophy, psychology, history, and literature, in a compelling demonstration of interdisciplinarity done right.

For all the intellectual stimulation on offer from the conference proper, however, this attendee

David Lloyd George – a one-day conference

The Birmingham and Midland Institute (BMI), together with The Lloyd George Society, are organising a one-day conference to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of David Lloyd George (1863–1945). The event will be held at the BMI, 9 Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS on Saturday 23 November 2013 between 10am and 4pm.

The speakers will be **Professor Russell Deacon**, Chairman of the Lloyd George Society, on Lloyd George and Welsh Liberalism; **Professor Emeritus Roger Ward**, Birmingham City University, on Lloyd George and Austen Chamberlain; **Professor Richard Toye**, University of Exeter, comparing Lloyd George and Winston Churchill as war leaders; and **Professor Lord Kenneth Morgan**, concluding with an overview of LG's career and his legacy.

The cost of the day will be £28, to include lunch and refreshments at registration and in the afternoon. Bookings may be made to Philip Fisher, Administrator, Birmingham & Midland Institute, 9 Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS by post; or email: Philip@bmi.org.uk; or telephone: 0121 236 3591.

drew most of all from the opportunities it presented to leaf through Gladstone's personal library. It was extraordinary, after so many years of reading about the man, to be confronted with the massed physical evidence of his voracity; and, in particular, to pull down a volume of Mill from the shelves, only to find it inscribed to the statesman 'from the author'. Here was confirmation, perhaps, of the wisdom – and the necessity – of the conference's efforts to bridge the gap between literature and politics. Many thanks are due to Matthew Bradley and Louisa Yates for organising such a splendid conference in such exceptional surroundings, and to the Library staff for their unfailing friendliness and efficiency.

Liberal Democrat History Group website

The History Group is beginning the process of overhauling our website (www.liberalhistory.org.uk), revising and updating its content and in due course – finances allowing! – its design.

Any *Journal* readers with views on the existing content, structure, navigation and look of the website are very welcome to let us have them. Please email our web coordinator, Chris Millington, at chrismilli@aol.com.

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.*

Dadabhai Naoroji

Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917) was an Indian nationalist and Liberal member for Central Finsbury, 1892–95 – the first Asian to be elected to the House of Commons. This research for a PhD at Harvard aims to produce both a biography of Naoroji and a volume of his selected correspondence, to be published by OUP India in 2013. The current phase concentrates on Naoroji's links with a range of British progressive organisations and individuals, particularly in his later career. Suggestions for archival sources very welcome. *Dinyar Patel; dinyar.patel@gmail.com or 07775 753 724.*

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 Colllege, 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 Boshyk, 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 Liberal Party in Wales, 1966–1988

Aims to follow the development of the party from the general election of 1966 to the time of the merger with the SDP. PhD research at Cardiff University. *Nick Alderton; nickalito@hotmail.com.*

Policy position and leadership strategy within the Liberal Democrats

This thesis will be a study of the political positioning and leadership strategy of the Liberal Democrats. Consideration of the role of equidistance; development of policy from the point of merger; the influence and leadership strategies of each leader from Ashdown to Clegg; and electoral strategy from 1988 to 2015 will form the basis of the work. Any material relating to leadership election campaigns, election campaigns, internal party groups (for example the Social Liberal Forum) or policy documents from 1987 and merger talks onwards would be greatly welcomed. Personal insights and recollections also sought. *Samuel Barratt; pt10seb@leeds.ac.uk.*

JO GRIMOND

Joseph (Jo) Grimond was born 100 years ago, on 29 July 1913. As leader of the Liberal Party from 1956 to 1967, Grimond made a difference not just to the fortunes of his party but to British politics, helping to end the two-party mould into which Britain had seemed to settle. He made the most substantial contribution to Liberal politics of any post-war politician, taking over an ailing party and transforming it into a formidable force. His idealism, his imagination, his ability to communicate, his freshness, made him 'the personification and the hope of post-war Liberalism'. Here we reprint **David Steel**'s lecture to mark the 100th anniversary of Grimond's birth, given at Firth Kirk, Finstown, Orkney, on 18 May 2013.

1913 – 1993

It is a trite, commonplace cliché for a politician to open a discourse such as this by saying what a pleasure it is to be here and doing so. In this case, the moment I received the invitation I replied saying that genuinely it would give me enormous pleasure. So before I delve into Jo Grimond's life let me explain why I owe him such a huge personal debt on two levels.

In 1961 when I had been president of the Liberal Club at Edinburgh University I persuaded Jo Grimond to stand for the office of rector and he was indeed elected. The secretary of the club, George Inglis, and I went on a camping holiday in the Highlands in my old motor car and had the temerity to travel over to Orkney to land ourselves on the Grimonds for free bed and breakfast at the Old Manse of Firth, and similarly lodge with the former rector James Robertson-Justice on our way back south at Spinningdale. Jo's rectorial address was entitled 'In praise of politics' and in it he declared: 'I urge all of you to become politicians, Liberals preferably, but if you can't manage that even Labour or Conservative politics are better than none. I urge you because politics are important, because politics are rewarding, but, most of all, because politics are one of the greatest, most natural and most enjoyable of human activities'.

Now Jo Grimond was notoriously mean when it came to small amounts of money, preferring to eat in one of the Commons cafeterias rather than pay for dinner in the Members' dining room, but for students at Edinburgh and later as rector at Aberdeen and chancellor at Kent, he loved to put together generous dinner parties of a dozen or so for convivial discussion, and at one of these he sat me next to a fellow law student whom I knew but slightly, called Judy MacGregor. I offered her a lift back to her flat afterwards. We celebrated our golden wedding last year.

My second reason for my indebtedness to him occurred two years later by which time I was prospective candidate for Edinburgh Pentlands – a seat not fought by the party for many years and where my ambition was to save my deposit. I was, on graduating, offered and accepted the full-time job of assistant secretary of the Scottish Liberal Party. One of my tasks in that august role was to organise a pre-election tour for the Leader in the summer of 1964. So I was Jo's bag carrier (as we call them in the trade) as we travelled from hall to hall. All went well in Inverness and Caithness & Sutherland where we knew Russell Johnston and George Mackie had good chances of winning, but in Stornoway and especially Ross & Cromarty things were different. Neither Jo nor I knew the newly adopted candidate Alasdair Mackenzie. Gaelic was his first language and he was already into his sixties, was an expert on sheep but not thought to be so on politics.

The town hall in Dingwall was packed to the rafters, and Alasdair who had never addressed more than a local NFU meeting panicked and said he could not make the supporting speech, and that I should do so. I insisted that I was only there to take the collection to cover the costs, and he spoke for about three minutes. Then Jo wowed the audience. Unfortunately I had decided we would have questions, and of course Jo answered superbly. Then a man in a loud tweed suit with a pukka voice – obviously up for the grouse shooting – got up at the back and insisted on addressing his question to the candidate: 'What is the Liberal Party policy on defence?' I looked at Jo. Jo looked at me. We both looked at Alasdair, and I could see my sparkling career in the party about to disappear. Alasdair got very slowly to his feet, cleared his throat noisily, and said very slowly: 'The Liberal Par-ty will de-fend Brit-ain, the common-wealth and the free world'. He sat down to tumultuous applause, and went on to win the seat and be an excellent MP. It was a model answer.

Jo Grimond (1913–1993), Leader of the Liberal Party 1956–1967

Some of you may remember my boss, the secretary of the Scottish party, Arthur Purdom, whose reaction to the good second places at by-elections we had polled in East Aberdeenshire, Galloway, and Kinross was 'we need fewer brilliant second places and a few more mediocre firsts!'

Well one constituency where we had always been in well-entrenched second place, and indeed fleetingly – before the boundary changes turned it into a safe Tory seat – the Liberals had won it in 1950 (the same year Jo won here), was Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles, but an active Labour candidate called Tam Dalyell had nearly pushed us down

to third place at the 1959 general election.

The prospective Liberal candidate was a distant Asquithian relative of Laura Grimond – the Hon. James Tennant of the Glen. He fell out with the local party and they parted company. In the autumn of 1963 with no candidate there and – we thought – a general election looming, Jo Grimond came into the Edinburgh HQ and rightly insisted that the seat must be fought at all costs, and if nobody else was available 'young Steel you will have to go and do it'. And so to cut a long story short I did.

Alec Douglas-Home became prime minister and delayed the election for another year. With the help of many student friends I reduced the Tory majority in the 1964 election, and when the MP suddenly died just a few weeks later, I was elected at the subsequent by-election in March 1965 bringing the total number of Liberal MPs back into double figures – ten.

So you can see why both in my private and public life I owe Jo Grimond the most extraordinary debt and why I rejoice in this opportunity to mark the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Today I want to suggest that Jo Grimond left us and the nation five distinct legacies. First was his deep devotion to life as a constituency MP. It might never have happened. Having been born into a well-to-do Dundee jute manufacturing family in St Andrews and educated at Eton and Oxford, then serving during the war in the Fife and Forfar Yeomanry, he had moved in Liberal circles through his friendship with the Bonham-Carters and the Sinclairs. So in 1940 when Lady Glen-Coats the prospective candidate for Orkney and Shetland decided to resign she recommended Jo Grimond as her successor. He thought it too difficult and remote, and expressed interest in standing in Banff, which I doubt if he would ever have won, but was prevailed upon to tackle Orkney and Shetland, with its substantial Liberal traditions.

I remember him on one visit to Shetland taking me to the solicitor's office in Lerwick where he had arrived in 1945, announced himself as Major Grimond intending to fight the election and asked if Mr Goodlad would agree to be his agent. 'Indeed', was the response, 'for which party?'

He and Laura revived the somewhat moribund Liberal organisation and he lost by just 329 votes. We won no seats at all in Scotland, five in England and seven in Wales. But he soldiered on as prospective candidate whilst being the full-time secretary of the National Trust for Scotland, and won the seat at the next election in 1950.

From then on until and indeed after his retirement as MP in 1983, it was a fully requited love affair between these islands and the Grimonds. Conventional canvassing was not his forte, and he was suspicious of outside interference, promising that if material was sent from Liberal HQ he would ensure that all Liberal literature would be 'seized at the ports'.

His devotion to the islands shone through many of his speeches in the Commons and produced tangible results getting an amendment into the Scotland Bill; and securing the twelve-mile fishery limit instead of the six-mile one elsewhere when we joined the EEC. In 1973 he piloted through the Zetland Bill in cooperation with the Council to secure a share of oil revenues, and as far back as 1960 he was lamenting in a speech on the Crofters Bill the lack of proper development of the Highlands and Islands: 'There is no other part of this country in which more stable doors have been locked after the horses have gone than in the Highlands and Islands. I do not say that these horses have bolted: nothing as dramatic as that. They have ambled out of the stable while successive secretaries of state have leaned against the doorpost chewing straws'.

I recall vividly the time he was interviewed on television and accused of just representing the Celtic fringes. With a rare show of anger he turned on the interviewer and berated him telling him that the entire nation's newfound wealth depended on his constituency.

Young Magnus Grimond once, when asked what his father did, famously replied: 'he jist gangs aboot'. But that he did with great effect, making a point of visiting even the smallest inhabited island at least once every two years. Nor should we forget the input of Laura – not just guarding the fort at election times but actively on Orkney Council and operating directly for example to rescue and preserve the little row of houses beside St Magnus Cathedral which are her monument today.

Conventional canvassing was not his forte, and he was suspicious of outside interference, promising that if material was sent from Liberal HQ he would ensure that all Liberal literature would be 'seized at the ports'.

I enjoyed many visits to his constituency, not least on the weekend when he told me not to go overboard when addressing the evening Orkney supper because he intended to tell our colleagues next week of his intention to retire as leader. Our son Graeme was four months old, and on Sunday morning we left him sitting in a plastic chair with Jo as baby sitter while we went to church with Laura. Jo was terrified, and when we returned he said: 'it made some noises but I didn't know what to do'.

His commitment to his constituency was something I tried to emulate in my beloved Borders with the result that we were both less than enthusiastic about the policy of the party on electoral reform – STV in multi-member seats did not appeal to us, and we would still I believe have been better to disinter the 1930 Speaker's Conference recommendation for multi-member seats in the cities, but AV in the rural areas and single burghs.

Jo's determination to put Orkney and Shetland first often clashed with the party strategists who naturally wanted him to spend more time touring the country, and indeed it must have been very difficult and tiring to combine service to the islands with party leadership. One peculiarity of his life was that he never spent money on cars, preferring to travel by tube and train. Such vehicles as he did possess always seemed rather down at heel, so much so that he regularly made the same remark when driving with me – 'very smart car' even if it wasn't particularly.

Laura used to drive their car back from Orkney to London at the end of the summer recesses and, finding the Borders a halfway point on the road to London, either stayed with us or her great aunt Baroness Kay Elliot. On more than one occasion she did this in an incredibly decaying mini. Jo himself used to turn up in the Commons after time at the Old Manse with his fleshy hands covered in scratches from his attention to the garden. He held the seat in ten general elections and was a perfect example of the first-class constituency MP.

Jo Grimond's second legacy was quite simply the Liberal Party. It is difficult for a younger generation to realise how close the party came to extinction, having been in the nineteenth and early twentieth century the great reforming party of government. Yet extinct as the dinosaur it nearly became.

In the 1951 election the once great party of government polled only 2.5 per cent of the popular vote partly because we could fight only a minority of the seats, and in that short parliament of 1950–51, when Jo was a new MP, the small Liberal band had only four times out of twelve major divisions voted in unison – in other words they were just a handful of disunited hangovers from historic days and by 1956 were reduced to just five MPs – with Jo being the only one elected against both Conservative and Labour candidates. Two actually had formal pacts with the Tories in Bolton and Huddersfield which we in due course lost when the pacts ended. So that is why I say that the party was nearly over.

When he became Leader in 1956, he began to proclaim the need for a realignment of the left, bearing in mind that the Labour Party had begun as the Labour Representation Committee within the Liberal Party but had now become too subservient to the powerful and reactionary trades unions. So it was natural that when I started to argue in 1979/80 for an alliance with the breakaway SDP, Jo was a leading supporter, so much so that I decided to play the Grimond card and on the eve of our annual assembly at Llandudno in 1981 persuaded him to come out of retirement and address what turned out to be a huge and emotional fringe meeting with me and Shirley Williams on the eve of our critical vote as a party when only 112 delegates out of 1,600 voted against the formation of the Alliance. 'I beg of you to seize this chance,' he said, 'do not get bogged down in the niceties of innumerable policies. I spent my life fighting against too much policy in the Liberal Party'. So Jo Grimond not only revived the old Liberal Party he played a crucial role in the events leading to the formation of today's Liberal Democrats.

His third legacy was to shake Britain out of its imperial past with policies more attuned to the realities of the second half of the twentieth century. The American Secretary of State Dean Acheson was frequently quoted as saying that Britain had lost an empire but not yet found a role. Jo was among the early fighters against imperial nostalgia. He spoke against racism at home, and against the conduct of the colonial administration in Kenya at the time of the Hola Camp massacre.

When he became Leader in 1956, he began to proclaim the need for a realignment of the left, bearing in mind that the Labour Party had begun as the Labour Representation Committee within the Liberal Party but had now become too subservient to the powerful and reactionary trades unions.

On South Africa he said of the Sharpeville massacre in 1960: 'I believe something happened which has made a dividing line in history such as we sometimes see. I do not think things will ever be quite the same again. … The prime cause of all this is the attempt to impose a wholly unworkable and repugnant system – a system of race superiority'.

But perhaps the most controversial and uniquely Liberal commitment was his espousal of entry into the European Economic Community and opposition to the creation of the so-called independent nuclear deterrents of Polaris and Trident. In those days he did not wait for policy debates at the annual assembly – together with a small group (usually consisting of Frank Byers, Mark Bonham-Carter, Arthur Holt and Donald Wade) he would simply pronounce new ideas in the *Liberal News* to the astonishment of us humble readers of that much-missed paper.

When the UK government stayed out of the talks leading to the Treaty of Rome the six Liberal MPs divided the House, criticising the failure to join the EEC, and I think they were joined only by two or three others against the united forces of the Tories and Labour. Jo wanted us to take the lead role in a new united Europe instead of constantly – as today – being out-manoeuvred by the original powerful members. He described its creation as 'the disappearance of the cloud which has lain over Europe for a thousand years – the plague of Western European wars – which has been so completely expunged that new generations do not even appreciate the boon of its dispersal; it is alone worth any petty tribulations that the EEC may inflict'.

That sentiment was echoed by the late and great Sir Alastair Burnet who was presenting the ITV all-night results programme of the first European Parliament elections in 1979, at the end of which he told the remaining viewers: 'Thirty-five years ago the people of Europe from the Shetlands to Sicily were at war: today the people of Europe from the Shetlands to Sicily have elected a parliament. Goodnight.' It is noteworthy that David (now Lord) Hannay, who was Prime Minister Ted Heath's chief negotiator on our belated entry, wrote in his recent book that Britain's problems with the Common Agriculture Policy and especially the Common Fisheries Policy were because of our lack of vision – our failure to enter at the start as a founding member – as the Liberals alone had advocated.

Jo Grimond showed the same attitude to imperial pretensions on the issue of Britain acquiring an independent nuclear deterrent. He was opposed to the Polaris project and later the Trident one believing them to be 'unnecessary, dangerous and expensive' and argued that they made little additional contribution to that of the West as a whole and that they were maintained for 'out of date reasons of national prestige'. In the 1959 election he set out the policy: 'We of the Liberal Party say that Britain should not make its own nuclear deterrent. We believe the nuclear deterrent should be held by the West on behalf of the West as a whole and not by individual countries.' He was not a unilateralist but wanted to limit our nuclear participation to co-operation within NATO, not attempting to run our own independent deterrent: 'Must we not abandon many of our ideas about sovereignty and pool much of our resources and our arms?' he asked.

For that reason he was fully supportive when David Owen and I went to discuss with President Mitterand and Mr Chirac the possibility of reducing our deterrent jointly with that of the French, and he would have been doubtful about our present attempts to find a cheaper independent deterrent than Trident. Indeed this week's report of the Public Accounts Committee questioning the capability of the Ministry of Defence budget on equipment underscores the huge savings we could have made over the decades if the Grimond policy

had been pursued at the outset, and we had confined our deterrent role to providing bases for NATO operations.

My fourth suggested Grimond legacy was Scottish home rule as we used to call it. Jo devoted part of his maiden speech in the Commons to the subject and it was always a major part of his election addresses, though he always warned that his island constituents would be 'against any parliament run by a combination of Glasgow trade unionists and Edinburgh lawyers!' He would have been very pleased at the birth of the Scottish Parliament and indeed he at one point when ex-leader, and somewhat controversially within the party, favoured an electoral pact with the SNP in some seats to help bring it about.

But his view of the devolution settlement would have chimed with our party attitude today to the upcoming referendum. He was not in favour of independence, but stressed the sovereignty of the Scottish people and therefore would have advocated not the top-down Westminster devolution we have, but rather the devo-plus alternative to which we should be moving once the referendum is out of the way.

This is how he put it in his 1983 book *A Personal Manifesto*:

> I do not like the word devolution as it has come to be called. It implies that power rests at Westminster, from which centre some may be graciously devolved. I would rather begin by assuming that power should rest with the people who entrust it to their representatives to discharge the essential tasks of government. Once we accept that the Scots and the Welsh are nations, then we must accord them parliaments which have all the normal powers of government, except for those that they delegate to the United Kingdom government or the EEC.
>
> I find it difficult to see how, if the case for Scottish and Welsh self-government is accepted at all, any powers can be reserved to the UK government except foreign affairs, defence, and the wider issues of economic policy linked to a common currency and common trade policies. So when we consider Parliament we must think of three Parliaments and of a much-restricted Westminster Parliament.

He was the most engaging politician I have ever met – fantastically good company always. It has also to be admitted that at times he was delightfully imprecise and occasionally downright self-contradictory. *The Economist* likened his style to a man thinking aloud in the company of friends.

I suggest that today his credo probably sums up the view of most Scots against the overblown, vague and unrealistic rhetoric of the independence lobby.

My fifth and final suggested legacy is much more imprecise – it is the personality of Jo Grimond itself. For a start he was the most engaging politician I have ever met – fantastically good company always. It has also to be admitted that at times he was delightfully imprecise and occasionally downright self-contradictory. *The Economist* likened his style to a man thinking aloud in the company of friends. One of his attributes was a lively sense of humour with which he peppered his speeches. Away back in 1933, in his home town of St Andrews, he attended his first political meeting during a by-election in East Fife being addressed by the Scottish Nationalist candidate, Eric Linklater (who was later in Orkney to become a friend and supporter). This is what he wrote about it: 'It was in a temperance hall which had obviously taken a good deal of trouble to live up to its name, for it was as dark and cheerless as cold tea. Eric Linklater battled valiantly against that chilly hall, but I fear that the hall won.'

When he was frustrated at the poor transport links to his constituency he underlined the point by filling in a bureaucratic form for the Commons authorities naming his nearest railway station as Bergen – which for Shetland was true. He also tried unsuccessfully to persuade them to permit him to travel to the islands by plane via Copenhagen.

In 1962 during the arguments about the terms for entry into the EEC he remarked that the preoccupation about the detailed terms 'would be as if at the Reformation someone had said they were unable to make up their minds until they knew what price the monasteries were likely to fetch'.

You will recall that when Jeremy Thorpe resigned as leader the party had not yet put in place the new democratic procedure for electing a new party leader by the members instead of just the MPs – something which incidentally we pioneered and the other parties copied. We therefore had to hold a special assembly to draft the new constitution amendments and Jo was persuaded to return as acting leader whilst we did so. John Pardoe gave him the bad news that apparently the only available venue for the assembly at such short notice was Bellevue zoo in Manchester – highly unsuitable. 'On the contrary', responded Jo, 'in the circumstances there could hardly be anywhere more appropriate'.

As he grew older he suffered from deafness, and indeed he told me that was one of the reasons he wanted to retire as leader, and I recall a dinner party at his home in Kew where he obviously could not follow the conversation round the table. Only in his later years did he admit to infirmities, telling one journalist in 1984: 'I am a little deaf, so I'll talk anyway and let's just hope I answer the question I think you asked me'. On another occasion when we were recording a party political broadcast I was becoming exasperated by his failure to stick to the script to which he retorted: 'David, you should know that I can't read the autocue – that's what gives my TV talks that unmistakable air of sincerity.'

Speaking at a pre-election rally in the Barbican in 1987, just after the hero of Orpington, Lord Avebury, had announced that he intended to leave his body to the Battersea Cat and Dog home, Jo said in his speech: 'my only worry is that the Alliance might have lost the votes of animal lovers now that they know that the dogs of Battersea are going to have to eat Eric Lubbock'.

But it was not just his humour that endeared him to so many. His first general election campaign as leader in 1959 attracted a whole new generation of Liberals especially amongst university students. It was the first election in which television was really important and the Tories and Labour had impressive budgets for their party political broadcasts. The Liberals did not, and simply put Jo live in front of the camera. The veteran American commentator Ed Murrow gave his broadcast top marks against the expensive ones describing it 'as effective as anything presented during the campaign'.

Jo was also a well-rounded and cultured individual with a

particular interest in the arts – often to be seen carting his latest picture purchase on the plane to Orkney. His period as secretary of the National Trust also had its effect. When Edinburgh University set about in the late fifties destroying most of George Square to build new tower blocks he was scathing in a speech in the Scottish Grand Committee:

> I hope that an indestructible ferro-concrete monument will be put up on which will be carved the names, not only of the Secretary of State, but of the Principal of the university and the whole of the university court commemorating the deed. Presumably they are proud of pulling down George Square, and so they should be associated with its destruction.

Jo's political style was totally hands on. He had only one member of staff – his indefatigable secretary Kate Fisher. When he was being prevailed upon to have a political assistant – what nowadays would be called a Spad, a special adviser – he was firmly resistant: 'I don't want anybody with bees in their bonnet – I have quite enough of my own'. He was eventually persuaded to take on Christopher Layton. He had been recommended as someone 'who would have lots of bright stimulating ideas for your speeches' to which Jo's response was 'I have six bright stimulating ideas before breakfast – what I want is someone who will get me from A to B on time'. And Jo could be remarkably vague – memorably turning up without his passport and thus missing the chartered plane taking the party leaders to President Kennedy's funeral.

