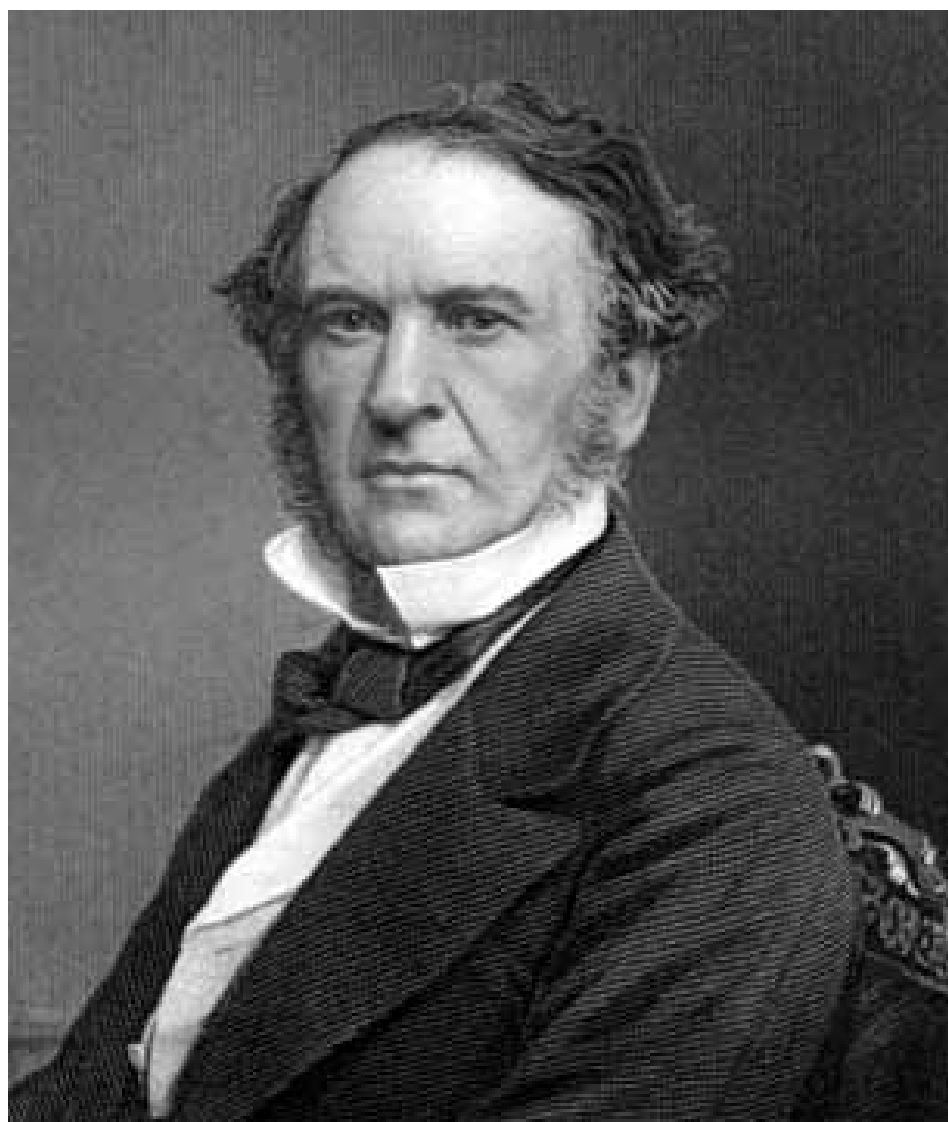


GLADSTONE GREAT IRIS

William Ewart Gladstone's Irish policy as Prime Minister has received a great deal of historical attention, but aspects of his earlier engagement with Ireland remain less well known. In particular, Gladstone's response to the defining social and economic crisis of modern Irish history – the Great Famine of 1845–52 – has attracted only cursory attention. In this article, **Douglas Kanter** explores Gladstone's reaction to the Great Famine, some two decades before his first premiership.



