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