So what would he have made of our situation today? Would he have approved of the coalition? Jo was unmistakably a politician of the left, writing this in 1958: 'We carve out a niche for ourselves left of centre in the sense that we stand for personal freedom against authority, in the sense that we believe there is still too much poverty, too many slums and too much cruelty, in the sense that we want and mean to have a wide dispersal of property and power'. He would have been alarmed by this year's report from Poverty and Social Exclusion who found that 33 per cent of the UK population suffers from multiple deprivation, by the standards set by the public, compared to 14 per cent in the same survey thirty years ago, and notes that 1930s-style soup kitchens have returned to our towns and cities.

In the same year, 1958, he first advocated what he called 'a realignment of the left' stating his long-term objective 'to become the progressive wing of politics in this country, sweeping not only Liberals but liberal socialists and liberal Tories, and make it a great movement for the shaping of a Liberal society'. That is why despite some misgivings he personally and actively supported my leadership during the Lib–Lab pact and especially the Liberal–SDP Alliance and subsequent merger.

But my answer to the question would he have approved of the coalition is decidedly 'yes'. How can I be so sure? Because I recall our fourteen MPs' intense discussion round the table in committee room J in the Commons basement immediately after the February 1974 election – when Ted Heath had gone to the country early on a 'who rules Britain' basis and the people had decided it should not be him. Jo, Frank Byers and I had already damped down Jeremy Thorpe's fleeting attraction to Heath's suggestion of a coalition, and the parliamentary party was clearly equally unimpressed by the suggestion. But Jo intervened to say he was worried by the tone of some of the arguments – that although the conditions were not right (a Con–Lib coalition would still not have had a majority) we should not as a party rule out coalition in principle even with the Tories, especially as we advocated proportional representation. He would have been astonished but tickled if you had told him that his two successors as MP Jim Wallace and Alistair Carmichael would both be members of a coalition government though he would have been mischievously sarcastic about both of them.

That is not to say that he would have approved of all that the coalition has done. He would certainly have opposed the about-turn on student fees with its inevitable loss of trust in our party among the electorate, though I recall that in 1983 he and Laura both came to my defence of the Leader's right to a veto over items in the manifesto, a gloriously undemocratic but useful proviso which we lost in the merger process, and which might have been used to save us that campaigning embarrassment at the last election. He would have been dubious about the AV referendum and, given his utterances on the plethora of detailed policies, he would have been sceptical about the laundry lists of supposed achievements (such as amendments to the Health Bill) regularly trotted out by party headquarters but which seem not to impress the public one bit. Why do I say that? Because again his own words in 1964: 'Some time we will have to change the electoral system, but not immediately, the most important thing to face is the economic situation'.

'We carve out a niche for ourselves left of centre in the sense that we stand for personal freedom against authority, in the sense that we believe there is still too much poverty, too many slums and too much cruelty, in the sense that we want and mean to have a wide dispersal of property and power'

He would also argue that we should concentrate on and promote Liberal principles and values. How do I know that? Because he made exactly that point publicly during the Lib–Lab pact. What had he in mind? First and foremost co-determination in industry. He was deeply interested in that, having studied Yugoslav cooperatives even within a communist system, and the Mondragon cooperative in the Basque region of Spain, which he described as 'socialism without the state'. He believed fully in co-ownership of shares and worker representatives on boards. Our German Liberal colleagues used to joke with his approval that after the war we the occupying powers insisted on a new German constitution which contained a decentralised federal system of government, proportional representation, and industrial democracy, 'and you are so generous you British you took not one of these three for yourselves!'

Another Liberal fundamental would be a land tax or site value rating to free up land hoarded for speculation and undeveloped, still as relevant today as it was in his.

I want to end with Jo's own words from his last book to illustrate what he meant by Liberal values:

> The ancient Greek ideals of restraint, of economy, of serious application to the cultivation of the mind and the Christian teaching of poverty, charity in

> all its senses, of self-sacrifice, have given way in the West to the ideals of the barbarians. The individual is sacrificed to the rulers. Ostentation, unending demands, the glorification of material success have ousted to a great extent the older philosophies. Those Greek and Christian ideals were never realised, but it is only comparatively recently that they have been rejected even as ideals and that whole nations have come to ape the barbarians.

Jo Grimond's politics stemmed from the heart and mind, not from focus groups and market research.

At his overcrowded funeral in St Magnus Cathedral one of his constituents read a poem she had written:

> Lord Grimond of Firth they ca' him.
> 'Tis right that should be so,
> but here in the isles where we loved him
> he'll aye be known as Jo.

Jo Grimond was one of the last real orators in our country. It was the job of the leader to inspire and fire up his annual party audience to go out to greater endeavours. Nowadays all the party leaders are made to behave like performing seals ambling around an empty space chatting to their audience. In 1963 when the party was at a particularly low ebb he thunderously addressed the pre-election assembly in Brighton with his most famous quote:

> In bygone days the commanders were taught that when in doubt they should march their troops towards the sound of gunfire – I intend to march my troops towards the sound of gunfire.

And so he did, and those of us who followed him and, even more, had the privilege of knowing him and counting him as a friend will be forever grateful.

The Rt Hon. Lord (David) Steel of Aikwood KT KBE was MP for Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles, later Tweeddale, Ettrick & Lauderdale, 1965–97, Leader of the Liberal Party 1976–88, MSP for Lothians and Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, 1999–2003.

REPORT

Jo Grimond: The Legacy

Evening meeting, 10 June 2013, National Liberal Club, with Peter Sloman, Harry Cowie, and Michael Meadowcroft; chair: Tony Greaves
Report by **Graham Lippiatt**

Jo Grimond continues to hold a particularly affectionate place in the collective memory of Liberal Democrats. His charisma, charm, good looks, political courage, intellect and inherent liberalism inspired many new people to join the Liberal Party in the late 1950s and 1960s. He gained a reputation as someone who could give politics a good name, which has endured to the present day. To mark one hundred years since his birth in 1913, the meeting sought to examine Jo Grimond's legacy to the modern Liberal Democrats and more widely to British politics and political ideas.

The meeting was chaired by (Lord) Tony Greaves. Tony, who first joined the Liberal Party when Grimond was leader, had kindly agreed to step in to replace William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire), who had been press assistant to Jo Grimond during the 1966 general election, but who had been called away on government business.

Ideas

Our first speaker was Dr Peter Sloman, of New College, Oxford, who was asked to explore Jo Grimond's ideas, with a focus on his thinking around the role of the state and free market. Dr Sloman started by saying that Grimond was one of a rare category of politicians, those whose legacy was mainly associated with their political thought. While Grimond was not an original political theorist he was certainly an ideas man and was perhaps the best political communicator that British Liberalism has had since Gladstone. While many Liberals or Liberal Democrats have had more electoral success or held more political power, very few have had Grimond's ability to expand Liberalism as a philosophy or political creed. Grimond wrote four major books setting out his vision in addition to pamphlets, speeches and a volume of memoirs. In addition his political career spanned much of the twentieth century, from his Oxford days, when he apparently admired Stanley Baldwin, through his entry to the House of Commons in 1950 when Attlee was prime minister, to his stepping down in 1983 during the Thatcher era. Inevitably, therefore, his thought developed over time, but there were important consistencies in Grimond's understanding of what Liberalism was and its implications for policy. Dr Sloman proposed to explore Grimond's thought under four headings: his philosophical position, his attitude to socialism and the state, his vision of a liberal society and his view of Britain's role in the world.

Grimond's conception of Liberalism was at root a philosophical one. He understood Liberalism to be a humanitarian creed, grounded in men and women's experience in the world and dedicated to ameliorating their problems; a creed based on the individual and innately suspicious of deities and dogma. At Balliol, where he read PPE, Grimond had come under two influences: the legacy of T. H. Green, with an emphasis on self-development, civic participation and the common good; and also early-twentieth-century ideas reacting against idealism, hence his emphasis on experience and the individual. This background came to give his thought its balance and vitality. People were both individuals and members of wider communities. He was suspicious of abstract ideas and utopian solutions and

Jo Grimond's politics stemmed from the heart and mind, not from focus groups and market research.

believed politicians should confine themselves to dealing with particular social issues as they arose. Dr Sloman said that Grimond's conception of Liberalism was not exceptional but what gave it its hard edge was the way he defined it against socialism. This sprang from his political career being contemporaneous with the Cold War and the post-war social democratic settlement at home. He was passionately against the practice of Marxist socialism behind the Iron Curtain which denied the individual the opportunity for choice and self-development. He also saw it as economically flawed as the market system could satisfy needs more efficiently than state planning. Labour's policy of nationalisation at home stood equally condemned. So from the moment he became Liberal leader in 1956, Grimond argued that the British left had to choose between two paths to progress: the socialist path based on equality and public ownership or a Liberal path based on freedom, democratic participation and the free market. While most Liberal thinkers would have agreed with Grimond to that point, many in the radical tradition like Beveridge and Keynes would probably have stopped there, as would some later social Liberals such as David Steel. They would have argued that once Clause IV socialism had been eliminated there was not really much to fear from the democratic state being used as an essential tool for bringing about a fairer society. But Grimond was more cautious about the state. He believed that modern governments had an inbuilt tendency to ever expand their activities and waste money on prestige projects, Concorde or nuclear weapons for example. Whereas historically MPs had been sent to Westminster to restrain government spending, since the Second World War they had abandoned this role and had become lobbyists for government intervention. Grimond saw the growth of the state as having two malign consequences. Firstly, high government spending overloaded the British economy, imposing a heavy tax burden on private industry and making economic management more difficult. Secondly, it fostered a culture of dependency on the state and discouraged personal responsibility. This approach placed Grimond close to some new right philosophers like Arthur Seldon of the IEA, accounting for his qualified sympathy with elements of Thatcherism.

However, moving to his third heading, Dr Sloman stressed that Grimond had a positive vision of a liberal society as well as his negative critique of the state, which served to make him such a successful Liberal leader. His vision centred on the need to return to the individual and the community the power that was rightfully theirs. These ideas were reinforced by Grimond's role as MP for Orkney and Shetland. The islands were remote from London and Edinburgh. So despite his links to the establishment by education and marriage, Grimond came to see the governing classes from an outsiders' perspective. Grimond also saw the islanders as representative of that spirit of sturdy independence and mutual personal responsibility he valued so much. He consistently sought to push political power closer to the people, championing Scottish home rule and supporting devolution to Wales and the English regions. At the same time he was very much aware that nations and regions could also be remote and bureaucratic. The real prize was to create active and participative communities on a human scale. That included effective local government but was not limited to it. Nor was community responsibility limited to a vote at the ballot box. In the 1970s Grimond helped organise independent civic development initiatives, with financial support from the Rowntree Trust, believing that these grassroots experiments could achieve more than government bureaucracies. One of his later inspirations was the Mondragon cooperative in the Basque country founded in the 1950s but which by the 1970s had its own local bank, school and technical college as well as its own social insurance scheme. It also chimed with Grimond's longstanding interest in industrial partnership. Grimond very firmly believed in the Elliot Dodds concept of 'ownership for all' wishing to spread property ownership across the community and to democratise industrial relations. He also wished to see power devolved in the area of social welfare. Again following Dodds' approach in the *Unservile State* essays, Grimond felt that state universal provision was inferior to a system in which individuals or voluntary institutions were able to provide for their own or their members' needs because the latter gave citizens greater independence and choice. The welfare state should be allowed to wither away as living standards rose or reduced to a safety net for the poorest. Liberals should focus on raising the incomes of the poor through tax credits or negative income tax rather than provide state subsidies or benefits in kind. Social services were there solely to meet a need, not good things in themselves. To this end Grimond was sympathetic to education vouchers, charges for GP consultations and the sale of council houses.

Grimond understood Liberalism to be a humanitarian creed, grounded in men and women's experience in the world and dedicated to ameliorating their problems; a creed based on the individual and innately suspicious of deities and dogma.

In his final section, Dr Sloman turned to Grimond's internationalism and his ideas about Britain's place in the world, which were as important as his ideas on domestic policy. Grimond was one of the first politicians to recognise and say publicly that Britain could no longer be the great power she had been up until the 1940s. Particularly in the wake of the Suez crisis, Grimond was forthright in arguing that Britain's destiny had to lie in Europe with membership of the Common Market. This was not just on economic grounds but as a matter of political and strategic interest. He called for Britain to reduce her global military interests and pool her nuclear capabilities with other western countries. The common thread between Grimond's domestic and international visions was his low view of the nation state and his belief that power should rest at the most appropriate level.

Dr Sloman concluded that while the main elements of Grimond's ideas were consistent through all his writings and speeches, the more anti-statist aspects did tend to predominate during the early 1950s and the post-leadership phases of his career, rather than in the period of Liberal revival around the time of the Orpington by-election. Yet this was the time when Grimond seemed to inspire people most and draw them into Liberal Party membership or activity. At this time he proposed more public investment and indicative planning to get the British economy moving, in contrast to his usual caution over state intervention. Dr Sloman felt that Grimond was seduced

by the modernising mood of the early 1960s and the opportunities this presented. He hoped the Liberals might capture the spirit of the age, drawing Labour revisionists like Crosland and Jenkins into a new progressive movement. Yet somehow it never quite seemed that Grimond was fully swayed by the slogans and policies the party was using. Once out of the leadership, while Thorpe and Steel continued in more social democratic mode, Grimond reverted to his anti-statist ideas and this could explain Grimond's detached stance towards the Lib–Lab pact and the alliance with the SDP towards which his own strategy of realignment of the left had so clearly pointed.

Policy

Our next speaker was Harry Cowie, a former Director of Research at the Liberal Party and speechwriter to Jo Grimond, with a remit to talk about the development of policy under Grimond's leadership. Tony Greaves remarked that while Jo Grimond was very definitely an ideas man he was not really interested in policy, despite the party producing a great deal of it at the time of his leadership, and he introduced Harry Cowie as the man who responsible for formulating much of that policy at a time when the party had minimal resources to research and develop it.

Harry began by agreeing that Grimond was much more interested in ideas than policy but pointed out that under his leadership the party had set up policy committees and appointed a Director of Research with three assistants funded by Rowntree Trust money. This team also briefed the parliamentary party and did work for Grimond himself. They also produced policy briefings for candidates, not only setting out the Liberal approach but also providing critiques of Conservative and Labour policies. This meant that come the general election, the party was able to produce a useful candidates' handbook answering points which might arise. As a result of their efforts a series of policy reports were published in advance of the 1964 general election. Grimond called Harry to a meeting in his office at the House of Commons and told him he did not want the reports published. Firstly on the grounds he would have to read them. Secondly because Tory Central Office would add up all the costs of the proposals and this would lead to Robin Day asking Grimond on TV how the Liberals were going to pay the bill. Harry contacted the chairman of the department, Mark Bonham Carter, whose view was the very practical one that if the Liberals were to be taken seriously they had to have a credible platform. He knew the party could not rely any longer simply on the traditional policies of free trade, proportional representation and industrial co-partnership. Bonham Carter took on Grimond over the issue of the publication of the reports ensuring they saw the light of day.

One of the new, key, elements of the policies was the issue of regionalism and the passing down of power to other levels of government, introduced as a means of implementing Liberal ideas. This flowed through the whole of Liberal policy, although it was not clear that Grimond actually fully agreed with it, mainly because he feared the cost of new tiers of government might outweigh the benefits. One such reform was the abolition of the hereditary peers and the introduction of appointed Lords with a strong regional element. Regional development plans were to be drawn up by people in the localities backed by a Land Development Corporation to undertake urban renewal, develop new towns, magnet areas and check the drift to the south-east. The regions were to have independence in financial terms with responsibility for health, education and town and country planning. While not directly elected in the first instance, this was expected further down the road. Grimond was keen that these new bodies should take advantage of new techniques, like cost–benefit analysis, or social benefit analysis, to investment decision-making. He also feared the dead hand of the Treasury and supported the party's moves to develop a strategy for growth. The party adopted a flexible target for growth across the economy with a ministry responsible for overseeing progress, a ministry for expansion which would take some of the Treasury's functions. The idea was then followed up by Labour which set up a Department for Economic Affairs after the 1964 general election and to an extent by the Conservatives when they set up the National Economic Development Council in 1962, although Grimond dismissed this as a talking shop. Liberals were also taking the lead on reform of income tax. A heavyweight panel led by Professor Wheatcroft, the editor of the *British Tax Review,* and Hubert Monroe QC wrote a report recommending the abolition of the standard rate of income tax. The standard rate was hardly paid by anyone and made the whole system too complicated, allowing high levels of tax evasion. The scheme was welcomed by Douglas Houghton, the Labour MP, who was General Secretary of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, as a major and innovative proposal.

On co-partnership, Grimond was a repeated critic of the class divisions reflected in British industrial relations.

On co-partnership, Grimond was a repeated critic of the class divisions reflected in British industrial relations. The policy committee on co-partnership was chaired by Peter McGregor, a Ferranti executive. They updated the policy, which went back to the Yellow Book, taking account of developments at the Esso refinery at Fawley where great productivity gains had been made by the dropping of demarcation by the unions. This was in return for generous wage settlements and redundancy schemes. Success depended on the decentralisation of wage bargaining. Under McGregor's plan the union shop stewards were the most likely people to be elected to the works' council, they would get to see the whole picture of the company's development and have a real stake in making things work.

As ever, a key area of Liberal policy was education, as it rested on the liberal principle of individual development and personal happiness. Again the regional approach was important. A major adviser to the party was Alec Peterson, head of the Department of Education at Oxford, who came in as a result of Grimond's leadership. Peterson believed that regional authorities would be able to promote research and encourage fresh thinking in contrast to Labour's centralised approach of building huge comprehensive schools. The study group on the public schools suggested that the independent sector should find new roles. The headmaster of Westminster School was a member of the panel, although he did not wish

that to be known publicly. One of their recommendations was that the public schools should become a new generation of liberal arts colleges on the American model. Grimond's attitude to the public schools was that they should enlarge their intake to wider sections of the community. At the same time Liberals were calling for a large increase in the number of universities, doubling in ten years.

An area of Liberal policy that was especially important to Grimond was foreign policy. His principal adviser was Alastair Buchan, professor of International Affairs at Oxford, who was a proponent of the gradual withdrawal by the UK from worldwide commitments. At the Llandudno conference in 1962, Mark Bonham Carter hardened policy on the EEC. No longer were the Commonwealth or EFTA members to have any simplified veto on British membership and there was a call for greater political unity in Europe with a directly elected European Parliament, proposals which were far in advance of their time.

How to decide the success of these policy initiatives? Seven documents were published before the highly successful 1962 assembly and appropriate resolutions were drafted to get them debated. The press reaction was then very positive. The *Daily Mirror* reported that '… the Liberals have practical policies on housing, town planning, health, old people … they are projecting an image of a party led by hundreds of intelligent professionals. … They are real radicals who want to have a new society. Watch out George Brown and Ian Macleod.' On the day before the 1964 election the first leader in *The Times* was headed 'A Radical Influence'. It read, 'Geographically Britain is an island. She cannot stay one politically … the test is Europe. She needs a government committed to forthright and radical changes, a competitive economy and more sensibly articulate society. The Liberals represent millions of voters on all these things … There should be the largest possible Liberal vote.'

In response to Harold Wilson's comment that he was willing to join Europe if the price was right, Grimond commented this was rather like reserving judgment on the Reformation until you knew what the monasteries would fetch.

Leadership

Our final speaker was Michael Meadowcroft on Jo Grimond's leadership of the Liberal Party. Meadowcroft joined the party in Southport at the end of the 1950s and his key early role was as local government officer. He went on to become Liberal MP for Leeds West from 1983 to 1987.

Meadowcroft began by recalling how Jo Grimond, in contrast to the current Twitter generation, used to say, 'Never ask me to say a few words. I will give you a speech, a lecture, write an article at the drop of a hat but "just a few words" is much too difficult.' Meadowcroft admitted that when he joined the Liberal Party in 1958 he did not know much about Jo Grimond. But later that year he went to a huge rally in Blackpool, one of those affairs that the party could put on, even in the dark days before the revival and heard Grimond speak – and he was magnificent. Grimond had physical advantages. He had a wonderful resonant voice. He was a large, tall man and could never be intimidated by the press – or by hecklers. At the rally a member of the League of Empire Loyalists began shouting. Grimond challenged him to come down to the front if he wanted to ask a question. Then he waited while the heckler slowly trudged down from the gallery only to wave him away when he got there. Grimond also projected a slightly anarchic or academic air when it suited the occasion but when he needed to be direct he was unstoppable. The general election of 1959 was the first time that politicians could be asked questions by members of a studio audience posed through the presenter, Robin Day. A questioner wished to know if Grimond was in favour of joining the Common Market and wanted a 'yes or no' answer. So Grimond just said 'yes'. Day attempted to follow up but Grimond stood his ground. This was an example of his sense of humour used for political purposes. In response to Harold Wilson's comment that he was willing to join Europe if the price was right, Grimond commented this was rather like reserving judgment on the Reformation until you knew what the monasteries would fetch. He used self-deprecation but was not a humble man. He possessed a sentimental arrogance about himself that he was capable of achieving things. He took on the Liberal leadership at a time when the party was in a poor state but he truly believed he could recreate a viable Liberal Party. His style filled a gap in contemporary politics and he used it to appeal to the social democratic side of the Labour Party to create a progressive consensus. He was disappointed in the long run but he felt it was possible to mix syndicalism with social reform, as advocated by George Orwell, much to the horror of many senior Liberals. The self-assurance and confidence with which he proposed such things appealed to people greatly. Before becoming leader, Grimond had been chief whip of the tiny parliamentary party. Despite there only being six MPs, they frequently voted three different ways and it was Grimond's responsibility to keep the disparate members together. He understood this and still felt he could achieve it by leading from the front. A good example of this was his line on Suez, which he got the party to follow even though many believed it was wrong.

Grimond used his gifts even more effectively outside the House of Commons. From his performances in the House, people in parliament at the time often used to be bemused at what people outside saw in Grimond. Given that he usually had to speak once the House emptied after the front bench speeches it is not surprising that he saw little merit in trying to use the floor of the House to make an impact. His element was television or groups of people (especially the young). His crinkly smile and disarming, slightly crumpled appearance showed a common touch which people found tremendously attractive. He was also popular at party headquarters because he did not interfere, perhaps unlike every other party leader before or since. His knew his job was to lead the party not administer it. As a platform performer Grimond was absolutely magnificent. He was perhaps the best orator of his day, epitomised by his 'sound of gunfire' speech, and could genuinely enthuse and inspire. The structure of his speeches was similar. The first segment hit you between the eyes to get your attention. In the middle, came fifteen minutes of ideas. You were always struck by his ability to close by hitting the Liberal nail on the head when talking about the current topics of the day.

Grimond was also a great believer in the power of politics. For that reason he used to hate staged photo-shoots which he regarded as insufficiently serious. He refused to take part in stunts such as pretending to sleep rough, always preferring reflective, rationale debate and the exchange of ideas. He insisted on reading the morning papers even when general election timetables required him to be elsewhere and held court at his home at Kew into the small hours with amusing anecdotes as well as serious debate about the election.

During the 1966 general election, Grimond's eldest son Andrew, committed suicide. The prime minister arranged for RAF transport to help him travel. Meadowcroft concluded that the shock of the death of his son took more out of Grimond than was realised at the time. In 1967 he resigned the party leadership against the advice of many in the party including Meadowcroft himself, saying he had had nearly ten years in which to get on or get out and he felt he had done all he could. In retrospect however Meadowcroft believed Grimond had served one year too many. In the final year he got very stubborn and it was often necessary to have two people present at meetings with him to ensure he stuck to what he had agreed. His deafness, while it could be used to his advantage with people he preferred not to engage with, was getting to a point where it was a problem for him. Harry Cowie added that a major factor in his decision to retire was his sense of having been let down by Harold Wilson with whom Grimond felt he had an agreement to bring in proportional representation. Whether such an agreement was reached is unsure but there is no doubt Grimond did feel sidelined after the result of 1966 election. To end, Meadowcroft quoted Grimond as saying, 'What should alarm us about politicians is not that they break their promises but they frequently keep them.'

Tony Greaves ended the meeting with a reading from the Young Liberal publication *Gunfire*, which was named after Grimond's famous 'Sound of Gunfire' assembly speech. When it was written in 1968, Greaves was the editor of the publication. The article was headed 'The Grimond Generation'. 'We are the Grimond generation. Whether we like it or not most of joined and became active in the Liberals and Young Liberals when Jo Grimond was not only the Liberal leader, to all intents and purposes he was the Liberal Party. He had virtually no Parliamentary party and policy was whatever Jo said at the time. It must have been shockingly undemocratic but we were newcomers and did not really notice. We joined because the Liberals (Jo Grimond) seemed to be bright and new and relevant and sensible.'