PEEL AND THE IRISH FAMINE

IF, AS GEORGE Boyce remarked not long ago, the words 'Gladstone and Ireland' resonate to this day,¹ the same cannot be said for the phrase 'Gladstone and the Great Irish Famine'. William Gladstone's response to the defining social and economic crisis of modern Irish history, in fact, has attracted only cursory attention. Historians of the famine have generally neglected Gladstone's opinion of that tragic event, while his biographers have typically made only passing mention of it, in order to explain his support for the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The reasons for such inattention are not difficult to discern. Having resigned from Sir Robert Peel's Conservative government in January 1845 as a result of the Prime Minister's decision to augment and render permanent the grant to the Catholic seminary at Maynooth, Gladstone was out of office when the extent of the potato blight first became apparent in October 1845. Although he returned to the Cabinet in December of that year, his endorsement of Corn Law repeal over the objections of his patron, the Duke of Newcastle, resulted in the loss of his seat at Newark, and he did not return to parliament until November 1847. Despite, rather anomalously, serving as Colonial Secretary for several

months during his involuntary absence from the House of Commons, Gladstone made no significant impact on relief policy in these critical years, when deaths from starvation and disease mounted and the basic structures of government assistance were established. His contribution to policy formulation remained slight after his return to parliament as a member of the Opposition in the autumn of 1847, notwithstanding the recurrence of the famine and the revival of contentious debates concerning Irish land law and the financing of relief. Nevertheless, in light of Gladstone's subsequent significance to the Anglo-Irish relationship, his reaction to the Irish Famine merits a closer examination. Gladstone's understanding of the crisis in Ireland was informed by his deeply held religious convictions, and the famine provided the occasion for his earliest foray into Irish land legislation, with important, albeit unanticipated, consequences for the future.

Gladstone was on the Continent, addressing a family emergency, in mid-October 1845, when ministers received confirmation of the impending potato failure, and after his return to England he spent little time in London until the second half of December. His protracted removal from the

metropolis helped to ensure that, by his own account, he remained unaware of the magnitude of the approaching catastrophe.² Perhaps as a result, Gladstone was at first more preoccupied by the political implications of the crisis than by its potential human cost. Initially anticipating no more than a 'temporary' suspension of the Corn Laws, he was 'rather puzzled' by the Peel ministry's ultimately abortive resignation in early December 1845, and 'dismayed and amazed' by the evident willingness of the Peelites to support the abolition of the Corn Laws out of office.³ Even after Gladstone's perusal of the government's 'Scarcity & Crisis papers' in late December had convinced him to join the reconstructed Conservative ministry and assist Peel in the repeal of the Corn Laws, he continued for some time to regard the famine primarily as a problem of policy.⁴ As late as April 1846 he portrayed it, in essentially secular language, as 'an unforeseen emergency' and 'a great public calamity'.⁵ Within several months, however, he had concluded that the famine was an act of God.

Gladstone's perception of the famine began to change in the autumn of 1846, after the Peel ministry had resigned from office. When, in November, the reappearance of the blight prompted

William Ewart
Gladstone
(1809–98)

GLADSTONE AND THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE

Lord John Russell's Whig government to approve a national day of humiliation in Ireland, Gladstone privately regretted that ministers had not appointed a fast day in Britain as well.⁶ By January 1847, he had discerned 'the hand of providence' in the famine, and by March he had become convinced that it was 'a calamity most legibly divine'.⁷ Gladstone's profoundly religious temperament doubtless encouraged such a providential interpretation of events, particularly in the context of the deepening subsistence crisis in Ireland. But his views also reflected a developing consensus in Britain concerning the divine origins of the famine, which was fostered by the Whig government and the established church.⁸

Gladstone offered his lengthiest and most detailed analysis of the famine in three sermons that he composed and delivered to his household in March 1847, in preparation for a national day of humiliation held throughout the United Kingdom on 24 March. These famine sermons were hardly unique – Gladstone completed almost 200 sermons between 1840 and 1866 – but they were unusual in explicitly addressing a contemporary event.⁹ In the first sermon in the series, Gladstone situated the Irish Famine within a framework of sin and retribution provided by the Old Testament. Passages from the books of Isaiah, Numbers and 2 Kings revealed that God, 'in divers times & places[,] sent forth the Angels of destruction to punish the sins of particular periods and nations. ... Sometimes by pestilence ... Sometimes by the Sword [and] ... Sometimes also by Famine'. Although some commentators had 'foolishly or impiously' suggested that the potato blight in Ireland was the result of 'natural causes', Gladstone was certain that 'we should divine in it the hand of God conveying to us especial tokens of His displeasure'. 'We are', he admonished his family and servants, '... to plant deep in our minds the lively conviction that the famine which now afflicts Ireland and begins to press even upon England is a judgment of God sent upon the land for our sins'. He advised the members of his household that they might help to mitigate 'the horrors' of the famine in three ways. They could, in the first place, contribute money for the