Graham Lippiatt is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

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LETTERS

Honor Balfour

It was fascinating to read about Honor Balfour in *Journal of Liberal History* 78 (spring 2013), not least because I was one of the people mentioned as having consulted her papers while she was alive. I thought readers would be interested to to know more about this and about Honor in her later years.

I started the research for my doctorate on the Liberal Party 1945–64 in late 1994 and began the task of identifying suitable interviewees. My supervisor, Dr Michael Hart, mentioned that Honor Balfour lived locally and had fought a by-election during the Second World War as an independent Liberal. I contacted Cotswolds Liberal Democrats and got her address. In those pre-Google days I knew nothing about Honor: all I had to go on was the close result in Darwen in 1943.

We met in Burford in January 1995. She was tiny, spoke in precise terms, and seemed amused to be of interest to a research student. I was crammed into her tiny car for the short drive to her cottage at Windrush. There it was soon clear that she had a passion for post-war British politics. Her library was enormous. She owned the biography or autobiography of every major politician active during her career. She had incisive views on the current political scene, when New Labour was on the rise and the Major government was beginning to collapse. Although she was not a name-dropper, it was clear that she still had links to the politicians from the 1950s, 60s and 70s whom she had interviewed. Former cabinet ministers sometimes dropped in for lunch.

My interview covered her early political career, her views on the Liberal Party during the war, the circumstances of the Darwen by-election and her subsequent interest in politics. A left-wing Liberal, she had been tempted to join the Labour Party, not least because Harold Laski offered her a choice of safe Labour seats, but she had been put off by the party's link with the trade unions. Had she taken up Laski's offer she might well have become a cabinet minister under Harold Wilson (whom she knew at Oxford). Instead she committed herself to a career in journalism.

Towards the end of the interview Honor said that she had some papers upstairs which might be of interest so, mindful of the time of the bus back to Oxford, I arranged to return. When I did so I was ushered up to a spare room and invited to rifle through some boxes of papers, press clippings and photos. Some were hers and some she had inherited from Lancelot Spicer, head of the Liberal Party's Radical Action group in the 1940s. Here was a treasure trove of information which had not previously seen the light of day and which I wrote up in my thesis and then for an article in this *Journal* ('Radical Action and the Liberal Party during the Second World War', *Journal* 63, summer 2009). As a research student, finding something new and interesting was like discovering gold dust.

During this and a later visit I discovered that Honor was also a talented cook. I was treated to a three-course lunch with beer – a cut above my usual student lifestyle. I liked her tomato salad so much I borrowed the recipe, and still use it today. When I finished with the papers Honor asked if I could arrange for them to be deposited at her old college, St Anne's. I suggested that the Bodleian would be a more suitable home for them and put her in touch with the archivist. I am delighted that her papers are now there, properly catalogued and cared for.

I kept in touch with Honor after my research ended and visited her for the last time shortly before her death. Suffering from emphysema and reliant on oxygen, she was as cheerful as ever, looking out from her book-lined study over the Cotswolds countryside.

Mark Egan

1963 Dumfries by-election

David Dutton's fascinating tale of the *Dumfries Standard* in your last splendid issue (*Journal of Liberal History* 79, summer 2013) dealt rather lightly with the 1963 by-election at which the hapless Liberal candidate Charles Abernethy lost his deposit. It was an object lesson in the result of the Liberal Party not fighting the seat for so long.

I was assistant secretary of the Scottish Liberal Party at the time and was sent down to help organise the campaign, for which I was very grateful because without that experience I would never have accepted to abandon my PPC role in Edinburgh and step into the sudden vacancy next door in Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles. What happened in Dumfries was that on Sunday afternoons I held a strategy meeting at which each branch reported in. I was told: 'we are doing rather well in Eskdalemuir' – a community with about 180 voters on the roll, and: 'insufficient returns from Dumfries burgh', which had some 18,000 voters. Indeed, only two turned up for the eve-of-poll rally in the burgh.

So when I tackled the Borders seat I said 'forget the 53 villages and with our limited forces concentrate on the eight towns'. That post-Dumfriesshire strategy paid off in 1964, reducing the Tory majority of nearly 10,000 to under 2,000 and paving the way for the successful by-election in 1965.

David Steel (Lord Steel of Aikwood)

Aubrey Herbert

I met Aubrey Herbert (noted in letters, *Journal of Liberal History* 79, summer 2013), in the early 1960s when we both served on the Liberal Council. A most approachable, genial, laid-back character, he had a fund of numerous political anecdotes which he told with wit and deliberate understatement, in a measured, Leslie-Phillips-style drawl. At Chester in the bitter general election of 1931, he was hospitalised after a Conservative official, yelling 'You traitor! Treason!' rammed an umbrella, point first, into his chest, where it stuck fast between two ribs. Aubrey was one of those Liberals who would be my first choice as a dinner party guest. I find myself wondering once more: 'Where have all the Liberal characters gone?'

Lionel King

Liberals and Ireland

In the review of Gerald R. Hall's *Ulster Liberalism* by Eugenio F. Biagini (*Journal of Liberal History* 79, summer 2013), there was a reference to Irish Presbyterians as 'Nonconformists'. Surely, after the disestablishment of the Church of England in Ireland in 1869, there were no 'Nonconformists' in Ireland.

Further, following Irish criticism of the 1871 Irish Land Act for not providing for fair rents and fixity of tenure, and, with the defeat of the 1873 Irish Universities Bill, with 43 (mainly Irish) Liberal MPs voting with the Conservatives, as the Bill did not provide for a state-funded Roman Catholic university, most Irish Liberal MPs elected in 1868 contested the 1874 general election as candidates of the new Irish Home Rule Party, or were defeated by such candidates. This had disastrous consequences for the Victorian Liberal Party in Ireland, reaching a nadir at the 1886 general election, when there was only one Liberal candidate in Ireland.

James Fargher, in his wide-ranging article on 'The South African War and its effect on the Liberal [–Irish Nationalist] Alliance', might have mentioned that there was not only a temporary *de facto* Conservative–Irish Nationalist alliance at the 1900 general election but also at the 1885 general election. Indeed, if 17 more pro-home rule Liberal MPs had been elected in 1885, the first Irish Home Rule Bill would have secured a Second Reading on 8 June 1886, and the next challenge to the Liberal government would not have been a general election but the Conservative (and Liberal Unionist) majority in the House of Lords.

Moreover, the home-rule-by-stages approach agreed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, with Asquith and Grey, and then with the Irish Nationalist leadership in November 1905, led on to the 1907 Irish Council Bill. However, the Bill made no progress as it was unanimously rejected by an Irish National Convention in Dublin during the Whitsun recess, given that it offered neither as much as Gladstone's Home Rule Bills nor the Dual Monarchy approach then favoured by the new Sinn Fein movement (founded in 1905) nor the aspirations of the semi-secret Irish Republican Brotherhood, and also by reason of priestly opposition to secular control of Irish schools. The Irish Parliamentary Party was now in the position that any further appearance of compromising in relation to the fuller Irish demands would be fatal electorally – as would be the case some eleven years later.

Finally, mention should also be made of the Irish Home Rule motion, with the wording agreed with the dying Campbell-Bannerman, carried by 313 votes to 159 in the House of Commons in late March 1908.

Dr Sandy S. Waugh

Women leaders

In this spring's edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* (issue 78), in the report on the 'Mothers of Liberty' conference fringe meeting, a statement is attributed to one of the parliamentarian speakers that 'Kirsty Williams … is currently the only female leader of any part of the Liberal Democrats'. This overlooks Fiona Hall MEP, who has been our leader in the European Parliament since 2009, and who will lead us superbly in next year's election.

Anthony Hook

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LIBERALISM AND N
THE VICTORIAN

'The Liberal Party is a house of many mansions', Sir William Harcourt once observed. At the time it was not altogether a compliment. From the perspective of late-Victorian party management, the sheer variety of Liberalism in social and intellectual terms added considerably to the complications of keeping a parliamentary majority intact during what was notionally a seven-year term. On the other hand, as the foundation for building a coherent and inclusive sense of national identity Liberalism looked a much more serviceable vehicle. By **Martin Pugh**.

In its heyday from the 1850s to 1914 the Liberal Party enjoyed significant support in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland; it included High Anglicans, Nonconformists, secular Radicals and Jews; it mobilised agricultural labourers and aristocratic landowners, trade unionists and major employers, monarchists and Republicans, dedicated teetotallers and successful brewers. This rainbow coalition not only reflected British society in all its inconsistency and exuberance, it also proved to be instrumental in integrating the various elements into the system and giving them a sense of Britishness that seems increasingly elusive today.

This was no small achievement, for at the start of the nineteenth century Britain was a society experiencing great social and economic upheaval while being run by a largely closed aristocratic elite comprising just a few hundred families. As John Vincent observed some years ago, the Liberal Party offered an answer to the question of who was to govern the nation

ATIONAL IDENTITY
ACHIEVEMENT

after the landed aristocracy ceased to be able to do so by themselves.[1] In effect the solution lay in gradually curtailing, though not overthrowing, aristocratic rule and supplementing it by drawing in talent from outside its ranks and eventually engaging comparatively poor and powerless people in the political process.

To this end, nineteenth-century Liberals developed what today would be called a *narrative* designed to explain the nation's past and its present. At the constitutional level this drew on the notion of a rough-and-ready democracy dating back to Anglo-Saxon England that had been subverted by the Norman Conquest; in this analysis, parliamentary reform could be seen as patriotic and British. In time the British had overthrown the absolutism of the Stuart Kings, replacing it with a parliamentary monarchy and a balanced system of government in which three institutions, King, Lords and Commons, checked each other's exercise of power. The Liberal philosopher, John Locke, argued that men placed themselves under society on the basis that the state guaranteed to safeguard their lives and property, with the clear implication that failure to do so gave them a legitimate reason for rebellion against authority.

In this way emerged the characteristic liberal belief that liberty was integral to Britishness and Britain the most free society on earth, a view widely endorsed by Continental observers by the nineteenth century. Among other things this involved never imprisoning men without bringing them to trial, not levying taxes without parliamentary approval, and maintaining a free press and freedom to criticise the highest in the land. Although the basis for this system was far from democratic – only 2.6 per cent of the population enjoyed a vote before the 1832 Reform Act – Liberals believed they had found the means of steadily extending popular participation without recourse to the violence and revolutionary upheaval experienced by Continental Europe in 1789–1815, in 1830, in 1848, in 1870 and at intervals in Tsarist Russia. By contrast the British had a genius for step-by-step reform. Although the 'Whig' interpretation of gradual, managed political change tends to be disparaged more than respected today, it exercised a powerful influence on British thinking and on British politicians right up to the time of Clement Attlee.

The role of Victorian Liberals in building a coherent idea of Britishness is the more obvious by comparison with their Conservative rivals. No doubt Conservatism also mobilised a wide range of support when forced to do so by the expansion of the electorate. Later in the century, under Disraeli and Salisbury, it promoted its claim as the patriotic, imperial and monarchist party as a challenge to Liberalism as the national party; but in the process Conservatism confirmed itself as a much more exclusive force, reliant on exploiting fears and antagonisms about external factors. For much of the century Conservatism

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was a narrow movement too closely linked to the Anglican establishment and the maintenance of privilege generally. The 1846 split over the repeal of the Corn Laws left the party more dependent on its rural and landed interests and reluctant to adjust to industrial-urban Britain. After the expansion of the electorate in 1867 and 1885 it retained very little representation in Wales, and not much more in Scotland until the Liberal split over home rule in 1886 boosted the party with Liberal Unionist recruits. Above all, Conservatives were alienated from the Irish by virtue of their links with the Anglo-Irish landowners and the maintenance of the Anglican establishment over a Catholic population. Defence of the Union with Ireland made the Conservative appeal more negative and divisive than ever. In a reactionary speech in 1886, Lord Salisbury deliberately polarised opinion by disparaging the Irish for being as unsuited to self-government as the Hottentots; he advised them to emigrate to Manitoba, a suggestion almost as insulting to the Canadians as it was to the Irish![2] The most the Conservatives achieved was to win sixteen to seventeen seats in Ulster, in the context of a hundred for Ireland as a whole, by exploiting the fears of the Protestant minority.

In effect Conservatism became the *English* party, as it is today, rather than the British party. Conservatives even struggled to come to terms with provincial England and its leaders, apart from the Glaswegian Andrew Bonar Law, were essentially English. Admittedly

Arthur Balfour had a home in the Scottish Borders but his mental outlook was entirely dominated by metropolitan society, London clubland and Hertfordshire. Visits to the provinces left Balfour feeling queasy. 'Public meetings in great towns have attendant horrors in the way of subsidiary luncheons and dinner', he complained to Lord Salisbury, 'which are fatal to one's temper at the moment and to one's digestion afterwards.'[3] He was not altogether sorry to be defeated at Manchester East in 1906!

Today, with British national identity unravelling fast, the apparently secure Britishness of Victorian society seems remarkable, rooted as it was in pride in economic success, parliamentary government, imperial expansion and popular monarchism, not least because Britain comprised four distinct nationalities and suffered from divisions of all kinds. Religion, for example, generated political controversy right up to 1914. But while Conservatism increasingly took its stand on defence of the Anglican establishment, Liberalism managed to be more inclusive. This was symbolised by W. E. Gladstone, who was a staunch Anglican so immersed in Christian theology that he might have made a career as a bishop, but also enjoyed huge credibility as the exponent of what came to be called the 'Nonconformist Conscience' in late-Victorian Britain. In effect the role of Liberalism lay in curtailing some of the least defensible advantages of Anglicanism and incorporating non-Anglicans into the system. This was essential because although the Church of England enjoyed the legal status of an established church, it fell well short of being an effective national church. By 1800 it claimed only 46 per cent of active church-goers compared with 43 per cent for the Nonconformist churches and 10 per cent for the Catholics. Although the Liberal Party included many Anglicans in its parliamentary leadership, it harnessed the support of the Nonconformists, by tackling the disabilities that had excluded them from participation in national life, so effectively that in the 1906 parliament 177 Nonconformists sat as Liberal MPs. It ended the church monopoly on marriage through the introduction of civil marriage in 1838, and excluded the church courts from the process of divorce in 1857.[4] It was also responsible for disestablishing the church in Ireland in 1869 and in Wales in 1920. In 1858 Liberals helped remove the disability that excluded Jews as non-Christians from sitting as MPs. These reforms would have attracted condemnation from the *Daily Mail* as being anti-Christian, politically correct and multicultural, though fortunately it did not come unto existence until the end of the century. Even so, reforms of this kind were not achieved without some political cost, though they gradually had the effect of fostering the inclusive society of the pre-1914 era.

Rather less complicated, though even more efficacious, was the association of Victorian Liberalism with the British success story in the shape of Britain's role as a pre-eminent manufacturing and commercial power. Mid-Victorian Liberals were imbued with an optimistic belief in the inevitability of progress that distinguishes their society from ours. The mood was typically expressed by the historian, H. T. Buckle, in his *History of Civilisation in England* (1857–61) – like other contemporaries he was inclined to equate civilisation with England! In his explanation for national characteristics and successes, Buckle put much of the emphasis on material factors such as the gloomy climate and Britain's island position. He thought that freedom from invasion had resulted in the English being especially attached to liberty and less willing to accept authoritarian rule than the peoples of Continental Europe.

Such sentiments were robustly voiced by Lord Palmerston, who enjoyed a strong, and typically Liberal, sense of the superiority of the English government and constitution. As foreign secretary, Palmerston welcomed the growing ascendancy of Liberal principles in Europe and cheerfully associated himself with reform movements even when, as in 1848, they took the form of revolutions; he argued with some reason that this reflected public opinion. Thus, when accused of promoting and aiding rebellion by sanctioning the dispatch of arms to the Sicilians in the 1840s, he brushed aside his critics. Arguably Palmerston's foreign policy proved to be a more formative contribution to the emergence of the Liberal Party in the mid-Victorian period than his more equivocal views on domestic reform, for he was instrumental in popularising a Liberal narrative based on the steady promotion of reform and self-determination against autocracy and the abuse of power by emperors and Catholic regimes all over the Continent.

While Conservatism increasingly took its stand on defence of the Anglican establishment, Liberalism managed to be more inclusive. This was symbolised by W. E. Gladstone, who was a staunch Anglican … but also enjoyed huge credibility as the exponent of what came to be called the 'Nonconformist Conscience' in late-Victorian Britain.

For Liberals this cause went hand in hand with the other key vehicle of progress: the implementation and extension of free trade. The rationale was both material and moral. Free trade raised the living standards of the growing urban population, kept down the costs of the manufacturers and boosted both direct exports and indirect earnings from investment, shipping and insurance. Free trade created the confidence that an ever-expanding industry would eventually create work for everyone who was capable and thereby eliminate poverty from British society. But Liberals also invested free trade with moral implications in that by drawing other countries into a system of economic cooperation and interdependence they felt it would inexorably erode the causes of war.

One by-product of this confidence in material progress was to make the British, though robustly patriotic, more relaxed about expressing their nationalism than other peoples. As British national identity could virtually be taken for granted there seemed less need to assert it. Consequently the British neglected some of the obvious expressions of national identity used in other countries. For example they had no day of national celebration until Lord Meath dreamed up the idea of 'Empire Day'. Significantly, no one was very interested, and when the House of Commons debated Empire Day in 1908 members rejected the idea by a majority of sixty-eight. Eventually Empire Day was adopted in 1916, a sign that British self-confidence was now slipping.

Empire provoked a good deal of controversy between the two parties, especially later in the century, which may appear to signify their different approach to this element in national identity. However, the differences were less than they appeared. Both Liberal and Conservative administrations

presided over dramatic extensions of colonial territory; yet this was rarely the result of a deliberate policy, rather the consequence of initiatives taken locally by ambitious governors general and military commanders in defiance of London. Home governments frequently despaired about being dragged into costly new campaigns designed to rescue British colonists from conflicts with native peoples. For example, the reckless seizure of several princely states by Dalhousie helped to provoke the Indian revolt of 1857. Gladstone notoriously became entangled in 1880 when General Gordon, who had been sent to withdraw troops from the Sudan, flagrantly disobeyed orders and was killed by the rebels as a result. Despite the controversy over Gordon, imperial policy was usually bi-partisan. Several forward moves by the post-1874 Conservative government were actually continuations of policies initiated by the previous Liberal administration.

On the other hand, by the late-Victorian period the two parties did increasingly diverge over imperial questions partly because Disraeli, who had previously disparaged colonies as 'millstones around our neck', accused Gladstone of wanting to dismember the empire following his withdrawal of troops from New Zealand. In the Midlothian campaigns of 1878–80 Gladstone famously attacked Disraeli for reckless aggrandisement over the wars in Afghanistan and South Africa, though as usual they were largely the result of local initiatives. Liberals also criticised Disraeli for his decision to make Queen Victoria Empress of India, which seemed alien to the British tradition: imperial titles smacked of the Continental autocracies of Russia, Austria and Germany.

Moreover, by the 1880s many Liberals saw the empire as a moral issue; they argued that colonial rule was justified in so far as it enabled Britain to extend the advantages of efficient government and economic development to less developed societies. As the territories of white settlement were now becoming self-governing Dominions they envisaged that other parts of the empire would eventually join them. India posed the most embarrassing challenge to liberal principles. Yet, though ostensibly the Raj offered a system of alien, autocratic rule much appreciated by Lord Salisbury and those Tories who disliked the trend towards participatory democracy at home, India was never the unqualified autocracy it appeared to be. Liberal Viceroys like Lord Ripon took pains to maintain a free press in India, in the face of Tory opposition, thereby keeping open the door for Indian participation in public debate. Gradually a university system was created, in the process fostering a class of Indians familiar with Western liberal ideas about law and government. It is usually forgotten that the Indian Civil Service was also open, via the examination system, and although only a handful of Indians had joined the I.C.S. by 1900, the numbers steadily grew – for example, by the 1930s half the officers in the Bombay Presidency were Indians. Although these policies were disparaged by Conservatives as subversive, for Liberals they gave tangible form to the belief that the ultimate justification for British rule lay in leading Indians towards self-government. In this sense Liberalism incorporated its thinking about empire into its wider view of Britishness.

Despite the popular prejudice against the Irish for causing pressure on housing, employment and the poor law, for Liberal Britain it remained a matter of pride and patriotism to admit both economic migrants and those fleeing political persecution abroad.

Indeed, Victorian Liberal attitudes towards empire and free trade were characterised by a combination of idealism and hard-headedness. One consequence was what, by today's standards, was a remarkably relaxed view of the free trade in *people*. Until interrupted by war in 1914 Britain routinely experienced massive emigration, immigration and internal migration. By far the majority of internal migrants were the Irish, forced out initially by the famine in the 1840s. Seen from the perspective of an inclusive national identity, the Irish presented challenges similar to those thought to be posed by Catholics during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and by Muslims in the late twentieth. That is to say they were widely demonised as a subversive element, lacking loyalty to Britain and outside the values and institutions of the host country. In reality things were more complicated, for while the late-Victorian Irish nationalists sponsored a terrorist campaign in the countryside they also maintained a respectable parliamentary party. On the mainland Irish communities remained distinctive but were steadily absorbed into the political and social mainstream. They were mobilised by political parties, joined trade unions, and gave a welcome boost to the Catholic Church and Catholic schools.

Despite the popular prejudice against the Irish for causing pressure on housing, employment and the poor law, for Liberal Britain it remained a matter of pride and patriotism to admit both economic migrants and those fleeing political persecution abroad. Challenged by a deputation of trade unionists in 1895 complaining about immigrants, the Home Secretary, H. H. Asquith, simply rebuked them: 'who has gained most among the nations of the world from the free circulation and competition of labour? … who would suffer most from the exclusion of foreign labour? Again, the English.'[5] In fact, by the 1850s it had become essential to the British self-image as a nation of liberty-lovers to offer refuge to anyone, but especially to those oppressed by Catholic regimes and by authoritarian governments in Italy, France, Russia and Germany. As a result London became notorious as the centre for violent opponents of Continental regimes, who usually went unpunished for their activities.

Liberal attitudes towards immigration were tested by the new influx of Jewish refugees in the 1890s mostly fleeing persecution under the Tsarist regime. By 1900 around 160,000 Jews lived in Britain and by 1914 around 300,000. The new arrivals seemed to pose a challenge to Britishness because they followed a different religion, many spoke no English and they were regarded as a burden. The Conservatives exploited popular anti-Semitism in the East End, where they won several seats, and passed the Aliens Restriction Act in 1905 with a view to checking Jewish immigration. In fact the 1905 Act had little effect, perhaps because after 1906 it was implemented by Liberal Home Secretaries. Winston Churchill, who occupied the Home Office in 1910–11, robustly defended 'the old tolerant practice of free entry and asylum to which this country has so long adhered and from which it has so greatly benefited.'[6] The remarks of Churchill and Asquith remind us

that the inclusive Liberal version of Britishness in this period was effectively underpinned by confidence in material success; conversely it was to be undermined in the decades after 1918 by economic decline.

Moreover, the stance towards Jews adopted by Liberals in the late-Victorian period built on an existing policy developed in the context of the smaller but long-standing community. As early as 1847 Lionel Rothschild had been elected to parliament as a Liberal but was prevented from taking his seat by the requirement to take the oath as a Christian; this was lifted in 1858. Nathan Rothschild eventually became the first Jew to receive a peerage after the recommendation of Gladstone who earned warm praise in the Jewish community for helping Jews to participate in mainstream British life.[7] By1900, nine Jews sat as MPs – mostly Liberals – and three rose through the party hierarchy to ministerial posts after 1906: Rufus Isaacs, Herbert Samuel and Edwin Montagu. It was noticeable that whereas before 1900 Jews had usually represented East End seats where they were presumed to enjoy an advantage, the Edwardian candidates ventured further afield, Isaacs to Reading, Samuel to Cleveland and Montagu to Cambridgeshire. This pattern of formal assimilation was complemented by the leaders of the Jewish community who went out of their way to express their loyalty, especially during the Boer War and the First World War, on the basis that Britain had treated them fairly and that Jews must reciprocate.[8] In effect the Jewish community had maintained its own culture and traditions in the context of what would now be called a multicultural society while enthusiastically embracing British values, causes and institutions.

But it was arguably in managing Britain as a multinational state that nineteenth-century Liberals made their most signal contribution to national identity. There was nothing inevitable about this achievement. The original Union of England with Wales, Scotland and Ireland owed a good deal to bullying by the dominant power at best and to sheer military conquest at worst; and while it worked well for Scotland and Wales, Ireland was never effectively assimilated. After the 1707 Union with Scotland, much of the eighteenth century was marred by outbreaks of virulent Scottophobia among the English, symbolised by some of the words in the national anthem – 'rebellious Scots to crush' – which reflected contemporary fears about repeated Jacobite revolts. For their part the Scots remained sensitive to symptoms of metropolitan arrogance well into the nineteenth century. When Palmerston visited Glasgow in 1853 he was corrected by the locals for repeatedly referring to 'England' and 'the English' when he meant Britain. On a subsequent visit he took care to avoid giving offence.[9]

Above all it was Gladstone who bestrode the multinational British state. With his roots in provincial Liverpool, his estates at Hawarden in North Wales, his adopted Scottish constituency and his dedication to resolving the grievances of Ireland he symbolised the role of Liberalism as the link between the diverse elements in Victorian society.

However, after 1800 Scottophobia became increasingly anachronistic as Scots enjoyed the economic benefits of Union and became drawn into the political mainstream. They took advantage of access to the large English market, employment opportunities in the expanding empire, and imports of cheap food and raw materials under the free trade system. By this stage the Scottish aristocracy had built London homes, played the English marriage market, sat in Cabinets and administered imperial territories. In the process they demonstrated that to embrace Britain involved no surrender of Scottish nationality. The Gordons of Aberdeenshire are a good example of how such families advanced through Liberal politics. In 1852 the fourth Earl of Aberdeen led the Whig–Liberal–Peelite coalition that formed the basis of the Victorian Liberal Party. In 1898 Gladstone appointed the seventh Earl governor general of Canada and first Marquess of Aberdeen. Perhaps the most iconic Anglo-Scots figure was Lord Rosebery. A popular Scottish landowner who acted as Gladstone's impresario in the Midlothian campaigns, Rosebery occupied several pivotal roles British including president of the Imperial Federation League, the first chairman of the London County Council and briefly prime minister. In this way he epitomised the compatibility of British greatness with Scottish national pride.

Above all it was Gladstone who bestrode the multinational British state. With his roots in provincial Liverpool, his estates at Hawarden in North Wales, his adopted Scottish constituency and his dedication to resolving the grievances of Ireland he symbolised the role of Liberalism as the link between the diverse elements in Victorian society. 'English policy has achieved no triumph so great as the Union between England and Scotland', he claimed. In view of Gladstone's absorption with Ireland it is easily forgotten how important he was in recognising the distinctiveness of Welsh cultural and political views. As a result, under Liberalism Wales won its first specifically Welsh legislation in the shape of the Sunday Closing Act; in 1872 a college was established at Aberystwyth that evolved into the University of Wales in 1893; the National Library of Wales was founded in 1905; and a Welsh Department to promote the Welsh language was set up in 1907.

This record looks rather like a successful example of Victorian multiculturalism, for Wales became fully absorbed into the British mainstream. By 1880 no fewer than twenty-nine of the thirty-three Welsh constituencies returned Liberal MPs. Liberals were only a little less dominant in the seventy-two Scottish seats following the extension of the electorate in 1885. Whereas previously ambitious Scots had often come south to find a parliamentary seat, by the late-Victorian and Edwardian period English Liberal carpetbaggers happily ventured north: Gladstone to Midlothian, Asquith to East Fife, Augustine Birrell to East Lothian, John Morley to Montrose, and Winston Churchill who represented Dundee as a Liberal from 1908 to 1922.

Nor was Scotland merely a convenience for Liberal politicians. Given their sympathy for Greeks and Italians struggling to win national self-determination they were naturally sympathetic to Scottish pressure, which was greatly stimulated by the campaign for Irish home rule, leading to the formation of the Scottish Home Rule Association in 1886. But unlike the Conservatives, Liberals did not see this as a threat. In 1885 they created the Scottish Office with its own secretary of state. By 1906 there was a Liberal–Labour parliamentary majority in favour of establishing a Scottish parliament as part of a wider scheme for home-rule-all-round. Had this movement not been disrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914 with its concomitant

political changes it would have put multinational Britain onto a more secure base for the twentieth century.

Of course, this Liberal achievement must be heavily qualified by the failure in Ireland, which ultimately resulted in the partition of 1921. Yet this outcome was not inevitable. Victorian Liberals inherited a highly dysfunctional system for governing Ireland through a viceroy, a chief secretary and the hundred Irish MPs. Initially Gladstone underestimated the depth of Irish grievances in that his first land reform and his disestablishment of the Church failed to check the nationalist tide. A crucial step in the breakdown of the Union came at the election of 1874 when the Home Rule Party won fifty-seven constituencies, largely displacing Liberals in the process. Gladstone then went much further in tackling the social problem with the 1880 Land Act, an astonishingly interventionist measure at the time that effectively curtailed the rights of private property owners through rent tribunals. During the 1870s and 1880s Liberals also made efforts to tackle the economic grievances of the rural population in Ulster with a view to reconciling the Protestant and Catholic communities and thereby consolidating their loyalty to the Union. For some years the parliamentary leadership in London strove to integrate the Ulster tenant farmers into the British mainstream.[10]

Ultimately, however, this strategy failed as opinion polarised between a radical Irish nationalism and a reactionary Ulster Unionism encouraged by the English Tories. However, Gladstone's first Home Rule Bill represented a realistic attempt to solve the problem. His draft measure was based on a 'Proposed Constitution for Ireland' prepared by Parnell and handed to Gladstone in November 1886.[11] The bill satisfied Irish aspirations by creating a parliament in Dublin but also maintained the Union by retaining control over defence and foreign policy at Westminster. 'What fools we were not to have accepted Gladstone's Home Rule bill', King George V, who favoured a general policy of devolution, told Ramsay MacDonald in 1930.[12] The rejection of the legislation 1886, when ninety-three Liberal Unionists rebelled against Gladstone, inflicted serious damage on the role of Liberalism as the effective British national party and enabled the Tories to undermine the party's standing and its electoral base.

On the other hand, the Irish national movement retained its central place in British politics, thereby keeping alive the prospect of resolving the Irish Question by parliamentary means. While the Home Rule Party retained over eighty of the hundred Irish members right up to 1914, in the English urban constituencies Irish voters were effectively organised with a view to sustaining the majorities of Liberal candidates. More widely the movement for home rule had a radicalising effect on Liberal politics, not simply by promoting constitutional reform but by advancing the idea of state intervention in the sphere of private property, an idea capable of extension to the mainland. When the Irish held the balance of power after 1910 they forced the issue back onto the agenda and the passage of a Home Rule Bill under the Parliament Act prior to the outbreak of war in 1914. Ultimately the parliamentary strategy for satisfying Irish ambitions within the Union was not decisively derailed until 1915 when the Irish leader, John Redmond, unwisely declined Asquith's invitation to participate in his new coalition government. Thereby he allowed the Unionists to occupy positions of power, and by 1918 the Liberal–Irish alliance had been fatally undermined by reactions to the Easter Rebellion and the emergence of Sinn Fein. Both parties suffered heavily in the election of 1918.

This represented the one great failure of Liberalism in its work of sustaining the viability of the British state. It is no accident that the long-term decline of the Union and of Liberalism coincided. After 1918 the rationale for the wider Union was gradually undermined though this was not obvious for many years. In Scotland and Wales the Liberals gave way to the two rigidly pro-Unionist parties, and the idea of devolution largely disappeared from politics. But as early as the 1920s long-term economic decline set in among the manufacturing and extractive industries of Scotland and Wales, admittedly interrupted by the Second World War, with the result that Westminster lost its claims to competence and the rationale for the four-country Union began the long process of unravelling.

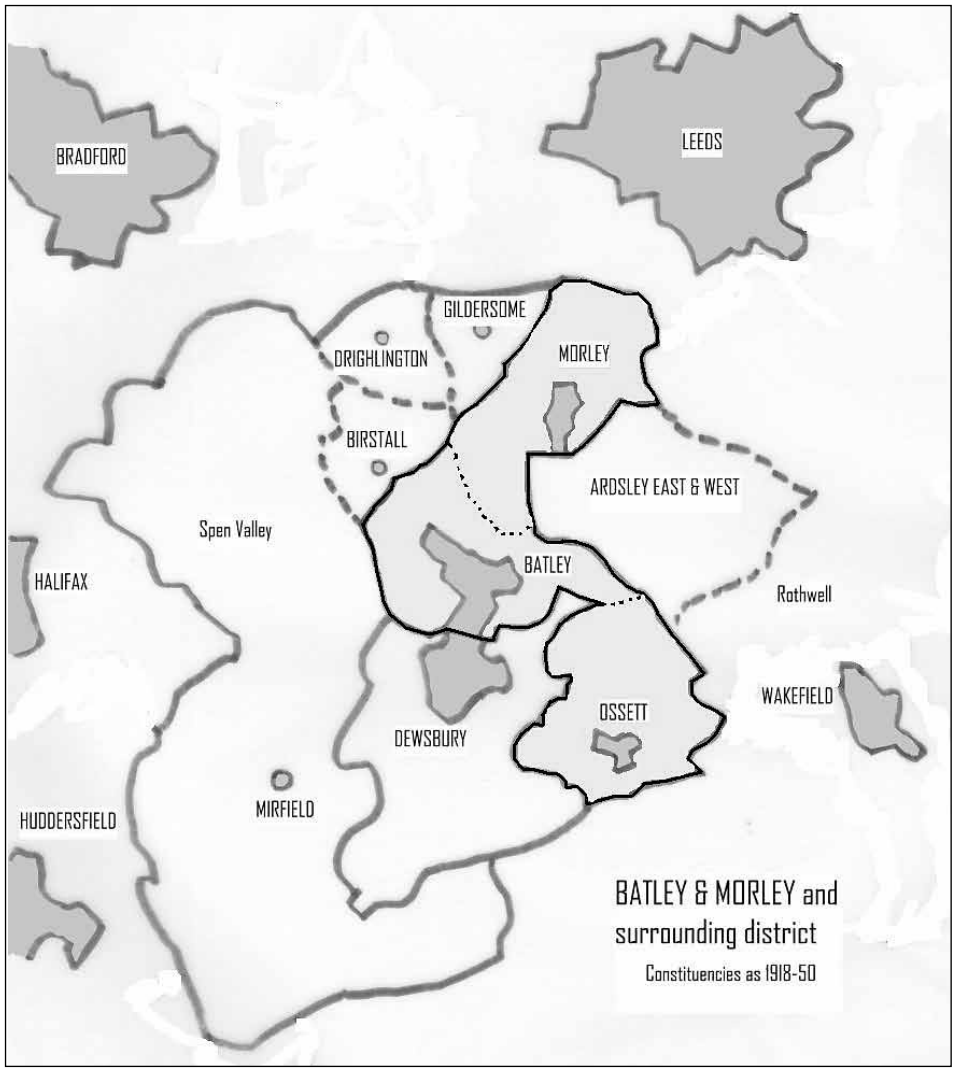
It is no accident that the long-term decline of the Union and of Liberalism coincided.

Martin Pugh was formerly Professor of Modern British History at Newcastle University. His most recent book is a study of the historical origins of the current crisis of national identity: Britain: Unification and Disintegration, *published by Authors OnLine.*

1 J. R. Vincent, *The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857–1868* (Constable, 1966), pp. 12–13.
2 Speech to the National Union of Conservative Associations, 15 May 1886; the idea was to make it impossible for Lord Hartington to form a consensual government and resolve the home rule issue. See A. B. Cooke and J. R. Vincent, *The Governing Passion: Cabinet Government and Party Politics in Britain, 1885–86* (Branch Line, 1974), pp. 80–1, 422.
3 A. J. Balfour to Lord Salisbury, 29 Sept. 1880, in Robin Harcourt Williams (ed.), *The Salisbury–Balfour Correspondence 1869–92* (Hertfordshire Record Society, 1988).
4 In the debate on the matrimonial causes bill, 7 Aug. 1857, Gladstone was the only member to argue that women should enjoy the same privileges as men. The bill allowed husbands to divorce their wives for adultery alone whereas a wife was obliged to prove adultery plus one other offence.
5 *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 Jan. 1895.
6 Quoted in Paul Addison, *Churchill on the Home Front 1900—1955* (Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1992), pp. 42–4.
7 *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 Jan. 1885.
8 *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 Jan. 1885; 13 Mar. 1885; 6 Nov. 1885; 5 and 12 Jan. 1900; 7 Aug. 1914.
9 David Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 353, 471–2.
10 See Graham Greenlee, 'Land, reform and community: the Liberal Party in Ulster 1868–1885', in Eugenio Biagini (ed.), *Citizenship and Community: Liberals, radicals and collective identities in the British Isles 1865–1931* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 253–75.
11 Eugenio Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism 1876–1906* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 8.
12 Harold Nicholson, *King George The Fifth: His Life and Reign* (Constable, 1952), pp. 222–3.

LIBERAL ROOTS: TH
IN A WEST YORKSHIRE CON

From 1966 to 1971, as a teenager, **Jaime Reynolds** lived in Morley, West Yorkshire, now part of south Leeds. During that time he was an active member of the Liberals, who were enjoying something of a renaissance in the Batley & Morley constituency. In 1969 Batley borough council was briefly the only local authority in England and Wales where the Liberals were the largest party. Jaime's desire was to chart the story of Liberal fortunes in these Yorkshire mill towns and pay tribute to the efforts of the pioneers who led the revival there. Thanks to the Liberal Democrat History Group, a few years ago he reestablished contact with **Peter Wrigley**.



HE LIBERAL PARTY
NSTITUENCY, 1920s – 1970s

Peter was one of those pioneers, parliamentary candidate in 1970 and February 1974 and still today an active Liberal Democrat in the Batley & Spen constituency. Peter's recollections, local research, and the memories he has gathered from others involved have greatly enriched this joint portrait of the decline of a Liberal stronghold and its revival in the 1960s.

The Batley & Morley constituency[1] was one of the band of West Yorkshire Liberal strongholds in the area of Huddersfield, Halifax Bradford and Leeds where a distinctive current of Radical, Nonconformist, free trade Liberalism persisted until 1945 and in some cases later. This Northern Radical tradition stretched across the Pennines into Colne Valley and the Lancashire cotton belt where towns such as Rochdale, Bolton, Darwen, Mossley and Rossendale were notable Liberal redoubts. It was closely linked with the social and political culture that arose around the textile industry and mirrored that industry's rise and decline.

Batley and Morley have particular claims to fame in Liberal history. Herbert Asquith, the future Liberal Prime Minister, was born in Morley in 1852. He moved away as a child and though he was said to have few sentimental attachments to his birthplace, he returned in 1895 to open the town hall and in 1913 to be invested as a freeman of the borough. He was treated as a local hero.

It was also the home of Theodore Cooke Taylor,[2] a legendary figure in Yorkshire Liberalism, an 'advanced Radical' MP, a tireless campaigner for free trade and an 'out-and-out Batley-ite'.[3] He was an archetypal patriarchal millowner who pioneered profit-sharing in his textile mill. In his lifetime, over 75 per cent of the firm's capital was passed into the ownership of its two thousand workers. For many years he personified Liberalism in Batley.[4]

Another notable Yorkshire mill-owning family, the Walkers of Mirfield and Dewsbury,[5] also played an important part in Batley & Morley Liberalism.

'Shoddyopolis'

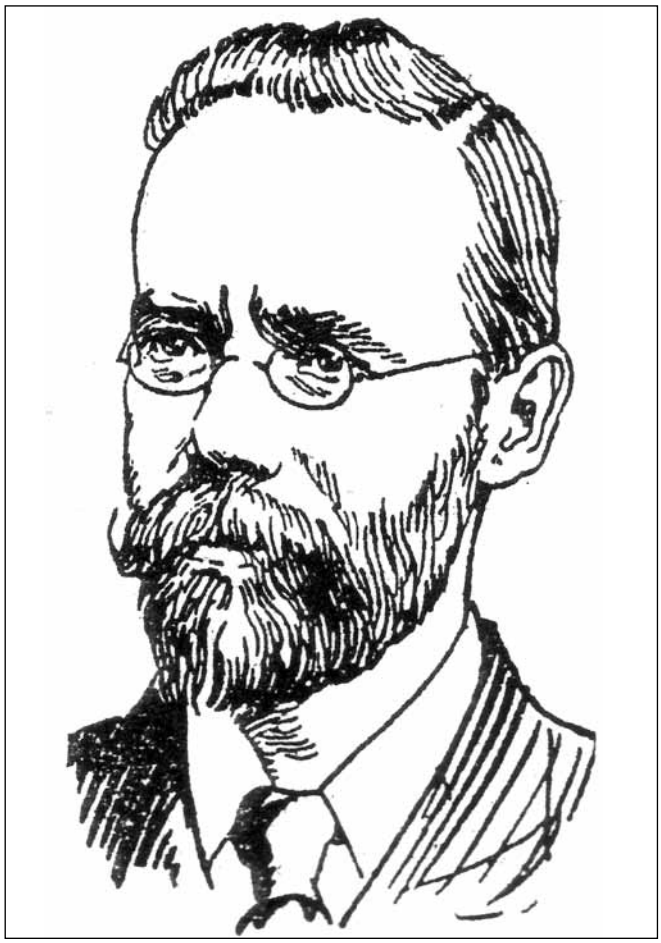
In the 1960s both Batley and Morley still retained much of the character and fierce local pride of old woollen mill towns.[6] Morley's magnificent Victorian town hall (built in 1895) proclaimed the prosperity and civic spirit it enjoyed at the end of the nineteenth century.

Batley and Morley and surrounding district: constituencies 1918–50

Morley and Batley, and neighbouring Dewsbury, were at the centre of the 'shoddy trade' – the recycling of woollen rags to make new cloth. This industry had boomed in the second half of the nineteenth century and at its peak there were thirty mills in Morley and the same number in Batley. Production flourished well into the twentieth century, and demand was particularly high during wartime. However from the 1960s, competition from man-made fibres and foreign producers, fashion changes, reliance on small-scale manufacture and private capital, and labour shortages, all combined to undermine the trade. The woollen mills with their tall chimneys closed down and within a decade or two the industry had virtually disappeared.[7]

The other foundation of the local economy was coal mining, situated in a number of pits on the outskirts of Morley and also in pits around Batley. This was also a declining industry – the last Batley pit closed in 1973.

By the 1960s the physical appearance of both towns was changing. In Morley, sweeping



Theodore Cooke Taylor, circa 1906; Brian Bradley Barker, Mayor of Morley

slum-clearance programmes had redeveloped some three thousand houses up to 1968 and a further 1,250 were demolished between 1968 and 1975. We can recall canvassing not far from Morley town hall in streets of blackened back-to-back terraces which disappeared soon after. In the early 1960s, only Liverpool had more inhabited back-to-back houses than Batley. By 1972 only a couple of streets survived.[8]

The years of decline

In the 1920s much of the old Radical political culture remained intact. At parliamentary elections Batley & Morley was a Liberal–Labour battleground, with the Conservatives generally backing the Liberals.[9] In the town halls a similar Lib–Con alliance dominated the scene, opposing the Labour Party, which at that time was under the charismatic textile trade unionist leader, Ben Turner, who served as both MP and as a member of Batley council.

The local power structure rested on business dynasties that ran the Liberal and Conservative parties and still, evidently, enjoyed the support of a subtantial proportion of their operatives. In Batley, mill owners such as Theodore Taylor, Frederick Auty,[10] Charles Spedding,[11] and Edmund Bruce[12] led the Liberals while Thomas Western[13] was a Tory. Clement Fernsides,[14] founder and proprietor of the *Batley News*, was another prominent Liberal. In Morley, millowners such as the Barkers,[15] the Rhodes/Watson/Marshall clan,[16] Joseph Kirk,[17] and David Dickinson[18] were among the leading Liberals, while the Hepworths[19] were Tories. In some cases these clans extended widely and over several generations. Taylor's brother-in-law John Stubley[20] (and his half-brother David Stubley[21]), his half-sister, Gertrude Elsie Taylor,[22] his business and political right arm, Hamilton Crothers,[23] and deputy managing director, Ernest Kirk[24] were also councillors and the first four served as mayor of Batley. Frederick Auty, also a mayor of Batley, was brother of Margaret Grace Auty[25] who became Mrs Herbert North.[26] She was active in the local Liberal Party and the Yorkshire Women's Liberal Federation and mayoress to her husband when he was mayor in 1919–20.

Four generations of the Barkers served as councillors and aldermen on Morley council over a period of more than eighty years and several of them were mayor. The Rhodes clan served some ten mayoral terms. The Liberal Association seems to have been constituted to a considerable extent by these pillars of the community and their entourages.

Naturally there were strong Liberal–Nonconformist links. The Taylors, Stubleys and Fearnsides were Congregationalists and Crothers's father was a Methodist New Connexion Minister. The Barkers were Primitive Methodists. The Rhodes family were also Dissenters. Ben Turner, the leading Labour figure in the constituency, recalled cases of ministers and lay preachers urging congregations to vote against him in Batley & Morley.[27]

In many cases the outlook of these practical businessmen Radicals was sharply ideological. Some years later Theodore Taylor explained his continuing commitment, despite many disappointments, to the Liberal Party and his attitude to the other parties:

Raymond Stone (photo provided by Sheila Stone); Batley's Liberal Mayor, Vera Ball, in 1969 (*Batley News*)

> I am a lifelong Liberal and … don't want to have to change my party. I have never, however, seen party as a primary consideration, but only as a means to ends which can be summed up in this case as maintaining and extending human freedom. It has always been threatened and I suppose it always will be, by ambitious men. At present in Britain, we are threatened by three sets of folk, the cartelites (with Protection as one of their instruments), the trade unions, and the 'intelligentsia' socialists. The latter two parties seem pretty well combined at present in the 'Labour Party'. The … cartel traders and trade unions have much in common, being both monopolistic in principle and, of course, the true socialist is a state monopolist. The truth is that all three sections are in fact monopolists of dangerous types. It seems to me that the Liberal Party, if it were to stick to its principles, has a good chance to save the country … however … some leading Liberals cannot resist the temptation to gain popularity by applying wrong views … I think I can be at present most useful as an inside Liberal, doing my best to keep the Party as sound as one can …[28]

By the mid-1920s, party distinctions between Liberals and Conservatives at local government level had become somewhat obscured as they increasingly adopted the label of 'Independent'. However it seems to have been well known which of the parties most individuals supported. In the interwar period, *The Times* published lists of new mayors by party each year and the vast majority were classified as either Conservatives or Liberals including almost all the Batley and Morley ones. In Batley, the Liberals dominated the mayoralty, occupying it for sixteen years between 1919 and 1945, while Labour and the Conservatives had only two years each and six were unidentified. In Morley, between 1919 and 1939 Liberals held the mayoralty for seven years, Independents for six, Labour for five and Conservative for three.

As elsewhere, the Liberal hegemony was broken by the events of 1931 and the split in the party between the Samuelite Free Traders and the pro-Tory Liberal Nationals under Sir John Simon, who was MP for the neighbouring constituency of Spen Valley. The split threw the Batley & Morley Liberals into turmoil. On the one hand there was considerable respect for Simon and a shared anti-Socialist outlook and readiness to work with the Conservatives. On the other hand compromising the party's independence was anathema for the Radical Free Traders who made up the local Liberal elite.

The Batley & Morley Tories clamoured for their own candidate committed to 'safeguarding' of British industry from cheap foreign imports and by September 1931 a 'cabinet' representing the local Conservatives nominated Wilfrid Dewhurst Wills of Skipton, who belonged to the tobacco family, as prospective candidate. At this stage it was uncertain whether the Liberals would also bring forward their man.[29] However, the obvious choice, Walter Forrest,[30] who had lost the seat to Labour at the 1929 general election, had recently joined the Conservatives.[31]

In the confusion of the political crisis of October 1931, the Liberals conceded Batley & Morley to the Conservatives. It seems that there was an understanding that in doing so, the Tories would stand aside in next-door Dewsbury where the free trade Samuel-ite Liberal Walter Rea gained the seat from Labour.