relief of distress, and to facilitate such Christian charity Gladstone placed a collection box in the hallway of his London home. (He also, according to his account book, subscribed £50 for famine relief, and if this sum represented a small percentage of the £562 he contributed to religious and charitable objects in 1847, it also constituted the second largest donation he made to any philanthropic cause in that year.¹⁰) Members of his household could, in the second place, economise 'the consumption of food'. Finally, and most importantly, they could humble themselves before God. Only through 'a true repentance', Gladstone insisted, would God 'find His scourge has done its work & ... in His great mercy withhold it'.¹¹ In his subsequent famine sermons, Gladstone returned to the theme of atonement, warning his auditors that they might avert a similar infliction upon England only through genuine penitence and a sincere abhorrence of sin.¹²

If Gladstone's famine sermons reflected the religious tenor of early Victorian society, they were also shaped by the distinctive contours of his faith, and particularly by his profound sense of sin and personal unworthiness in the eyes of God. Many early Victorians, particularly Whigs and Liberals, embraced an optimistic version of providentialism during the famine. God had sent the blight, they believed, to correct the moral failings of the Irish people, and to reconstruct Irish society. While the famine, unfortunately, entailed some necessary suffering, in the long run it would demonstrate God's benevolence by effecting the permanent improvement of Ireland. This anodyne view often distanced the government officials and opinion-makers who subscribed to it from the human cost of the famine.¹³

Gladstone's providentialism, in contrast, emphasised the retributive relationship between God and man. This left him uncertain about the ultimate beneficence of the divine visitation. The famine was 'without doubt' evidence of God's 'wrath', but only 'perhaps' a sign of 'His farseeing love'. The connection Gladstone discerned between sin and suffering encouraged him to acknowledge the famine's cruel toll. 'Many thousands of the people', he recognised, 'have in the last

few months died ... the dead are buried in trenches as in the time of plague, sometimes without coffins, there seem even to have been cases in which their bodies have remained exposed'. 'Looking to the future', he lamented, 'we have to expect a great increase it may be feared in the number of deaths'.¹⁴ Because Gladstone regarded sin as intrinsic to the human condition, moreover, he rejected explanations of the blight that ascribed it to the excessive immorality of the Irish people. Instead, in his third famine sermon he recalled Jesus's message to the Jews, as recorded in Luke 8:

There were present at the season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Lest his household misunderstand the message, Gladstone drew the moral explicitly. 'What the Jews thought of the Galileans slain by Pilate', he explained, 'we perhaps are tempted to think of our fellow countrymen in Ireland. Law & order[,] care & thrift are highly prized among us, whereas we hear of them as wild and unruly, setting too little value on human life and caring too little for the future'. 'Do not', he exhorted his listeners, 'let us assume that the blow has descended upon Ireland and not upon us because God is better pleased with us: for we have seen that He sometimes visits earlier where He means to chastise more lightly'.¹⁵ By 1847, therefore, Gladstone had come to interpret the famine as both a divine judgment upon Ireland and as a providential admonition to Britain. The continuance of the famine in 1848 served to confirm this belief, as he discerned God's 'judgments ... again going abroad' in the recurrence of the blight.¹⁶ Gladstone's tendency to descry the hand of God at work in Anglo-Irish relations, so evident during the famine, provided an important point of continuity between the youthful Peelite of the 1840s and the Liberal statesman of the late Victorian age.

By 1847, Gladstone had come to interpret the famine as both a divine judgment upon Ireland and as a providential admonition to Britain.



MULLIN'S HUT, AT SCULL.