However the Tory win seems to have been regarded as an abberation or accident. In 1934 after pressure by the Liberal Nationals on the Conservatives to concede them more seats, Batley & Morley was identified as one of the constituencies which a Liberal National would stand a better chance of retaining. However these discussions did not lead to any change in the National candidate.[32]

The Liberals' sacrifice in 1931 proved in vain. At the next general election in 1935 a 'National' candidate[33] was nominated against Rea in Dewsbury who lost his seat. The Batley & Morley Liberals were dismayed at this development and some looked for a candidate to stand against Wills and Labour. The names of Colonel James Walker[34] of the Mirfield Liberal dynasty, and a Leeds retired police sergeant, Ernest Dalton,[35] were mentioned. However not all of the local party had agreed with this move. One prominent Liberal was reported as saying that 'those who want to fight may get their own way … If they do they will drive a lot of Liberals into the Conservative camp for good. The excuse that a candidate is being put forward because Sir Walter Rea is opposed won't wash.' An Ossett Liberal stated that they did not agree with splitting the National Government vote.[36]

In the end at a private meeting the Liberals decided not to fight, according to Herbert Brook,[37] the President of the Association, because 'the time was too short to allow us to get our organisation into working order and make certain of victory'. However Ernest Dalton was invited to be the candidate next time and a motion to pledge support to W. D. Wills was defeated, with 'no more than four or five of the 80 or 90 present voting in favour.[38]

The decision to stand aside was unsurprising given that Batley & Morley was a marginal constituency, and in fact Labour gained the seat from Wills, even without a Liberal to split the anti-socialist vote. What is striking is the extent of local Liberals assertiveness and their refusal to back the Tory candidate. This was after all Sir John Simon's backyard, but there seems to be no evidence of any marked impetus to line up with the Liberal Nationals.[39] At this time many Liberals still hoped and even expected that the two wings of the party would reunite just as the Asquith and Lloyd George factions had fused in 1923.

What is striking is the extent of local Liberals assertiveness and their refusal to back the Tory candidate. This was after all Sir John Simon's backyard, but there seems to be no evidence of any marked impetus to line up with the Liberal Nationals.

This support for independent Liberalism was confirmed in the following years. Ernest Dalton was selected as prospective candidate for the next general election expected in 1940 and the Liberals were very active in Batley in the later 1930s, for example in the campaign against rising prices launched by the party in 1937.[40] However their calculations were upset by a by-election in February 1939. Dalton first offered to withdraw in favour of a 'United Front' candidate, but this elicited no response. The Liberal Association then decided not to fight the seat 'in order to conserve its resources for the coming General Election'.[41] Labour chose a candidate with considerable appeal to Liberals – an official of the League of Nations Union with a background in the co-operative movement, who pitched for the Liberal vote claiming that Gladstone would have agreed with his party's foreign policy. He received some Liberal support for his campaign from outside the constituency,[42] but Wills claimed the support of several prominent local Liberals, including some who signed his nomination papers.[43] Theodore Taylor issued a list of questions to the candidates to help Liberal voters make up their mind whom to support. Ernest Dalton issued a denial that any active Liberal in the Batley & Morley division was working for Wills, though he admitted that he was getting backing from some Liberal Nationals.[44]

At the end of the campaign a *Manchester Guardian* correspondent gave this somewhat unscientific assessment of the Liberal tradition in the constituency:

> Batley may be regarded as safe for Labour. Ossett is usually assessed as consisting of one half of Labour voters and one half of Liberals and Conservatives; in municipal elections the Liberals and Conservatives act tacitly together. At Morley a genuine Liberalism survives, not the kind of Liberalism that sleeps in the pocket of the Tory party, but the old type of Nonconformist Radicalism … Radicals of this school detest the National Government, but are extremely uncomfortable with political associates whom they think insist too much upon doctrinaire Socialism …[45]

Labour held the seat with an increased majority.

The next general election was not held until the end of the war in 1945. The Batley & Morley Liberals rallied around Ashley Mitchell,[46] a dissident Liberal, who stood on an ultra-traditionalist anti-Beveridge platform. Mitchell, who came from an Ossett mill-owning family, was a long-standing pillar of Henry George's land value taxation movement. He was also a fervent Free Trader. In 1943–45, such Liberals were sidelined by policy shifts in favour of town and country planning and William Beveridge's social insurance plan.[47] The dissidents had formed the Liberal Liberty League to resist the trend but had been decisively defeated at the party's assembly in February 1945. Mitchell with some other traditionalists had resigned in protest from Huddersfield Liberal Association and there was wider uneasiness about Beveridge among West Riding Liberals.[48] According to Mitchell's account he was persuaded by friends in Batley to contest the seat which he agreed to do as 'an independent free from party directives', although he was nevertheless adopted by 'the local Liberal selection group'. His campaign was supported by mostly elderly Liberal luminaries including Theodore Taylor, who spoke for nearly half an hour on the merits of free trade at a rally in Batley Town Hall, Miss Elsie Taylor, Herbert Brook (the chairman of the Batley & Morley Liberal Association), Alderman David Dickinson, who was mayor of Morley 1942–43, and Alderman Patterson of Ossett. Despite an influx of Liberal Liberty League activists and Mrs Mitchell's canvassing efforts with the 'Women's Auxiliary', the

George-ists were disappointed with the result. Labour held the seat with a large majority and Mitchell came third with 13.5 per cent of the votes, enough to keep his deposit. This was effectively the last stand of the old Radicals in Batley & Morley.[49]

After 1945 the Liberals did not contest the seat again until 1964. Their failure to contest a by-election in 1949 drew criticism from the Yorkshire Young Liberals.[50] Labour easily held the by-election which launched the long parliamentary career of Dr (later Sir) Alfred Broughton, another Labour MP acceptable to many Liberal voters: he came from a family who had been general practitioners in Batley through three generations. He held the seat until his death in 1979.

Theodore Taylor's decision – at the 1949 by-election and again at the 1950 general election – to back, and speak on behalf of, the Conservative candidate, for the first time since he began participating in elections in 1868, symbolised the final passage of the old Liberal elite into the Tory camp.[51] It was one of the relatively few constituencies not contested by a Liberal in 1950. Some younger members of the Association were keen to fight and C. E. Hindley, chairman of Bradford Liberals, was available as a candidate. However the majority followed the advice in a letter from Taylor arguing that:

> in order to defeat the Socialist party it is necessary that those who are opposed to Socialism should unite. I know the reluctance of old campaigners to join with their former opponents in a political struggle, but it is more than a party which is at stake – it is the welfare and prosperity of our country which, in the hands of the Socialists, would certainly diminish.[52]

In local elections both in Batley & Morley, the Liberals and Conservatives had stood under the 'Independent' umbrella for more than two decades by the 1940s. It was said nevertheless that they could still be easily identified as belonging to one party or the other.[53] A Liberal Association was functioning as late as 1950 and some local government figures were still regarded as leading Liberals – Colonel James Barker in Morley, for example. However it seems likely that in many cases Liberal allegiance had become purely nominal. Barker chaired a Tory meeting in the 1949 by-election. Theodore Taylor died in 1952 at the age of 102 and his departure marked the demise of the old Radical cause. Any Liberal organisation or activity in the 1950s was invisible.[54] If it existed at all, it was probably concentrated in the urban villages of Birstall, Gildersome and Drighlington which joined the constituency from Spen Valley in 1949 and had their own Liberal clubs. However these areas were under the influence of Liberal National collaboration with the Tories. Peter Wrigley recalls much talk of the Lib Nats, Sir John Simon and Walter Runciman (who had been MP for Dewsbury until 1918), on the doorsteps when he first started canvassing in the 1960s.

The Independents held off Labour until after the Second World War. Labour briefly took control of both Batley & Morley for the first time in 1945. Labour established firmer control over Batley in 1950 and held it continuously and often with large majorities until 1968. Morley was more marginal, swinging backwards and forwards between Labour and the Independents in the 1950s and '60s.[55]

Revival in Batley

Liberalism in Batley & Morley emerged anew in the period between the October 1959 general election and the May 1960 local elections.

Peter Wrigley takes up the story:

> I had spent the years 1957 to 1963 in the London area, at college and in my first teaching post. In that period I became disillusioned by the Tory Party (partly because of the cover-up of the Hola Camp massacre of 1959, and, like many others, inspired by Jo Grimond) and joined the Liberals through the Hayes and Harlington local party. They were at such a low ebb that I was invited to be their chairman at my first meeting! I declined and was never very active there. I returned to Birstall in 1963, became active and was adopted as PPC in 1968. My knowledge of the history of the revival of the Batley & Morley Liberals is based on what I picked up in that period. I believe it was Bill Berry who, as part of the Grimond revival, placed an advertisement in the local paper inviting those interested to form a local Liberal Association. I was often told that in the early days the greatest progress was made in Morley, where the leading lights had been a couple who lived in Gildersome. However, when I came on the scene the Morley activity had faded to almost nothing, whilst things had flourished considerably on the Batley side.

In many respects the local party was fresh and modern. Gone were the old mill-owning patriarchs and in their place were much younger activists mostly new to the Liberal Party and often working in the public sector.

The respondents to Bill Berry's[56] advert included several people who were to spearhead the revival: Trevor Evans[57] and Clifford Lockwood[58] in Soothill, and Raymond Stone[59] in Birstall. Among the activists in Batley were many teachers – such as R. Stone, C. Armitage,[60] P. Wrigley, G. Gaunt,[61] R. Beman[62] and K. Gatenby[63] – and employees in local government and the health service – such as T. Evans, L. Ely,[64] and V. Ball.[65]

The new Association clearly distanced itself from the tradition of collaboration with the Tories under the Independent label. Raymond Stone, standing for the first time in 1961, declared: 'I am a Liberal by conviction and I do not wish to deceive the electors of Birstall by using any other label, especially the term 'Independent' which has been brought into disrepute by Conservatives using it as camouflage.'[66] In many respects the local party was fresh and modern. Gone were the old mill-owning patriarchs and in their place were much younger activists mostly new to the Liberal Party and often working in the public sector. None of them appears to have been involved with the old organisation of ten years before. However that is not to say that there were no traces of traditional Liberal influences. Raymond Stone was a teetotaller and prominent member of Birstall Temperance Hall. Cicero Armitage served for fifty years as a lay preacher with the Congregational Church and was the son-in-law of Clement Fearnsides, a Liberal mayor in the 1930s. The party received active help and encouragement from John G. Walker, the Yorkshire Federation

president, who came from the old Radical family, the Walkers of Mirfield.

There was also a sustained attempt by Raymond Stone to reassert the party's interest in the Birstall Liberal Club, which was selling its premises at this time. The club had abandoned its mission to 'promote the cause of Liberalism and provide means of social intercourse between persons professing Liberal principles' some time previously and none of its current trustees was Liberal. After extensive but inconclusive legal research Raymond Stone concluded that any action would 'court a great deal of unpopularity and hostility which might be a stumbling block to further progress of the Liberal Party in the area, as we believe that a good deal of support for myself in the municipal election came from the membership of the club'[67].

The first Liberal candidates stood in 1960 and the the initial breakthrough came in Birstall. Standing for the first time in 1961, Raymond Stone came a good second to Labour with one-third of the votes. The following year, at the height of the post-Orpington surge when the Liberals made sweeping gains nationally, he stood again under the slogan 'Build a Better Birstall with Stone', and comfortably gained the seat with a swing of almost 12 per cent. Thereafter Birstall remained safely Liberal down to 1970.

Soothill was the other Liberal stronghold. The ward was securely Independent after 1945. Trevor Evans's surprise victory in 1964 was clearly aided by the absence of Labour opposition and came after an intense and comprehensive door-knocking campaign against the complacent Independents. From 1967, the ward was consistently Liberal, though usually with small majorities.

Cicero Armitage gained a seat from Labour in Batley East in 1963. 'Mr Armitage' (as Peter Wrigley always thinks of him) was a very popular junior school head in Birstall. There were further sporadic Liberal wins in this ward but it remained marginal.

The Liberals never managed to win the other two wards – Batley North and West, both Labour-leaning – though they came close in the early days.

Political outlook

Peter Wrigley does not remember much discussion of 'high politics' at any of the meetings – ward or constituency – nor any disputes over policy, either local or national. Members and councillors, perhaps with some exceptions, had a Liberal ethos rather than a detailed knowledge of or concern about, national policy. Peter summarises their outlook as:

- Exasperation with class-based politics and commitment to a party which tried to represent all the community, and not just one side.
- Belief that councillors and MPs should be servants of the public rather than an exclusive cabal which made decisions in their own rather than the public's interest.
- Expectation that councillors should think for themselves and not slavishly follow a whip. (That had to be modified as the group increased in size!)
- Strong commitment to their areas.
- Inspiration from Jo Grimond, the then apostle of the 'New' politics.
- Industrial partnership and cooperation rather than competition.
- Openness and good communications, though via the press and surgeries rather than literature.

Two areas which might have caused contention had they been pressed too far were Liberal policies on Europe, and immigration. Some of us were ardent Europeans and proud of the fact that the Liberals were and are the only party to have advocated membership from the beginning. Others were less enthusiastic. Batley had at the time a large immigrant population, largely from Pakistan and Bangladesh, recruited by the mill owners as cheap labour. I suspect some members were very uneasy about this, whilst others, like me, were proud of the stance the party had taken on the admission of the Kenyan Asians. Just before I was selected as PPC one of the local working men's clubs announced a colour bar. Just so that the association would be in no doubt as to what they were getting, I wrote a letter to the Telegraph and Argus, which was published, condemning this. A small group of Young Liberals and I joined a protest march. One of our councillors came to watch from the pavement. I was nevertheless selected: there wasn't much competition!

Views in other parties were probably similarly eclectic. For example the chairman of the governors at Batley Grammar School, where I worked, was a Labour Alderman, J. W. Thornton. I remember having long arguments with him, I advocating comprehensive education and he being strongly pro-grammar school.'

Members and councillors, perhaps with some exceptions, had a Liberal ethos rather than a detailed knowledge of or concern about, national policy.

After adoption as prospective candidate Peter Wrigley joined the Candidates' Association and attended the national Candidates' Association meetings and the party council which met twice a year in in the National Liberal Club.

On the whole most Liberals did not leak beyond the region, and weren't really much interested outside their own patch. We were very parochial. This was before the era of working and lower-middle-class affluence and few, if any, of the activists would have been able to afford to attend the assemblies, except perhaps as part of the annual family holiday, which might not have pleased those with partners and children. In any case, the assemblies were too late for the traditional northern holiday weeks (known as Feast Weeks in Yorkshire and Wakes Weeks in Lancashire). Many of the activists were teachers and would not have found it convenient, or affordable, to take time off so near the start of a new school year. Hence links were mainly with the region. Jeremy Thorpe made a flying visit in the late 1960s. This was part of a regional 'Leader's Tour' and was organised by Michael Meadowcroft. Our turn came for an hour or so on a Friday afternoon, and we toured a local 'up and coming' firm called 'Shaw Sideloaders', then went on to the town hall to meet Vera Ball, mayor, and other councillors.

Community politics in Morley

Morley proved stonier ground than Batley. Efforts to gain a foothold in the early 1960s came to nothing. Frances Sowden contested North ward in 1962 (13 per cent) and 1963 (11 per cent), but could make little impact in this hard-fought Labour/Independent marginal. Drighlington, where the Liberals received 23 per cent of the votes in 1962 seemed more promising, but it was left uncontested in 1963. Thereafter Liberal activity in Morley seems to have largely subsided until the end of the decade.

A second revival took place in Morley at the end of the 1960s. Jaime Reynolds recalls:

> 'hen I first became politically active in Morley around 1968, the Liberals seemed so absent that I decided instead to help another venerable third party which had a couple of activists in the town and had started to contest the borough council election in one or two wards. This was the Independent Labour Party (ILP), founded by Keir Hardie, which, after a period of glory in the early 1920s, had split away from the Labour Party and declined to almost nothing by the 1940s. A few loyalists continued to keep the flame burning thanks – as I was told – to the fact that the party still owned the old ILP publishing house which gave it rather more resources than other far-left grouplets of the time. They did not seem to be perturbed by the fact that I regarded myself as a Liberal, and thus might be considered an ancient enemy of the ILP. This was the time of the Young Liberal 'Red Guards' and as far as I was concerned we were natural comrades on the radical left. Within a short time I made contact with the Liberals through Peter Wrigley and abandoned the ILP. I discovered that efforts were underway to revive the Liberal Party in Morley. In addition to Peter, the nucleus of activists comprised: Philip Heath,[68] an energetic Liverpudlian, who had been involved with the Liberals there before moving to Morley; Martin Robinson,[69] a Lancastrian who had recently started teaching chemistry at Morley Grammar School; and Wilf Whitaker,[70] a lecturer at Hull Further Education College who went on to stand as a Liberal parliamentary candidate five times. In Morley, apart from Wilf, who was local and had been a keen Liberal at Morley Grammar School, we were all middle-class interlopers.

Michael Meadowcroft, who was laying the foundations of the electoral organisation that was soon to produce a clutch of Leeds councillors and his election as MP for Leeds West in 1983, was an important inspiration in Morley. Peter Wrigley remembers:

> When I was adopted as PPC I felt that, rather than try to join the group on Batley Council, the best way forward for the whole constituency was to try and revive things in Morley. One way of recruiting was to distribute contact cards (postcards with a freepost reply – very adventurous at the time).

Procession of councillors, probably for the centenary of Batley's incorporation as a borough (1969). Liberal councillors are Bernard Prendergarst in glasses in the foreground, Gerald Gaunt behind him next to Lucy Ely. Behind and to the right of the bespectacled top-hatted figure is Harry Gledhill and the tall Trevor Evans; Cicero Armitage is just behind Gledhill with Vera Ball behind their shoulders (photo provided by Sheila Stone).

> Michael Meadowcroft, who had replaced the devoted and highly respected but rather staid Albert Ingham as Regional Secretary in 1967, introduced us to this system. Those who sent them in usually expected literature and were often surprised to receive a visit. I suspect this was how we 'found' Philip Heath.
>
> The Morley group was active from about 1969 to 1972. Meetings were usually held at Gildersome Liberal Club – like the one in Birstall, another remnant of the old working men's Liberal clubs that existed in the area, where some residual sympathy for the party persisted, at least to the extent of tolerating our meetings as long as we did not bother the other drinkers with politics.

The initial strategy was very simple: to get Philip Heath elected for the Denshaw ward, a Labour stronghold dominated by council housing, where neither Labour nor the Independents made much of an effort. Peter Wrigley continues:

> We actually caused the Denshaw by-election to be called. This was a ruse to which Michael Meadowcroft alerted us. One of the Denshaw councillors had died and it was common in those days, particularly in moribund 'one party' areas, to leave the seat vacant until the following May. However, if a very small number of electors in the ward, I think only two, pointed out officially that the seat was vacant, a by-election had to be called. So we obtained the necessary form, found local electors to sign it and then handed it in at the town hall. We, of course, were ready, with both a candidate and literature prepared: the others were taken by surprise. I remember very clearly the meeting in Gildersome Liberal Club when Philip Heath, Michael Meadowcroft and I planned all this. We had hoped initially to find a local candidate, preferably an 'opinion leader' (e.g. a local doctor or similar, a technique that Michael had successfully used in Leeds) but had no success, and it was Michael who steered the conversation round to the solution that Philip, though an incomer, should be the candidate. We managed to canvass the entire ward, probably a new experience for Denshaw, and came within a whisker of winning. Had we done so, that could have spearheaded the breakthrough in Morley, and Batley & Morley history could have been different.

So we obtained the necessary form, found local electors to sign it and then handed it in at the town hall. We, of course, were ready, with both a candidate and literature prepared: the others were taken by surprise.

The by-election was held in September 1969, Philip Heath coming a close second to Labour, with 36 per cent of the votes.

The revival falters

Philip Heath stood again in Denshaw in May 1970 but his vote slipped to 33 per cent and to only 23 per cent at a by-election soon afterwards. In May 1971 Martin Robinson secured 36 per cent in the safest Labour seat, Central Morley, just sixty votes behind Labour, but he was unavailable to contest a by-election held that summer and moved away from Morley the following year. No Liberals stood in 1972 and in fact no Liberal was elected before Morley ceased to be an independent borough and was absorbed into Leeds in 1974.

In Batley the Liberals built up their strength on the council to four seats by 1964, then surged to become the largest party in 1969 when they held all three seats both in Birstall and Soothill, three seats in East and an aldermen (Raymond Stone, group leader). Thereafter they fell back, maintaining the three Soothill seats, one in Birstall and two aldermen (Raymond Stone and Trevor Evans) in 1972 until the dissolution of the council.

After the May 1968 elections the Liberals held the balance with nine seats to eleven for Labour and twelve for the Allied group of Independents and Conservatives. The Liberals and the Allied group proposed a coalition with chairmanships shared out between all parties according to their strengths, but after eighteen years of control Labour decided to leave office. An Allied–Liberal partnership was, it seems, ruled out by the Liberals. The eventual solution was that the Allied group took the chairmanships and the Liberals the vice-chairmanships. In 1969 the Liberals gained one seat (to ten seats), but the Allied group also gained three more (Conservative nine, Independent six). As the largest single party the Liberals asked for the support of any of the Independents to take control, but there were no takers. There was no interest from the other two parties in sharing out the chairmanships proportionally. So yet again the Allieds took the chairmanships with the Liberals acting as vice-chairmen. Vera Ball was elected mayor – the first Liberal to serve as such since the Second World War.[71]

As the crucial 1970 elections approached there was some division within the Liberals over tactics. This mainly concerned the double-member East ward which was normally Labour territory and where there was a record of the anti-Labour parties putting up single candidates for the two vacancies raising the possibility of tacit alliances. The Liberal victories there were all achieved with only one Independent or Conservative candidate standing, or none at all. An exception was 1966 when Cicero Armitage faced both Conservative and Independent opponents and lost his seat to Labour.[72] But any cooperation must have been of the loosest kind as there was often a wide discrepancy between the votes received by the anti-Labour candidates. The issue came to a head in March 1970 when both Armitage and Gledhill were due to seek re-election. Fearing that the Liberals would lose both seats, East ward planned to put up only one candidate (Armitage) and then get Gledhill elected at a subsequent by-election when Armitage was made an alderman. Raymond Stone and others strongly opposed this strategy which would have meant throwing away a seat and criticised East ward's over-friendly relations with the Independents/Tories. In the end both Armitage and Gledhill stood, as did an Independent, and both seats were lost to Labour. This would have probably have happened anyway even without the split anti-Labour vote.[73] Thereafter the Liberal cause collapsed in the ward.

The Liberal cause was also slipping in Birstall. The last narrow Liberal victory was in 1970. In 1971 Labour surged past the Liberal candidate and in 1972 the Liberals fell to third place.

The Liberals were pushed back by Labour's increase in popularity in 1970–72 which was a national phenomenon, but hit the Liberals hard in those Northern textile towns where they had won seats in the late 1960s on the anti-Labour swing. The Independents/Conservatives lost support too and by 1972 Labour had recaptured a large majority on the council. By the time the next Liberal surge came in 1973–74 on the back of a string of parliamentary by-election successes, the two municipal boroughs were in the process of dissolution as local government was reorganised. Batley was merged into Kirklees and Morley into Leeds.

Parliamentary elections in the 1960s and 1970s

Elections to Westminster in these years reflected the ups and downs of the party's fortunes both nationally and locally. The Liberals put up a candidate at the 1964 general election for the first time since Ashley Mitchell's maverick bid in 1945 and the first fully official effort since 1929. The candidate was a Leeds pharmaceutical chemist and recent chairman of the National League of Young Liberals, Ivan Lester, who polled 17 per cent. Lester defected to Labour shortly afterwards and in 1966 Bill Berry was the candidate with a vote of 14.8 per cent.

Peter Wrigley takes up the story:

> I was selected as PPC in 1968 and tried hard to extend our influence into Morley. In addition I managed to get a good deal of publicity through my membership of the Trades Council. I belonged to the National Association of Schoolmasters, at the time the only teachers' union affiliated to the TUC. The local branch of the NAS appointed me as their delegate to the Batley Trades Council (there was no competition) and as such I attended their meetings which were held I think monthly and to which the *Batley News* sent a reporter.
>
> The most common topic of discussion was the inadequacy of the local bus services (plus ça change) but I managed to introduce lots of Liberal themes, particularly regarding industrial democracy and decentralisation to the regions, and the reporter usually put something of what I'd said in the local paper. A burning topic in the period was Barbara Castle's attempt to tame the unions with 'In Place of Strife', which much embarrassed die-hard Labour veterans and on which we Liberals, through our policies of industrial partnership, had a radical alternative which I very much enjoyed pushing.
>
> In those days parliamentary candidates were not given time off for the three weeks of the campaign so for the first two weeks I would teach full time during the day, and campaign and somehow also keep up with my work in the evenings. The weather was splendid, which was a great help, but the result was a disappointment nationally. However, locally we were proud to be one of only a handful of constituencies where the Liberals increased both the total vote (ours from 6,366 to 6,893) and percentage share (from 14.8 per cent to 15.1 per cent).
>
> In early 1972 I left the area to teach in Papua New Guinea. I tried before I left to fix up a successor but without success. Hence there was no PPC when the unexpected 'Who governs Britain?' election of February 1974 was called. The regional chairman, David Shutt, suggested I return to fight the seat. As I was paid a huge amount of money by British standards, I could well afford it, so flew back, and greatly enjoyed the three-week campaign when, unlike in the previous election, I was able to work at it full time.
>
> The atmosphere was totally different from 1970. Everywhere we were received as realistic contenders rather than as well-meaning also-rans and many people, including some of our campaign team, thought we could win. Optimism was at its highest in the weekend before the poll, when one of the opinion polls put us on 28 per cent and the newspapers speculated as to who might be in Jeremy Thorpe's Cabinet (I wasn't mentioned). Alas the euphoria faded in the final four days. Nationally we polled 19.3 per cent and in Batley & Morley we obtained 23.8 per cent (11,470 votes).
>
> It was never glad confident morning again. I did not fight the second 1974 election, but had returned to PNG (where I stayed until 1980). Ivan Lester had returned to the fold and polled 20.7 per cent, but by the 1979 election the heart had gone out of the association, possibly partly as a result of the demise of Batley town council and the merger into Kirklees. The candidate in 1979 was Chris Cawood, a Dewsbury teacher, who polled only 10.6 per cent in what he described as 'the cheapest election campaign ever'. Under the old rules that would have meant a lost deposit.

The atmosphere was totally different from 1970. Everywhere we were received as realistic contenders rather than as well-meaning also-rans and many people, including some of our campaign team, thought we could win.

This was the last Batley & Morley election. Morley was merged with South Leeds and Batley with Spen for the next election in 1983.

A reinvented party?

In 1974 Brian B. Barker, penultimate mayor of Morley, was one of its six councillors elected to serve on the new Leeds Metropolitan District Council. He represented the fourth generation of Barkers to play a leading role in Morley local government. His forebears had all been regarded as pillars of the local Liberal Party, but he was an 'Independent' – in other words a Conservative – with not even a hint of a connection with the Batley & Morley Liberal Association.

At first sight Batley & Morley seems to demonstrate clearly how far the modern Liberal/Liberal Democrat Party that emerged in the 1960s diverged from the old party that dwindled, died or was diverted into the Conservative camp between the 1930s and the 1950s. In a district where the Radical tradition was considered to be a powerful factor until well after the Second World War there seemed to be little if any continuity between the personnel, the outlook and the support of the Grimond-era Liberals and their predecessors.

But did the Liberals so decisively escape their past? In Batley & Morley, as in many other northern industrial constituencies built on textiles, 'Orpington Man' was a rare animal. The Liberal gains of

the 1960s came in areas with a Liberal tradition. In Batley & Morley the most sustained breakthroughs were in Birstall and Soothill,[74] urban villages with a long Liberal history. They were secured by Liberals with deep roots in their communities such as Raymond Stone and Cicero Armitage who personified Radical Nonconformism, not by incomers applying new electoral techniques as a short-cut to victory. The swing to the Liberals in Batley & Morley and some similar Northern industrial towns in the later 1960s came not because the Liberals were seen as an alternative party of the left, but because they were regarded as an acceptable anti-Labour Party at a time when the Wilson government was unpopular. As Labour recovered, the Liberals lost ground. Their retreat was partly because the 'pioneers' had run out of steam by the early 1970s and were unable to find charismatic leaders to re-inspire them. But it was also because the district was undergoing sweeping changes in its economy and local government. This transformation undermined the Liberal roots that had supported the party for decades and had helped to sustain its revival in the 1960s.

In Batley & Morley, as in many other northern industrial constituencies built on textiles, 'Orpington Man' was a rare animal. The Liberal gains of the 1960s came in areas with a Liberal tradition.

Dr Jaime Reynolds was a UK civil servant from 1979 and since 2005 has been an official of the European Commission working on international environmental policy. He has contributed numerous articles to the Journal of Liberal History *and other Liberal Democrat History Group publications. Peter Wrigley was a teacher, mostly of economics, and mostly in Batley, but he has spent a substantial part of his career in developing countries: Papua New Guinea (1972–80) and, as a VSO, Malawi (1989–91). He is now retired but continues to campaign as a Liberal Democrat, is honorary president of the Batley & Spen local party and blogs as keynesianliberal.blogspot.com*

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1 The Batley & Morley constituency was formed in 1918, modified in 1949 and existed until 1983. It united the mill-town municipal boroughs of Batley & Morley throughout, and Ossett until it was transferred to Dewsbury in 1949. In 1937 the urban districts of Gildersome and Drighlington were joined to Morley and Birstall to Batley; and in 1949 they were transferred from the Spen Valley to the Batley & Morley constituency. Ardsley was also joined to Morley in 1937 and transferred from the Rothwell consituency to Batley & Morley in 1949.

2 Theodore Cooke Taylor (1850–1952), Batley woollen manufacturer, Liberal MP for Radcliffe-cum-Farnworth, Lancs, 1900–18.

3 Pall Mall Gazette, *The New Parliament 1900*.

4 George Arthur Greenwood, *Taylor of Batley* (London, 1957); T. C. Taylor, *One Hundred Years: Records, Recollections and Reflections* (Whitehead and Miller, 1946)

5 Sir Ronald F. Walker (1880–1971) was president of the Yorkshire Liberal Federation from 1947–60 and of the Liberal Party in 1952–53. His nephew, John G. Walker (1912–2009) was chairman of the Yorkshire party in the 1960s and was a Batley & Dewsbury magistrate and later president of the Batley & Spen Liberal Association. See: http://www.bramley.demon.co.uk/obits/walkerJG.html

6 An evocative documentary on Batley in 1968 by Professor Patrick Nuttgens can be viewed on Youtube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QN6Y8rktaVk

7 David K. Atkinson, *Morley Borough 1886–1974 – A Pictorial History* (Morley 1973). The Atkinson collection of photographs and much other fascinating local historical material can be accessed on the Morley Community Archives site: http://www.morleyarchives.org.uk/p_homepage2.html

8 *The Guardian*, 8 Feb. 1972.

9 There were straight fights between the Liberals and Labour in 1918, 1923, 1924 and 1929. The Liberals won in 1918 and 1924. In a three-way contest in 1922 Labour won with the Liberals second.

10 Frederick Wilfred Hoyle Auty (1881–1951), Batley woollen manufacturer, Liberal, mayor of Batley 1942–44.

11 Charles Robert Spedding (1865–1938), Batley woollen manufacturer, Liberal, mayor of Batley 1927–30.

12 Edmund Bruce (1873–1955), Batley woollen rag merchant, Liberal, mayor of Batley 1930–32.

13 Thomas Western, mayor of Batley 1920–22.

14 Clement Fearnsides (1882–1952), waste-paper merchant, founder of *Batley News*, mayor of Batley 1935–37.

15 Barker family – Morley woollen manufacturers, Nonconformists: James Barker (1842–95), Liberal councillor 1886–95; Brian Bradley Barker (1868–1942), Liberal, on council 1902–42, mayor of Morley 1936–37; James Barker (1899–1971), Colonel, Liberal/Independent, on council 1936–64, mayor of Morley 1952–53; Brian Baines Barker (1925–), Independent councillor, mayor of Morley 1972–73. Brian Bradley Barker's brother-in-law, Humphrey Akeroyd Bradley (1867–1934) was also a councillor (1934–56) and magistrate.

16 Rhodes etc. clan – Morley cloth manufacturers, Nonconformists. Samuel Rhodes (1857–1920) was mayor 1906–9 and 1911. His nephew Harold Rhodes (1881–1956) was mayor in 1934. Harold's half-brother Henry Hedley Watson (1866–1929) was mayor in 1919–20 (his son Mayo Marshall Watson was a councillor). Samuel's brother-in-law's nephew, Thomas Arthur Marshall (1874–1945) was mayor in 1927–28. See the Ellis Family Tree (Judith Berry) on Ancestry.co.uk for details of the Rhodes and Barker genealogies.

17 Joseph Kirk (1858–1931), Morley woollen manufacturer (having started as an overlooker), Liberal, on council 1905–31, mayor 1923–25.

18 David Dickinson (1880–1965) Morley textile manufacturer, Morley alderman, mayor 1942–43.

19 Hepworths: Benjamin Peel Hepworth (1858–1948), Morley woollen cloth manufacturer, Wesleyan, Conservative, mayor of Morley 1929–31; his daughter Clare Elizabeth Hepworth (1900–78) was a Morley councillor, alderman and mayor 1956–57, also freeman of the borough.

20 John Stubley (1850–1911), Batley woollen manufacturer, Liberal, Congregationalist, alderman, mayor 1909–11.

21 David Stubley (1858–1934), Batley woollen manufacturer, mayor 1911–12, 1917–19.

22 Gertrude Elsie Taylor (1875–1957), Batley councillor 1920s–40s, mayor 1932–34.

23 Hamilton Crothers (1869–1935), born Sheffield, insurance clerk then secretary to Theodore Taylor, Batley Liberal councillor, mayor 1922–24. His brother Montague (1862–1934) was deputy managing director of Taylors.

24 Ernest Kirk, director of Theodore Taylor's woollen mill, Liberal/Independent councillor 1945–50.
25 Margaret Grace Auty (1875–1960), active Liberal, married Herbert North 1915.
26 Herbert North (1867–1943), Batley furniture dealer, Liberal alderman, mayor 1919–20.
27 B. Turner, *About Myself* (H Toulmin, 1930), pp. 175–76.
28 Letter from T. C. Taylor to S. Martin, secretary of the Liberal Liberty League 23 Apr. 1945, quoted in Greenwood, *Taylor of Batley*, p. 140.
29 *Batley News*, 27 Sept. 1931.
30 Walter Forrest (1869–1939), Pudsey woollen manufacturer (sold out 1917), wealthy businessman, Coalition Liberal MP for Pontefract 1919–22, Liberal candidate 1923 and MP for Batley & Morley 1924–29, mayor of Pudsey, knighthood 1935.
31 *The Times*, 2 Apr. 1931. Soon after he joined the Liberal Nationals.
32 *The Times*, 19 Mar. 1934.
33 John Fennell, who ran as 'National Labour' although he was an ex-Liberal.
34 Col. James Walker (1879–1954), blanket manufacturer, DSO and bar, chairman Mirfield UDC, brother of Sir Ronald Walker. In 1931, resigned as president of Spen Valley Liberal Association in opposition to Sir John Simon's conversion to tariffs. Chairman of Dewsbury Liberal Association. In the early 1950s, associated with National Liberals and supported the Conservative candidate in Dewsbury.
35 Ernest Edgar Dalton (1879–1947), Leeds police sergeant, Nonconformist, prospective Liberal candidate for Batley & Morley in the late 1930s.
36 *Batley News*, 26 Oct. 1935.
37 Herbert Brook (1883–1949), clerk in woollen mill in Batley, chairman of Batley & Morley Liberal Association 1930s and 1940s.
38 *Batley News*, 1 Nov. 1935; *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1935.
39 The Liberal Nationals did not form a separate Yorkshire organisation until 1936 and until then did not break with the Liberal Party Organisation even in Simon's Spen Valley constituency. See David Dutton, *Liberals in Schism: A History of the National Liberal Party* (I. B. Tauris, 2008). Batley & Morley Liberal Association was affiliated to the LPO in 1938.
40 *The Times*, 28 Dec. 1937.
41 *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1939.
42 *Manchester Guardian*, 7 Mar. 1939. Dalton was critical of the government's appeasement policy and failure to support collective security through the League of Nations and the Republican government in Spain. See his letter to the *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Oct. 1939.
43 *The Times*, 28 Feb. 1939, 2 Mar. 1939, 7 Mar. 1939.
44 *Manchester Guardian*, 8 Mar. 1939.
45 Ibid.
46 Ashley Mitchell (1886–1977), Ossett worsted cloth manufacturer, father was mayor of Ossett, brother was mayor of Huddersfield, six times Liberal candidate 1923–55.
47 In July 1943, the Yorkshire Liberal Federation had rejected Mitchell's motion attacking the Beveridge Report and Mitchell had resigned his Federation offices. M. Egan, *Coming Into Focus – the Transformation of the Liberal Party 1945–64* (Saarbrucken, 2009), p. 122.
48 See Ronald Walker's letter expressing 'sympathetic anxiety' about the Beveridge scheme, *Manchester Guardian*, 22 Jan. 1945.
49 Sources: D. J. J. Owen, 'Batley and Morley from the Inside', *Land & Liberty*, July/August 1945, p. 65; A. Mitchell, *A Yorkshire Liberal Keeps Faith* (http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/mitchell-ashley_a-yorkshire-liberal-keeps-faith-1957.html); M. Cole, 'The Political Starfish: West Yorkshire Liberalism in the Twentieth Century', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 25, no. 1, March 2011, pp. 181–82. http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/georgists_mitchell_ashley.html
50 Cole, 'Political Starfish', p. 182, quoting a letter from the chairman of the Yorkshire Young Liberal Federation to Albert Ingham, Yorkshire Liberal agent, 21 Feb. 1949.
51 Christopher J. James, *MP for Dewsbury* (C J James, 1970), p. 238 – says 1950 was the first time Taylor supported a Tory candidate, but *The Times*, 8 Feb. 1949, says he did so at the 1949 by-election.
52 *Manchester Guardian*, 25 Jan. 1950, 13 Feb. 1950.
53 *Manchester Guardian*, 8 Feb. 1949.
54 A Batley & Morley Association was affiliated to the Liberal Party in 1949 and 1950, but not in 1958.
55 Labour controlled Batley in 1945–46, from 1949/50 to 1968, and in 1972–74. It controlled Morley in 1945–47, 1954–55, 1956–60, and 1963–66.
56 A. E. 'Bill' Berry (1928–2000), journalist, Deputy Chief Subeditor of *Bradford Telegraph & Argus*, member of Yorkshire Liberal Executive.
57 Trevor Evans (1922–92), local government (later health service) administrator, Batley Liberal councillor/alderman 1964–74, , deputy leader of Liberal group.
58 Clifford S. Lockwood (1915–97), Liberal councillor for Soothill and Kirklees, councillor for Batley East & Soothill 1973–76.
59 Raymond Stone (1933–85), teacher at Crossley and Porter School, Halifax, studied history at Manchester University, councillor for Birstall 1962–74, alderman and leader of the Liberal group.
60 Cicero Armitage (1904–96), headteacher of Birstall Junior School, Liberal councillor for Batley East 1963–70, Congregationalist, lay preacher 1935–85.
61 Gerald Gaunt, pupil at Batley Grammar School, teacher in Huddersfield, Liberal councillor for Birstall 1967–71.
62 Richard Beman, Liberal councillor for Soothill 1969–72.
63 H. Keith Gatenby Primary School teacher, councillor for Soothill 1971–74.
64 Lucy Ely, elder sister of Trevor Evans, Liberal councillor for Birstall 1967–73.
65 Vera Ball, shopkeeper and former nurse, Liberal councillor for Birstall 1963–70, mayor of Batley 1969–70.
66 *Batley News*, cutting undated (1961).
67 Letter from R. Stone to D. Fletcher Burden, 5 Jan. 1963, and other correspondence in the possession of the authors.
68 Philip Heath, sales manager, chairman of Morley Liberals 1970, candidate for Denshaw ward.
69 Martin Robinson (1947–), Chemistry teacher at Morley Grammar School, later deputy head at Ryburn Valley High School, former chair Lancaster University Liberal Club, Lib Dem candidate in Calderdale 2010.
70 Wilf Whitaker (1946–), educated at Morley Grammar School, Hull University, Huddersfield Polytechnic, lecturer in Geography and Urban Studies, chairman of Yorkshire Young Liberal Federation 1970, president of Normanton Liberals 1974–77, secretary of Boothferry Liberals 1982–83, Liberal parliamentary candidate in Keighley (February 1974), Normanton (October 1974), Barnsley (1979), Selby (1983) and Don Valley (1987). Gerry Wright recalls: 'I was at Morley Grammar School with Wilf Whitaker. He was two years older but I remember him standing in mock elections and raising awareness at every opportunity re the Liberal cause. Regarded as an eccentric by many fellow pupils probably because of his passion and appearance. His tortoiseshell glasses and vestiges of stubble marked him out as a hippy type. A very well-read scholar who did much for the Liberal cause when the party was going through some choppy water. Folklore in Morley. Wilf could not be accused of being bereft of distinctive views and policies. Although I did not share his classless approach to political analysis I matured enough to respect his commitment and views. A great character.' (email, 15 July 2011)
71 Raymond Stone's collection of *Batley News* cuttings in possession of authors.
72 Bernard Prendergarst was the Conservative candidate; he subsequently joined the Liberals.
73 Note on AGM of Batley & Morley Liberal Association March 1970 in authors' possession.
74 Soothill Upper (also known as Hanging Heaton) was an Urban District from 1894 to 1910 when half of it was merged into Dewsbury. The remainder of Soothill Upper was joined to Batley.

THREE ACR

In April 2011, the Communities Secretary Eric Pickles named the Smallholdings and Allotments Act 1908 among those ancient pieces of legislation, tying the hands of local authorities, which were up for review. This was the Liberal legislation which, among other things, still requires local authorities to provide land for allotments when there is demand for it. There was a huge outcry in the press and the rapidly expanding allotments movement promised to fight this tooth and nail. *The Independent* immediately launched a 'Dig for Victory' campaign against it, aware of how powerful the allotments movement has become.[1] David Cameron moved rapidly to reassure people that the 1908 law would stay. **David Boyle** looks at the story of the 1908 Smallholdings and Allotments Act, and the campaign that resulted in it, led by Liberal MP Jesse Collings.

RES AND A COW

This modern resonance makes the 1908 legislation important. But the history of the Smallholdings and Allotments Act was not quite what it appears on the face of it, and the legislation was not quite the uncontroversial breakthrough that it now seems. On the face of it, the Smallholdings Act was the culmination of a campaign for more smallholdings and allotments stretching back four decades by the Liberal campaigner Jesse Collings. In practice, when it came to the point, Collings was its bitterest critic and opponent. The debate on the Smallholdings Act at the time was a showpiece clash between the Liberals and their erstwhile colleagues in the Liberal Unionists. It was a division that stymied the Liberal land campaign which, back in the 1880s, had looked set to sweep all before it. The same divisions may even remain to this day.

To understand the debate, and why it was so bitter, we have to go back to the standard critique put forward by the back-to-the-land movement, a tradition which often dovetailed with aspects of Liberalism but which was primarily articulated by people very much on the fringes of the Liberal Party (William Morris, before his conversion to socialism), or proto-Liberals who pre-dated it (William Cobbett, Thomas Jefferson), or who were actually opposed to Liberalism (John Ruskin and those who followed him). It regarded the great original sin of Whig politics as the Enclosures, which drove poor people off the land, undermining their independence and creating a new class of paupers condemned to eke out a dependent existence in the new cities.

'The agricultural labourer of modern times is in a position quite different from that of the agricultural labourer of former years,' said Collings in his 1908 book *Land Reform*, written as part of the debate on the law which Pickles wanted to remove.[2] 'In former times, the agricultural labourer was a man who generally possessed land and almost invariably had rights in common in connection with the cartilage of his cottage. This enabled him to keep stock of various kinds and of more or less value, the proceeds of which, added to his earnings as a labourer, placed him in a fairly prosperous condition. The modern agricultural labourer is a mere wage receiver.'

Liberal politics in the mid-nineteenth century had tended to be an urban phenomenon, a product in its own way of the Industrial Revolution. But the agricultural depression of the 1870s brought agrarian campaigners into prominent positions in the Liberal Party. Joseph Arch, the farm workers' leader, was elected as MP for North West Norfolk in the crucial year of 1886. But the most prominent of them all was a bricklayer's son from Devon called Jesse Collings, the future Liberal MP for Ipswich and then Birmingham Bordesley.

Jesse Collings (1831–1920)

Collings had become a commercial traveller, took over the company he worked for, and became a close friend of Joseph Chamberlain at the beginning of his political career in Birmingham. He understood from his own experience the importance of a patch of land for those in poverty. His father had rented four acres next to their house. 'On these four acres we grew wheat, barley, potatoes, and other vegetables,' he wrote in his autobiography. 'We kept a number of pigs and a large number of fowls. For myself I had a fancy for rabbits, guinea-pigs, hedgehogs, and ferrets. We grew each year sufficient wheat to supply the family with bread.'[3]

It was his fervent support for the north in the American Civil War which brought him into formal politics, then his admiration for the American school system. By the 1870s, he was a town councillor representing Edgbaston, working in Birmingham with Chamberlain on the project to create a city that was 'parked, paved, assized, marketed, gas & watered and improved' (Collings' phrase). He was also among the organisers, with Arch, of the Agricultural Labourers Union, a Midlands phenomenon originally, formed on Good Friday 1872 under a chestnut tree in Wellesbourne. His work on the union led to the invitation to stand for parliament as a Liberal.

Collings came to believe that the best solution to urban poverty, and the best way of providing a dignified independence to agricultural workers, was to repopulate rural areas and rebuild the peasant class. That meant providing land for anyone who wanted it to meet their own needs. He and the union drew up the first of a whole series of bills that would give poor people rights over land, to 'restore the connection, now almost destroyed, between the cultivator and the soil'. If he could get it enacted, he said, it 'would largely diminish pauperism; and would increase the numbers, and raise the social condition of the rural population'.[4]

The key reform was for the state to help labourers become their own landlords. It was an idea bitterly opposed by the big landowners, perhaps unsurprisingly, who regarded it as the first stage of a radical expropriation of their inheritance. It was also opposed by the farmers, afraid that it would make their labourers too independent, and much of Collings' campaigning was designed to persuade them it would also benefit them.

That was the challenge. But Liberal politics in the mid-nineteenth century was optimistic when the Back to the Land tradition was deeply pessimistic. It was Nonconformist when the tradition was often Anglo-Catholic. It believed in the inevitability of progress when the tradition was deeply sceptical of it. So Collings' deft weaving together of Liberalism and rural radicalism was a new phenomenon, at least new since the days of Cobbett and his *Rural Rides*.

There was also a theological dimension because the few allotments that existed in rural areas were usually under the control of the local churches or the charities they controlled. Trustees often interpreted their responsibilities so tightly that nobody who really needed allotments could possibly find their way onto them.[5] But the understanding of the importance of common land and preservation was beginning to grow in the 1870s as the Commons Preservation Society got under way and William Morris launched his Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. New versions of common land were in the air and, as the 1880s dawned, the land question – especially at its sharpest in rural Ireland – was right at the forefront of political debate.

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The debate was spearheaded by Chamberlain's increasingly radical energies, Chamberlain campaigning in the cities, and Collings in the rural areas. They were a formidable couple, utterly loyal to each other, though Collings made fun of Chamberlain incessantly. They were also a formidable sight on the stump, Collings with his huge side whiskers, Chamberlain with his trade mark monocle and orchid in the breast of his long coat.

Chamberlain had set land reform at the heart of his 'unauthorised programme', which – although it was considered dangerously radical at the time – was actually designed partly to undermine socialism. It was formulated to provide ordinary people with a measure of economic independence by distributing small plots of land, as well as setting out a programme of education, democratic reform and decentralisation: it was a new kind of populist Liberalism.

'If you go back to the early history of our social system,' he said in his speech on the Reform Bill of 1885, 'you will find that … every man was born into the world with natural rights, with a right to share in the great inheritance of the community, with a right to a part of the land of his birth.'[6]

The great land magnates were appalled, but when the grand old man of Liberalism, John Bright, threw his weight behind the land campaign, it was clear that policy was moving on apace. 'The time is near in my opinion,' he said, 'when the great land monopoly of this country will be assailed and when it will be broken into and broken up.'[7] Chamberlain lit the touchpaper of the political fireworks with an attack on the Conservative leader Lord Salisbury, describing him as 'the spokesman of a class – a class to which he himself belongs, *who toil not neither do they spin*'.[8]

Collings achieved his first success with the Allotments Extension Act of 1883. It was a small measure to prevent local parishes from frustrating access to allotments. But at the heart of the land battle was the question of giving two million agricultural labourers the vote, under the assumption that they would force through radical land legislation. There were huge demonstrations after the House of Lords threw out the extended franchise in 1884, with farm labourers marching into London from Kent and Sussex in a pattern faintly reminiscent of the Peasants Revolt. The *Daily News* spoke patronisingly of 'men who carried fresh-cut walking sticks and who do not show the remotest affectation of the ways of town life'.

It was during the forthcoming general election in 1885, in a speech at Cirencester, that Collings first used his famous slogan 'Three acres and a cow'. It was not a new phrase and it was much ridiculed by his Conservative opponents, but it caught the zeitgeist, setting out clearly what he considered the minimum for a family to live on. Chamberlain adopted the slogan for his own programme, which set out how the state would buy land and let it to anyone who wanted it, at the rate of one acre of arable and four acres of pasture. It was the moment that the Liberal Party adopted some of the flavour of Ruskinian radicalism. 'The standard of welfare of the large family we call the nation should be not so much the amount of its aggregate money wealth,' wrote Collings in a close echo of Ruskin, 'but the moral, material and social condition of the great mass of its members.'[9]

Collings' new law had produced 394,517 allotments or smallholdings of under four acres and 272,000 'garden allotments'. He had been elected chairman of the new Allotment Extension Association to keep up the pressure. Historians sometimes argue that the Unauthorised Programme had little impact.[10] But the allotments element, which it gave birth to, was a political theme which echoed through the next six decades. Providing access to land was the proposed solution – not taxing land, the great campaign of the 1890s, because that accepted ownership patterns as they stood. For Collings, land was to be reorganised in such a way that anyone who wanted to access to it should be able to have it, whoever they were, wherever they lived.

It was at this point that his amendment to the Queen's Speech in January 1886, regretting that Lord Salisbury's Conservative government had no plans to help agricultural labourers find allotments and smallholdings, was

unexpectedly passed by the House of Commons. It brought down the government. This became known as the 'Three Acres and a Cow' amendment. At long last, the Liberal leader William Ewart Gladstone rose in his seat to support Collings during the debate, promising to 'restore the old local communities of this country something of that character of a community, in which the common interests of the individual labourer may be so managed as to associate him with the soil in a manner much more effectively than that by which he is associated with it at present'.[11] A few days later, Gladstone took office at the head of a new Liberal government. Collings had never been so hopeful, but it was all to turn to ashes within months.

The first sign of trouble came when he introduced his Allotments and Small Holdings Bill, designed to give parishes the power to provide allotments where there was a demand and nowhere was available at a reasonable rent. To his consternation, the new government failed to adopt it. Instead, Gladstone pushed forward his deeply controversial Irish Home Rule Bill, determined once and for all to end the centuries of dispute with Ireland. It was a brave move, but Collings and his colleagues were enraged that so much urgent radical legislation was being postponed for a Home Rule measure they hardly found convincing.

The divisions in the party saw Chamberlain and Collings both in the new grouping of Liberal Unionists. It was a traumatic period of betrayal and shattered friendships. Arch stayed with the Gladstonian Liberals while Collings and the land reformers followed Chamberlain. Collings was flung out of his own Allotments Extension Association, which was then in the hands of the Gladstonians. Instead, he set up the new Rural Labourers League, with Chamberlain in the chair, which became a formidable campaign organisation in its own right, with 25 paid local agents and 3,000 volunteers nationwide.

Despite this stressful and upsetting process, Collings went on campaigning, battling for his bill through increasingly elongated sessions until he could do no more. The issues were put to the test in a by-election in Spalding in Lincolnshire, which was unexpectedly won by a Liberal on the allotments issue. By then, he had decided to save what he could, and split his bill into two. What was passed was the Allotments and Cottage Gardens Compensation for Crops Act 1887, which obliged local authorities to provide allotments if there was a demand for them. Allotments later became the key issue in the first county council elections in 1889. Even the evolution pioneer Alfred Russel Wallace joined in the campaign by applying for an allotment to the new Dorset County Council and then publicising the delays and barriers thrown in his way by reluctant officials. Even so, three years later, another 150,000 people had allotments.

In March 1891, Collings finally passed the other half, his Smallholdings Bill. It had taken him eleven years of constant campaigning, reintroducing the bill with every session, rather as Sir John Lubbock had done with his Ancient Monuments Act. But there was an irony here: the Smallholdings Bill was passed with Conservative votes. 'I have in the last five years seen more progress made with the practical application of my political programme than in all my previous life,' wrote Chamberlain shortly afterwards. 'I owe this result entirely to my former opponents, and all the opposition has come from my former friends.'

The new political divisions began to make themselves felt. Collings passionately believed that the smallholdings should be owned outright, as similar legislation allowed for in Ireland. He wanted his new peasant class to be proprietors, not dependent on landlords, even if those landlords were the county councils. He drafted his Purchase of Land Bill in 1895, designed to let ordinary farm tenants buy their farms, by advancing them the money to do so, and doing the same for people who wanted to be smallholders. He reintroduced it every year until 1914. It never made it into law.

The problem was that the politics of the debate was changing. Gladstone's final administration gave powers to parish councils to acquire allotments, but they were to be rented, not sold or given away. The land tax debate was now emerging and Collings' former colleagues in the Liberals were less interested in providing new forms of land ownership. They were increasingly interested in using the tax system to take away the power of the landowners – not adding to their number.

At the same time, Collings' smallholdings campaign was attracting the determined opposition of the new Labour Party. Ramsay Macdonald himself opposed him in a ten-minute-rule-bill debate in 1907. The idea of land ownership, even by the poorest, was anathema to socialists.

Collings' influence on Chamberlain's son Austen was bringing the Conservatives round to the idea of a new class of owners on the land – as long as the smallholdings were not so big that labourers became independent of farmers.[12] The Conservative Lord Onslow launched his Association for the Voluntary Extension of the Allotments System as a way to head off their fears that the Liberals would nationalise the land.

At the same time, Collings' smallholdings campaign was attracting the determined opposition of the new Labour Party. Ramsay Macdonald himself opposed him in a ten-minute-rule-bill debate in 1907. The idea of land ownership, even by the poorest, was anathema to socialists. Collings' other political problem was that his Liberal Unionists now barely existed. Chamberlain had become a ferocious imperialist, and Colonial Secretary in the government, and the Liberal Unionist party organisation was to be wound up completely in 1912.

Worse, as far as Collings was concerned, the Liberal landslide at the beginning of 1906 had swept the Unionists from power. Chamberlain took the opportunity to swoop on a weakened Conservative Party and to effectively seize the leadership for his radical imperialism. But just as his moment of triumph, he was struck down by a paralysing stroke.

Lloyd George maintained the old Collings line as late as 1910. 'I hope Liberalism will see its way to go even further than ensuring security of tenure for those who cultivate the soil,' he told the audience at the Queen's Hall in London.[13] 'Our chairman has already indicated that in his judgement there should be some great measure which would transfer the ownership of the soil from the great landowners to the cultivating peasants.'

But the politics was different now. The main thrust of the new Liberal government was to build on the idea of security of tenure and they saw it differently to Collings.

'The magic of property, such as it is, is derived not from ownership but from security,' said Asquith, the Home Secretary.[14] So when the Liberals' twin Smallholdings and Allotments Bills emerged, in 1907 and 1908, security not ownership was the objective. In fact, would-be smallholders had to find a fifth of the purchase money themselves. This was the proposal of a commission chaired by the banker Sir Edward Holden, who said that a new land bank should only advance four-fifths of the price at 4 per cent interest. New smallholding tenants would have to pay the interest on the loan to buy the land for their farms, but the ownership would still stay with the county councils. 'It is, in short a communalization of the land, not at the expense of the hated landlord, but at that of the 'sweated' tenant,' said a furious Collings.[15]

The smallholdings aspect of the new law was a failure: less than 5,000 new smallholders took the plunge, mainly in market gardens near the big cities, but it was different for allotments. The 1907 Act was consolidated into the 1908 Act, but Jesse Collings, the great advocate of allotments – the key figure in their history in the UK – voted against it. His remaining allies tried to extend the rights of tenant farmers to buy their farms with state help when they were for sale, but their amendment was lost by fifty-six votes.

By the end of the decade, even Lloyd George was on the other side. 'Great Britain, in my judgement, is utterly unsuited to the establishment of a great peasant proprietorship,' he said.[16] It was a bitter blow to Collings, who was now in ill health and desperate to give up his parliamentary seat. The great cause he had given his political career to seemed to have finally been defeated. What he had actually achieved, embedding allotments into the new local government machine, was vital for the future, but it was so little compared to the scale of his ambition: to get people back on the land.

Lloyd George launched his own land campaign in 1913, borrowing Collings' radical language about the rural English, but to argue instead for land tax, conjuring up a vision of the sturdy, traditional peasant:

> He had his common (cheers) where he could graze a cow that would give him milk and butter for himself and his children. There was a little patch where he could raise corn to feed them. There he had his poultry, his geese, his pigs; a patch of land where he could raise green produce for the table. He was a gentlemen; he was independent. He had a stake in his country. His title was as ancient and apparently as indefensible as that of the lord of the manor. Where had it gone to? Stolen.[17]

It was radical. It may have resulted in major extensions to land available for allotments if the First World War had not intervened, but it wasn't what Collings had campaigned for. In March 1909, a disappointed Collings slipped on the icy footboard of a train at Charing Cross Station, fell on the platform and fractured his hip. He never entirely recovered, but he was paradoxically to see a peculiar and extremely sudden revival of his political fortunes.

Rather unexpectedly, the war provided the opportunity to shift the debate again because producing food suddenly became urgent and vitally important. Britain could no longer feed her own population, and the U-boat blockade made food imports difficult and dangerous. Food also took up space in the holds of merchant ships that could have been used for arms. The time had come to revitalise Britain's agricultural base.

The Dig for Victory campaign of the Second World War remains a part of British folk memory, but its equivalent in the First World War has been forgotten. Yet right at the heart of it all was Collings' Rural Labourers' League, encouraging village industries, linking them up with local smallholdings, and eventually concentrating on promoting the idea of potato and livestock clubs. Soon 400 of these clubs had begun, with an average membership of about thirty each – and involving about 24,000 pigs.

But the League was no longer the central player. The major revival of allotments in 1916 was brought about by the new Conservative agriculture minister, the Earl of Crawford, and his alliance with the Vacant Land Cultivation Society, a new pressure group set up in 1907 by the American soap millionaire Joseph Fels, following a series of controversial land invasions on the outskirts of cities by people who wanted to grow food. Fels had been at the forefront of the vacant lot societies that had emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in so many American cities, as a way of linking 'idle land with idle labour'.

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By November 1916, Lloyd George was about to take over the coalition government, which would leave both Asquith and Crawford out of office. But by then, the key policy shift had been made. Crawford called in the Vacant Land Cultivation Society to ask their advice about what he was planning. Included in the meeting was the society's enthusiastic organising director for London, Gerald Butcher.

Butcher explained that after 'an interview lasting an hour or more, [we] left with the full knowledge that probably the greatest drama which had taken place in land reform for many generations was about to be enacted …'

> For once, at any rate, the privilege of the few was to become the right of the many. By virtue of the powers conferred by the Defence of the Realm Regulations, the government was about to lay its hand upon the most sacred of monopolies, the most jealously guarded of all vested interests; it intended, briefly, to commandeer certain land in order that allotments might be provided on a large and unprecedented scale.[18]

Two weeks later, Crawford made his plans public. The result was the Cultivation of Lands Order 1916. It gave county councils the right to take over wasteland or abandoned land, without the consent or even knowledge of its owners, and use it to grow food. Crawford had been nervous that the order would outrage people, but in fact the local authorities were overwhelmed with demand from people applying to turn specific bits of land into allotments, or to take over part of the new allotments themselves.

The allotments of the First World War were a social phenomenon and their effects were to echo

through society long after the plots had been handed back to the housing developers. Many of those using them for growing vegetables had no idea how to distribute their produce, and refused to sell it – but gave it away around the neighbourhood as a sign of largesse. Those who did sell it found, on average that allotment growing could produce food to the value of £80 an acre – in the days when a hefty bag of potatoes cost 5d (about 2p).[19] The argument for allotments as a tool of poverty reduction seemed to have been won.

The desperate need for home grown food in the First World War had also converted Lloyd George to the old Liberal Unionist position, leading to the Land Settlement (Facilities) Bill of December 1918, designed to resettle returning soldiers on the land. Collings was ill, but his friends rallied round and organised a successful amendment allowing smallholders to buy their land after six years, and to pay back the money over sixty years.

Two years later, another 208,000 acres had been acquired for former soldiers. Collings died on 20 November 1920, believing that his campaign had achieved its objectives. He could look back on an extraordinary focused life of commitment to the cause, stretching from the days of town planning, *Ideal Home* magazine and hens in suburban back gardens, right back to Cobbett, the Great Reform Act, and the Captain Swing riots. He was old enough to have signed the petition calling for the repeal of the Corn Laws in the 1840s and to have regretted doing so. It was a long lifetime, nine decades, of unprecedented change.

Actually, Collings was wrong. The kind of transformation in land ownership and small-scale agriculture he imagined, and could see in other European countries on his summer jaunts with Chamberlain, did not come to pass after all. The great opportunity that opened up for land reform on that scale was a victim Home Rule divisions in the Liberal Party and the frustration of Lloyd George's Land Campaign by the First World War. The 1885 slogan 'Three acres and a cow' continued to be associated with the Liberal Party well into the second half of the twentieth century, but with little understanding about its origins or objectives. When the generation after Collings began to pull together the lost and frayed strands of his campaign, they did so outside the Liberal Party.

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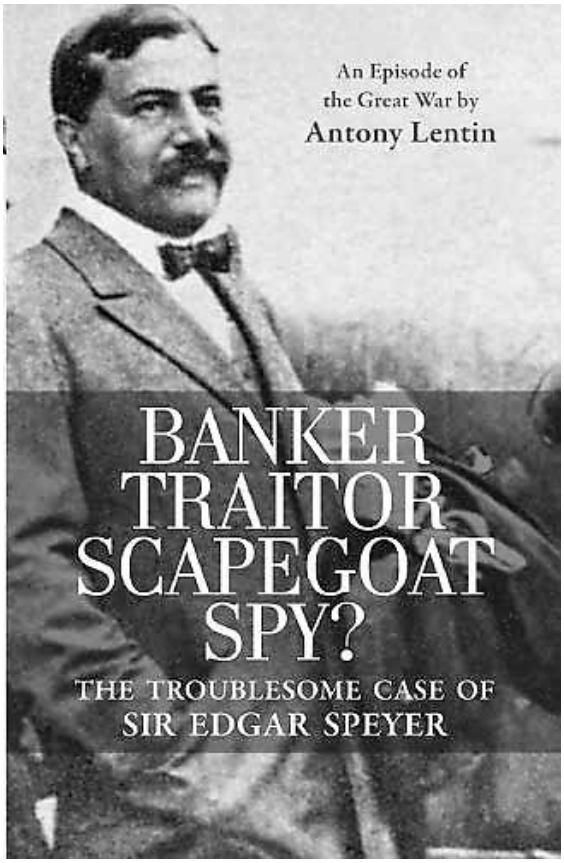
1 *The Independent*, 1 May 2011.
2 J. Collings, *Land Reform* (Longmans, Green, 1908), p. xvii.
3 J. Collings and Sir John L. Green, *Life of the Rt Hon. Jesse Collings* (Longmans, Green, 1920).
4 Ibid., p. 124.
5 Simon Grimble, *Landscape Writing and the Condition of England 1878–1917: Ruskin to modernism* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p. 86.
6 J. Garvin, *The Life of Joseph Chamberlain* (London, 1932), p. 549.
7 *Manchester Guardian*, 25 Mar. 1880.
8 Joseph Chamberlain speech, 30 Mar. 1883.
9 Collings and Green, *Life of Collings*, p. 181.
10 See Ian Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: The land issue and party politics in England 1906–1914* (Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2001), pp. 12–13.
11 Collings and Green, *Life of Collings*, pp. 185–6.
12 See Paul Readman, *Land and Nation in England: Patriotism, national identity and the politics of land 1880–1914* (Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2008), p. 20.
13 J. Collings, *The Colonization of Rural Britain* (Rural World, 1914), vol. 2, pp. 332–3.
14 Collings and Green, *Life of Collings*, p. 273.
15 Collings, *Colonization*, p. 339.
16 This was in July 1913, see Collings, *Colonization*, p. 333.
17 *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1913.
18 Gerald W. Butcher, *Allotments for All: The story of a great movement* (George Allen & Unwin, 1918), p. 18.
19 Ibid., p. 31.

REVIEWS

Scapegoat for Liberalism?

Antony Lentin, *Banker, Traitor, Scapegoat, Spy? The Troublesome Case of Sir Edgar Speyer* (Haus, 2013)
Reviewed by **David Dutton**

The First World War gave rise to countless acts of patriotic bravery and self-sacrifice. But it also prompted a large number of instances of ugly xenophobia. As is well known, the First Sea Lord, Prince Louis of Battenberg, second cousin of King George V, father of Louis Mountbatten and a nationalised British subject who had served in the Royal Navy from the age of fourteen, was forced from office in October 1914, solely on account of his German birth. The offence of Lord Haldane was equally slight. An admirer of German culture, he had once described Germany as his 'spiritual home'. At the same time, however, as War Minister under Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, Haldane had done more than anyone else to prepare the British Expeditionary Force for military combat in 1914. This, however, did not spare the by-then Lord Chancellor from a vitriolic campaign in the right-wing press. The recipient of more than 2,500 abusive letters in a single day, Haldane was summarily dropped from the government at the formation of the first wartime coalition in May 1915 – the price Prime Minister Asquith was prepared to pay to ensure Conservative participation in the government and his own position at its head. Even innocent



dachshunds, impeccably loyal to their British masters and mistresses, were the victims of unthinking persecution.

The fate of the German-born Edgar Speyer was arguably even crueller. In the same month that Haldane left office, Speyer, accompanied by his wife and children, sailed to New York to escape a sustained campaign of vilification in Britain which charged him with disloyalty and more. By this time he had tried, unsuccessfully, voluntarily to resign the privy councillorship to which he had been raised on Asquith's recommendation in 1909. Worse, however, was to follow. In 1921, after a lengthy investigation of his wartime activities, he was found guilty by a judicial committee of enquiry of disloyalty and disaffection to the Crown and of communicating and trading with the enemy. For this he was deprived of the British citizenship he had held since the age of twenty-nine and expelled from the Privy Council, the last individual to suffer this indignity until the Labour MP, Eliot Morley, in 2011, following imprisonment for fraudulent claims for parliamentary expenses.

Speyer's is not now a household name. Yet he was a leading figure in British society in the years before the outbreak of the First World War. A wealthy member of a Jewish merchant-banking family from Frankfurt, Speyer settled permanently in London in 1886 as chairman of Speyer Bros., the British branch of the family enterprise. It was Speyer's money that financed the Underground Electric Railway Company of London, bringing electrification to the Metropolitan and District lines of the London 'Tube' and completion to major sections of what became the Piccadilly, Bakerloo and Northern lines. As Tony Lentin writes, 'He saw the Company not only as a hoped-for source of profit which he must strive to keep solvent but also as a great public amenity, an agent of urban and social progress. The Underground became an end in itself' (p. 6). According to the *Daily Mirror*, by 1912 Speyer had become 'London's "King of the Underground" … the master-mind dealing with the mammoth problem of London's passenger-traffic' (p. 10). At the same time, he became a generous patron of the arts, saving the annual Promenade Concerts from bankruptcy, underwriting their losses and putting them on a secure financial footing. Speyer's enormous wealth also enabled him to support such varied causes as the Whitechapel Art Gallery, the Poplar Hospital and Captain Scott's expeditions to the Antarctic.

Then as now, wealth opened doors and Speyer became prominent on the fringes of Liberal politics, developing into an intimate of both Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith, and of the latter's wife, Margot. His contributions to party funds for the general election of 1906 no doubt eased the path to the baronetcy he secured later that year. The following year Lloyd George asked him to advise on the establishment of the Port of London Authority. Speyer gave public support to the People's Budget of 1909 and was on the long list of those earmarked for a peerage in the event that their Unionist lordships had not seen the error of their ways and allowed the Parliament Bill to reach the statute book in the summer of 1911. Winston and Clementine Churchill were even renting a holiday cottage from the Speyers as the European storm clouds gathered three years later.

In an essay published in 1912, Speyer lauded Germany and England as 'citizens of the world' and wrote of the prospect of continuing good relations between two kindred nations. Yet he would be a collateral casualty of the collapse of that vision following the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914. Spymania predated the coming of war, but the fear of the 'enemy within' inevitably intensified once fighting began. It was not long before figures on the right of the political spectrum started to ask whether someone born in Germany, no matter how pronounced his Anglophilia, could really be trusted. Journalists such as Leo Maxse of the *National Review* and H. A. Gwynne of the *Morning Post* were suspicious of Speyer's continuing entrée into 10 Downing Street. It was rumoured that at one dinner party in October 1914, he had been present during discussions of the disposition of the Royal Navy. 'One's blood boils at these things,' wrote the former Tory whip, the Earl of Crawford, 'while we know that communications are being made to the enemy' (p. 43).

Over the months that followed, indiscriminate hostility towards those of German birth was one way to vent frustration at the failure of the military to produce the promised early victory. 'I get lots of violent and abusive letters saying I am pro-German', complained Margot Asquith. 'This is because I won't drop my German friends, Sir Edgar Speyer, [Sir Ernest] Cassel etc.' (p. 59). Even the king, whom no one could claim was of undiluted British blood, was alarmed, a feeling that would lead to the masterstroke of the creation of the House of Windsor to replace that of the distinctly suspect Saxe-Coburg-Gotha.

Denounced by Maxse as one of a group of 'opulent, sinister, powerful, truculent Prussians' and no doubt recoiling from Horatio Bottomley's assertion that 'you cannot naturalise an unnatural beast, a human abortion, a hellish freak' (pp. 62–3), Speyer's decision to seek sanctuary in the then neutral United States was entirely understandable. His 'departure from these shores,' writes Lentin, 'and the fall of the last purely Liberal government were coincidental but symbolic of the decline of

liberalism generally' (p. 164). The decision of the Home Office in 1919 to re-open the case, a decision that led ultimately to Speyer's disgrace and 'conviction', was altogether less comprehensible.

Was this a flagrant miscarriage of justice inflicted on one of the country's greatest benefactors of the twentieth century? As an accomplished historian of this period and also a qualified barrister, Antony Lentin is well placed to decide. He does not, however, act unreservedly as the counsel for the defence. Rather his task is that of a fair-minded judge (something largely denied to Speyer through the person of Mr Justice Salter, for twenty years the Unionist MP for Basingstoke), summing up the available evidence for his readership, the jury. Yet the conclusion seems inescapable. Speyer had committed minor and technical misdemeanours, including deliberately evading the censor. But there is no proof that he had set out to betray his adopted country or indeed done anything to merit the punishments imposed. If not quite a British Dreyfus, Speyer had good reason to feel bitter at his treatment. He was, judges Lentin, in a phrase previously used by the late Stephen Koss of Haldane, 'a scapegoat for Liberalism'. 'Conservatives were paying off old scores, taking vicarious revenge for their deep-seated grievances both against Asquith's pre-war administration and for his wartime failings' (p. 166).

This is a compelling tale told with skill and verve. One would have liked a little more on the deeper origins of wartime hostility, not all of which came to light only with the outbreak of conflict, and of the anti-Semitism which was clearly a factor. Sir Almeric Fitzroy, clerk to the Privy Council, described Speyer as 'a most characteristic little Jew' and, when swearing him into that august body, pointedly offered him the Old Testament, 'and thus saved the Gospels from outrage' (p. 27). Overall, however, this is a valuable and salutary study of the perilous route by which patriotism can shade imperceptibly into jingoism and thence into pure xenophobia.

David Dutton is the author of A History of the Liberal Party since 1900 *(Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), and contributes regularly to the* Journal of Liberal History.

Bitterest allies

Ian Cawood, *The Liberal Unionist Party: A History*
(I.B. Tauris, 2012)
Reviewed by **Tony Little**

On 17 December 1885, a newspaper scoop revealed what some Liberals had long feared: Gladstone had been converted to home rule. Gladstone's proposal for a devolved Irish parliament resolved the impasse created by 1885 election where Parnell's Irish nationalist party held the balance of power. But his move split the Liberal Party and ninety-three Liberals joined the Conservatives in crushing the Home Rule Bill.

Division in the Liberal forces was nothing new. It had kept them out of power for parts of the 1850s. It had overpowered Russell's 1865 government and Gladstone's first administration. What was different about 1886?

The defeat of home rule, Ian Cawood claims, created the biggest defection from any British political party. It was followed by an immediate general election in which Gladstonian Liberals fought the Unionist Liberals who were protected by an electoral pact with the Tories. The split became institutionalised. The Unionists formed a separate party and supported Salisbury's minority Conservative administration between 1886 and 1892. In 1895, the Liberal Unionists (LUs) formed a coalition with the Conservatives and in 1912 the two parties merged.

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The quarrel kept the (Gladstonian) Liberals out of power for most of the following two decades and the home rule policy blighted both the 1892 and 1906 Liberal governments. The two candidates angling to succeed the aging Gladstone, the Whig, Lord Hartington, and, the Radical, Joe Chamberlain, both sided with the Unionists and in turn led the LUs in the Commons.

A devolved parliament no longer seems such an outlandish idea and it is hard to recreate the passions with which home rule was debated, compounded of enthusiasm for the Empire then approaching its zenith, resentment of Parnell's obstructive parliamentary tactics and the violence of Irish agrarian campaigners, British Protestant fear of regimented Irish Catholicism, and old-fashioned racial prejudice against the Irish, which had been stoked up in Stuart times and festered at least until the 1950s.

Gladstone had once defined Liberalism as 'trust in the people only qualified by prudence'. Gladstone believed that he had detected in Parnell, a Protestant landowner, the reasonableness and conservatism of a man with whom he could do business. I have always considered that the essential difference between the Gladstonians and the Unionists was this element of faith for the future. Gladstone judged that home rule would strengthen the ties between Britain and Ireland, the Unionists feared that home rule would begin the dissolution of the Empire. Alex Salmond's referendum on Scottish independence will put these hypotheses to a practical test.

While the home rule dispute is a staple part of analyses of the Victorian Liberal Party and biographies of Gladstone, little has been written on the Liberal Unionist party as a topic of interest for itself. The focus has been on the dispute or on its implications for the Liberal Party or on the leavening of the Conservative Party with a mildly more progressive element. So much attention has been paid to the LU leaders, especially Chamberlain, that it has often been considered a party of chiefs without Indians, or as Gladstone put it 'clergymen without a church' (p. 10). The traditional narrative – which suggested that the party merely provided disillusioned Whig aristocrats with a comforting

resting station on their inevitable journey into Conservatism – has been undermined by the work of Parry, Lubenow and Jenkins showing the continued vitality of Whiggism within the Liberal Party, but always had a flaw. How could the continued alliance of Chamberlain and his associates with these Whigs be reconciled with his known radicalism?

Dr Cawood seeks to put the Liberalism back into Liberal Unionism and to turn the spotlight on the led as well as the leaders. In the process he has painted a more detailed picture of the Unionists, drawn on a range of previously neglected sources and provided a range of novel illustrations which do much to enliven his text. By this process he gives more detail about the organisation and the foot soldiers of Liberal Unionism than is readily available about the Gladstonian Liberal Party and he moves us towards an answer to the Chamberlainite mystery though he certainly does not enhance Joe's reputation.

To some extent the opening three chapters cover old ground: the initial home rule division, the ideology of Liberal Unionism and the alliance with the Conservatives. What is added is a level of complexity missing from earlier accounts, which establishes how problematic was the creation of a new party/parties comprising the very different outlooks of the Hartingtonian and Chamberlainite MPs. For general readers, however, it would have helped if Dr Cawood had given some more background both to the home rule dispute and to the dissident Liberals. The 1880–85 government had not been a happy ship and for many that experience influenced their choices in 1886.

Character, consistency and manliness

It has been long accepted that the dissident Liberals MPs did not differ significantly from their more orthodox brethren in class or occupation. What Dr Cawood establishes is that there was also little difference in policies embraced, apart from the differences over Ireland, but that this apparently small variation masked critical differences in character and outlook.

While all Liberals had a particular reverence for the rule of law, the Unionists were less understanding of the aggressive Irish Nationalist land campaigns and Unionists were more outraged by the parliamentary stratagems of Nationalist MPs. The Home Rule Bill was seen as rewarding this lawlessness. Here, the Unionist Liberals were more in tune with middle-class public opinion than the Gladstonians. A swathe of newspapers switched their allegiance to the Unionist cause and LUs had a strong representation among universities and public intellectuals.

But in other respects they were out of sympathy with the developing political culture. They placed a particular emphasis on character, consistency and manliness. They deemed Gladstone effeminate for pandering to Irish bullying and that accepting such Gladstonian whims demeaned their sturdy independence. Outside Chamberlain's West Midlands Duchy, the LUs were men who formed relationships with their constituency only when an MP's family influence and his status in the community were critical to his election. These were not men who saw themselves as answerable to a constituency caucus or who recognised how crucial party organisation had become after the franchise had been extended so widely among the labouring classes, who more readily made a link between their work-place oppression and that of the Irish.

Where there was a significant difference was in the Lords, where defections were disproportionately at a much higher level than in the Commons. A separate analysis of its impact would have been valuable .

A hard truth

Dr Cawood sets the operation of the pact between the LUs and the Conservatives against the background of his detailed work on individual constituencies. To do so, the book spends surprisingly little time on the efforts to reunite the various wings of Liberalism. The alliance gave the Conservatives government between 1886 and 1892 and again in the 1895 coalition. The alliance protected LUs against the consequences of their home rule vote and gave their leaders places in government, but at a heavy price. The need to avoid upsetting Conservative sensibilities prevented the LUs from capturing any significant ground from the Gladstonians by embracing Chamberlain's more radically Liberal policy proposals. LU achievements within Tory governments were at best modest. Cawood's wide range of sources allows him to illustrate the breadth and depth of exasperation this caused among LU rank and file. The pact effectively prevented LUs fighting Conservative-held seats but did not stop the Tories trying to get their own candidates preferred for vacated LU seats. Inadvertently, Cawood's book describes the two parties as 'bitterest allies' (p. 91), a misprint which reveals a hard truth from which the LUs never escaped.

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The two chapters on the organisation of the Liberal Unionists and their impact on the electorate are a source of considerable strength to the book and value to the reader. The author presents an analysis that covers not only the efforts to establish a central party organisation and a variety of affiliated groups but the very patchy strengths and weaknesses of the LUs on a regional basis. Among the affiliated groups were a Women's Liberal Unionist Association, which attracted a number of high-profile Liberal women, the Nonconformist Unionist Association, capitalising on Protestant fears, and a Rural Labourer's League reflecting Collings' and Chamberlain's efforts to appeal to this component of the newly enfranchised. The regional basis of the party very much represented an early exemplar of the ALDC motto: 'where we work we win'. Chamberlain's team were nearly invincible in the Birmingham area. Parts of the west of Scotland and the West Country were areas of real strength, which Wales and the east of Scotland never became. Elsewhere efforts were distinctly patchy and Dr Cawood suggests that the electoral efforts of LU leaders were intermittent, energetic when roused by bad by-elections or the onset of general elections but otherwise often lethargic.

The final section deals with the merger of the Liberal Unionists with the Conservatives and is subtitled 'The Strange Death of Liberal Unionism' in a conscious echo of Dangerfield's well-known polemic on the problems of Edwardian Liberalism. But here surely there is less to explain. The leaders of the

Liberal Unionist Party were more involved in running government than developing their party after 1895. Chamberlain's explosive radical ideas could hurt his friends as much as his enemies, as he demonstrated between 1903 and 1906. The party had failed to establish itself outside its original enclaves and, once it had rejected the idea of reunion with the Gladstonians, it became progressively more problematic to envisage escaping the not always friendly Tory embrace. Cawood suggests that the prolonged engagement from the formation of the 1895 government to the consummation of the merger in 1912 is a tribute to the residual independence of the regional LU parties and the emotional commitment that individuals made to their party no matter how irrational their aspirations had become.

The legacy of Liberal Unionism was not limited to the subtle changes in Conservatism manifest right up till the Second World War, if not beyond, but was also evident in the pioneering campaigning methods the new party employed in its struggle to survive. Dr Cawood hints at the scope for more work that can, and I hope, will be done to explore this. His book is much to be welcomed and from now on those interested in the period will need to engage with his findings.

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

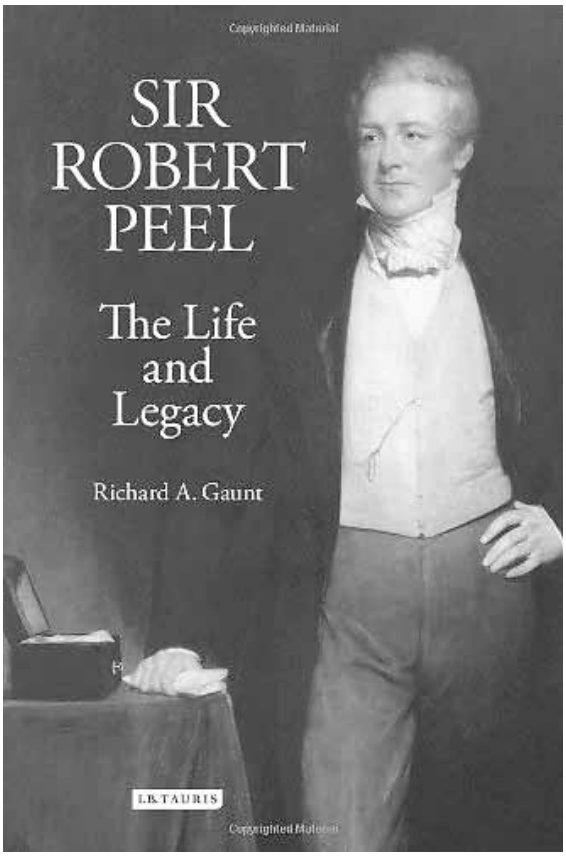
Views of Peel

Richard A. Gaunt: *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy* (I. B. Tauris, 2010)
Reviewed by **Dr Matthias Oppermann**

It is no longer possible to deny it: Sir Robert Peel was one of the most successful British prime ministers of the nineteenth century. He was the author of a couple of liberal reforms, for example the currency reform of 1819 and the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829. Moreover, he advocated, in 1829 – after having opposed it for a long time – Catholic emancipation, and repealed the Corn Laws in 1846. No prime minister produced a legislative record as comprehensive as Peel's. However, for a long time Disraeli and Gladstone have clouded Peel's image in history. Conservatives wanted Disraeli to be the greatest nineteenth-century prime minister; Liberals prefered to reserve this honorific for Gladstone. Peel, the founder of the Conservative Party who eventually wrecked it by the repeal of the Corn Laws, pleased neither side. At best, he was seen as Gladstone's teacher, as the forerunner of Gladstonian Liberalism.

The first historian to change that picture was George Kitson Clark who challenged, in the 1920s, the Gladstonian reading of Peel's career so well established after his death. He claimed Peel for the Conservative Party, a view that Norman Gash affirmed and widened decades later in his outstanding two-volume Peel biography. Gash, who himself favoured a prudent, pragmatic, and non-ideological conservatism promoted Peel to the rank of 'founder of modern Conservatism'. This new or 'revisionist' judgement resonates in Douglas Hurd's Peel biography of 2007, but it is far from being unanimously accepted. Cambridge historian Boyd Hilton, for example, has challenged it several times since the 1970s. He understands Peel as the contrary of a flexible and pragmatic politician. For him Peel was a dogmatic liberal who shared George Canning's assumed evangelicalism that drove him to embrace free trade and economic liberalism for ideological reasons. Unnecessary to say that Gash condemned this view lock, stock and barrel, and that the debate as to whether Peel was a conservative or a liberal continues to this day. As a consequence, a book that seeks an answer to this question would be timely.

Richard A. Gaunt's interesting new work *Sir Robert Peel: The Life and Legacy* is not such a book. Gaunt discusses the various facets of Peel's political career and tries to address the question of Peel's principles and convictions. However, he finally shrinks from being explicit about them. He finds virtue in the different interpretations and does not let the reader know where he stands personally. In fact, his book is neither an extended biography nor at least an exploration of Peel's political thought, but, rather, an informative account of the multifarious ideas that contemporaries and historians had about Peel. Gaunt rarely quotes Peel himself. Where he recounts what Peel actually did, he does not assess him, but prefers to point to all those who talked or wrote about him from the beginning of his political career on. Though this produces a fascinating picture of the evolving images of one of Britain's most eminent nineteenth-century politicians, it is not the best way to understand this politician's genuine intentions and ideas. This approach is not suited to offer, as Gaunt announces to do, 'a reinterpretation of Peel's attitudes to what he was doing in key areas of activity which have subsequently formed the nucleus of his political



legacy.' Attacking the question whether Peel's reforms as Home Secretary, especially the establishment of the Metropolitan Police, were signs of his liberalism and humanitarianism, Gaunt for example discusses the interpretations of several historians and concludes that none of them is completely compelling. Yet he does not take up a position of his own. If Hilton is wrong in assuming Peel to have been motivated by an evangelical belief in the natural harmony of every political order, what then was Peel's motivation? Gaunt does not say. Indeed, there is no 'reinterpretation' in this book, and the reader must wonder why the author did not make a stab at a close reading of Peel's speeches and letters as the only way to understand his 'attitudes to what he was doing'.

Gaunt thus missed a good chance to draw a little bit nearer to the thought of this important but somehow enigmatic politician. A close reading of Peel's writings could have led him to underline even further that all existing interpretations are flawed in one way or another. On the one hand, Norman Gash was right to criticise Hilton for ascribing ideas to Peel that were essentially his own and not Peel's: this non-ideological statesman, who used the word prudence in his letters nearly as often as Edmund Burke had, was not a dogmatic economic liberal driven by evangelicalism. On the other hand, where Hilton overstretches the role of ideas, Gash has too little use for them. That Peel was marked by moderation and prudence does not necessarily mean that he was merely a Conservative in the party sense. It is difficult to assess Peel in terms of this party label. Looking at Peel with continental eyes, I daresay that he was the quintessential model of the fusion of liberalism and conservatism that the French and Germans think to be typical of nineteenth-century Britain. For a better understanding of Peel and his actions, therefore, we should resort instead to the history of ideas in a broad sense rather than to party history. Like Canning, Peel was a nineteenth-century successor to the 'Old Whig' tradition, a politician in the wake of Burke and Robert Walpole.

But this is a perspective Gaunt is not interested in. By the end, he gives the impression that all attempts to classify Peel within a longer tradition are in vain: 'To designate him a false "Tory", a renegade "Conservative", a "Liberal Tory", a "Liberal Conservative" or a proto-Gladstonian Liberal, is to play, semantically, with the career of a shrewd, ambitious and complex political operator and try and give it helpful characterisation within a sometimes limited political vocabulary.' Nevertheless, more than one hundred years ago, the writer and Liberal MP Herbert Woodfield Paul showed in *Men and Letters* that it is indeed possible to characterise Peel in a balanced but significant manner: 'He was the father of modern Conservatism and of modern Liberalism. He was too great for one party.' Peel was a kind of conservative liberal or, to be more exact, a liberal with a conservative disposition in the Oakeshottian sense. And though he founded a party as an instrument for his ambition, he never was a confirmed party man.

'He was the father of modern Conservatism and of modern Liberalism. He was too great for one party.' Peel was a kind of conservative liberal or, to be more exact, a liberal with a conservative disposition.

Dr Matthias Oppermann is a lecturer in modern history at the University of Potsdam. He is the author of a book about the political thought of the French liberal philosopher and sociologist Raymond Aron.

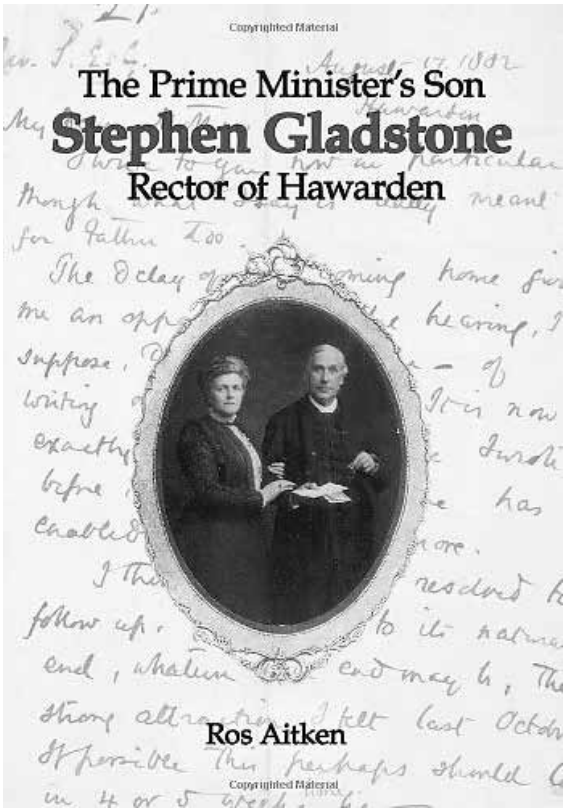
Son of the Grand Old Man

Ros Aitken, *The Prime Minister's Son: Stephen Gladstone, Rector of Hawarden* (University of Chester Press, 2012)
Reviewed by **Ian Cawood**

The sons of prime ministers are almost fated to endure lives of disappointment and relative failure. David Lloyd George's son, Gwilym, went on to be the most forgettable Home Secretary of the post-war years, while Winston Churchill's shadow managed to eclipse the careers of both his son and grandson. Of all eminent Liberal families, only the step-brothers Austen and Neville Chamberlain exceeded their father, Joseph, in the seniority of their appointments, but even their careers ended in ignominy, with Austen one of the few Conservative leaders never to become prime minister and Neville one of the few who ought never to have been allowed to do so. William Gladstone, at first glance, seems a relatively benign political parent in comparison, as his youngest son, Herbert, was apprenticed as private secretary to his father before going on to be a highly influential chief whip, a moderately successful Home Secretary and the first governor general of the new Union of South Africa. An enthusiastic supporter of the superb Gladstone's Library in Hawarden, Ros Aitken, has, however, revealed a much less complimentary side to Gladstone, the family man, in her biography of Stephen Gladstone, the G.O.M.'s second and eldest surviving son.

Ros Aitken is a model of the highly experienced history teacher who has never let the renowned snobbery of British academics dissuade her from engaging with serious archival research. Not for her, arcane and jargon-ridden musings on such sophistry as the 'otherness' of Stephen's familial identity; instead she painstaking describes all of Stephen's long life in a well-researched and nuanced picture of aristocratic life of the nineteenth century. Superb pen-portraits of the academic failings of the public school system, the residual popular anti-popery that blighted the careers of high churchmen such as Stephen and the sacrosanct importance of letter writing, create a micro-study of upper-class Victorian attitudes, behaviours and preoccupations.

Stephen emerges as a rather tragic character, full of doubt as to his role as a domestic clergyman, constantly pushed into preferments beyond his capabilities, largely as his father had always wanted to take holy orders and, like so many frustrated parents, he vicariously overcame his disappointments



through his children. Gladstone seems to have wanted to control his children and keep them close to him, a trait that seemed to intensify, once he himself lost control of his own party in 1886. That event was largely caused by his appalling mishandling of his Liberal colleagues and he seems to have taken the feelings of his own family for granted, in much the same way. One has to admire his daughter, Helen, who escaped to Cambridge to become vice-principal of Newnham College for nineteen years and who was only dragged back to Hawarden to nurse her ageing parents after William's retirement.

Inevitably, given the author's scrupulous concern for the use of primary sources to support all her assertions, there are frustrations. The question of Stephen's eyesight (he was blind in one eye and suffered restricted vision in the other) is given much attention in the first chapter, but seems to vanish once Stephen goes up to Oxford. Some minor issues, such as Stephen's thwarted plan to move away from his father's ambit in 1893, are explored in rather laborious detail with precious little contextualising, as the defeat of Gladstone's second Home Rule Bill in the same year must surely have been responsible for distracting the prime minister from this comparatively minor question. By contrast, there is far too little analysis of Stephen's reaction to William's famously ambiguous and posthumous confession to Stephen that he had never 'been guilty of the act which is known as that of infidelity to the marriage bed.' Nor is it made clear enough that this 'declaration' was only opened in 1900, two years after the retired statesman's death, so that John Morley could use it in the authorised biography of Gladstone (Morley wisely chose to steer clear of the whole matter).

Perhaps the text also hurries to a finish somewhat, with the last ten years of Stephen's life condensed into a mere fifteen pages. In this way, Aitken perhaps unwittingly confirms that his importance *had* lessened once his father had died. However, as these years included the First World War in which Stephen's second son, Charlie, was held in a German P.O.W. camp for three and a half years, and his youngest son, Willie, was killed in the British army's successful advance in autumn 1918, it is a pity that more time and reflection could not have been spent in reviewing the impact of the global cataclysm on those hitherto protected from the harshness of everyday life such as Stephen Gladstone.

Ultimately, this is a very well-written and insightful portrait of a minor figure in the orbit of one of the most remarkable men of the Victorian age. Stephen emerges as something of an irritating millequetoast, nagging at his father, yet unable to act independently, and his treatment of his wife Annie reflects poorly on his character, idolising her in his courtship, yet failing to defend her against the monumental busybody that was his mother, Catherine, once they were married. Remarkably, considering the unabated flow of scholarship on the four-time prime minister, Aitken's biography provides Liberal scholars with a completely original perspective on Gladstone; one which, in this reviewer's eyes at least, seems substantially to confirm Clement Attlee's judgement of William Gladstone as a 'frightful old prig', but which ameliorates it by revealing that Gladstone had, after all, spent his life in the company of prigs.

Ian Cawood is head of history at Newman University, Birmingham and is a member of the editorial board of the Journal of Liberal History. *His latest book is* The Liberal Unionist Party 1886–1912: A History *(I.B. Tauris, 2012).*

Art at the National Liberal Club

Michael Meadowcroft, *A Guide to the Works of Art of the National Liberal Club, London* (National Liberal Club, 2012)
Reviewed by **Eugenio F. Biagini**

The art collection at the National Liberal Club (NLC) is a great source of pride for its members and a delight for the visitor. This *Guide* is a gift to both, and indeed to anyone interested in the history of British Liberalism. It is lavishly illustrated and well supported by detailed descriptions of the works displayed, with short biographies of the subjects and of the artists who portrayed them.

Since its foundation in 1882, the Club acquired a substantial number of busts, monuments and paintings, including works by leading British and Irish artists such as Jack B. Yeats and William Orpen. Given the 'pro-Europe' tradition of the party, it is not inappropriate that for over thirty years the person in charge of new acquisitions and the conservation of the existing works was a Dutch citizen, J. E. A. Reyneke van Stuwe (1876–1962), who joined the Club in 1908. The author of this book, Michael Meadowcroft, a former adviser to emerging democracies as well as a Liberal MP for Leeds West, is himself an example of such an internationalist

tradition of liberalism. Yet the collection is surprisingly and exclusively 'British': you don't find here any of the many champions of liberty British Liberals admired – such as Abraham Lincoln, Giuseppe Garibaldi or Dadabhai Naoroji (of the Indian National Congress, the first Asian MP and an ardent Gladstonian). It is also surprising – and rather sad – that the Club does not have a memorial to John Stuart Mill, voted 'the greatest Liberal' in a party-member poll a few years ago.

Many of the paintings are portraits of leading radicals – such as William Cobbett, G. J. Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh – but most of them celebrate the party leaders, from W. E. Gladstone to Paddy Ashdown (there are no portraits, as yet, of Charles Kennedy, Menzies Campbell and Nick Clegg). The busts and statues include the seventeenth-century revolutionary hero John Hampden, the eighteenth-century Whig leader Charles J. Fox, the Victorian Quaker John Bright, and, again, Gladstone, who has inspired several works of varying artistic value. A whole room is dedicated to women, first among them Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, in a portrait which does justice not only to her stunning beauty but also to her indomitable political resolve and visionary approach to politics.

It is interesting to reflect on what this art collection suggests about party identity and self-representation. Even this *sanctum sanctorum* of the Liberal establishment celebrates not power, but opposition to power, and its heroes are often men and women who never held office or did so very briefly, who opposed power with all their strength (like Cobbett), or even died in the attempt to overturn the constitution (like Hampden). The most successful power politicians commemorated in the collection – Gladstone and Lloyd George – were themselves either 'trouble-makers' (in A. J. P. Taylor's words) or widely regarded as quasi-revolutionaries. There is also a bust of Sir Robert Peel: but then he too was a trouble-maker of sorts, having nearly destroyed the Conservative Party to advance the cause of free trade, 'the food of the people', which was and long remained one of the most important items on the Liberal agenda.

The message is clear: NLC members perceived Liberalism as 'conviction politics' in an exclusive, absorbing and uncompromising way. This does not mean that they had from the start the vocation of the 'party of protest' – as the media incessantly claim about the Lib Dems – but that they defined themselves primarily as the watchdog of the people's rights, a force that contributes to the governance of the country by being critical, independent and rooted in the ideals of civic virtue, rather than in market forces, national chauvinism or pressure-group shibboleths. In other words, the Club's art collection proclaims that there is more to British democracy than the obsession with power which defines the party's more successful national competitors on either the right or the so-called left. Perhaps this should provide food for thought for the present-day Coalition Lib Dem MPs, as they survey opinion polls and consider the party mood in the run-up to the next general election.

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