But if the responsibility of the individual was clear, what was the duty of the state? On this subject, Gladstone remained, throughout the famine, politically cautious and fiscally conservative. As late as 16 December 1845, only six days before accepting office, he expressed guarded and contingent support for the maintenance of the Corn Law of 1842.¹⁷ With the bruises over his support for the increased Maynooth grant in the most recent parliamentary session still tender, Gladstone was reluctant to risk the further alienation of the Conservative Party or its supporters.¹⁸ Although 'the special facts of the Irish case' ultimately convinced Gladstone to re-join the Peel ministry, he favoured a more measured approach to Corn Law repeal than the Prime Minister adopted.¹⁹ Peel proposed the imposition of a reduced sliding scale on foreign grains, to be replaced after three years by a 'nominal' duty of 1s. on all imports. In the meantime, colonial grains, as well as foreign and colonial maize, would be subject to a fixed duty of 1s. to assist famine relief efforts.²⁰ Gladstone, in contrast, 'should have preferred' the maintenance of 'a low fixed duty of 4/ or 5/ per quarter ... for a greater number of years'.²¹

When it became clear, in 1847, that the continuance of the famine would necessitate considerable

Famine distress: Mullin and his family in their cabin at Scull (Mary Evans Picture Library)

central government expenditure, Gladstone repeatedly expressed concern over the cost of relief. Though 'the question of money in its incidence upon the people of England' was, he conceded, only one of the 'secondary aspects' of the famine, it was also 'a very important one'.²² Lord George Bentinck's proposal for an advance of £16 million for Irish railway construction he deemed 'shallow and bad', while he similarly deprecated the government's decision to raise a loan of £8 million as 'bad in principle, and bad in policy' because it entailed 'a burden on posterity'.²³ Gladstone's cheeseparating instincts did not prevent him from supporting emergency relief expenditure, such as the modest but controversial grant of £50,000 to distressed Poor Law unions in Connaught during 1849.²⁴ But the absence of adverse comment indicates that he was generally content with the Russell ministry's commitment to the manifestly inadequate amended Irish Poor Law of 1847, which sought to enforce a workhouse test of destitution and to insulate British taxpayers from the cost of assistance, as the primary mechanism of relief.

Gladstone's famine sermons, delivered to a household consisting, in his view, of subjects rather than citizens – including dependent adult males, women and children – were frustratingly opaque

on the subject of government policy. Yet they suggested a degree of fatalism in the face of God's anger. 'Millions of money', he observed, 'have been poured forth from the treasury of this country: hundreds of thousands have been publicly and privately contributed by individuals: from all parts of the earth large quantities of food have been obtained & sent to Ireland[;] but even large quantities have failed to supply a void which is far larger still'.²⁵ Indeed, the famine helped to confirm Gladstone's bias against extensive state intervention in the economy. The British relief effort, he instructed the corporation of Manchester in 1864, some thirteen years after the famine had ended, provided an example of 'enormous waste' and 'lamentable failure'. 'There was', he recalled, 'an immense amount of devoted labour, and of most intelligent, as well as magnificent liberality, on the part of the country'. 'But still', he tellingly concluded, 'it was Government machinery, and I want you to see the infinite superiority of voluntary action in every such case'.²⁶ Thus, while Gladstone did not share the optimism of many Whigs and Liberals about the transformative capacity of the famine, his own more pessimistic providentialism pointed to a similar policy of limited intervention. Men must, it seemed, be left to work out their own salvation, temporal as well as spiritual.

This did not mean that the state had no social or economic role to play: it might establish the conditions in which self-help was possible. Government had an obligation, in Gladstone's view, to ensure political stability and to protect property. Accordingly, he expressed no objection to Peel's Protection of Life Bill in 1846, the rejection of which resulted in the resignation of the Conservative ministry. Some two years later, he divided in favour of the Whigs' Crown and Government Security Bill, which sought to render the conviction of Young Ireland agitators more certain by reducing the penalty for treason, under specified circumstances, from capital punishment to transportation.²⁷ He endorsed the suspension of habeas corpus in Ireland a few months later, approving what he termed Russell's 'statesmanlike' speech on the



SEARCHING FOR POTATOES IN A STUBBLE FIELD.

introduction of the measure, and assessing the overwhelming parliamentary support for suspension as 'satisfactory'.²⁸ Though the Young Ireland rebellion of 1848 proved abortive, and no serious revolutionary threat succeeded it, Gladstone voted in favour of the continued suspension of habeas corpus the following year.²⁹ His record on Irish coercion during the famine was consistently supportive.

Gladstone's interest in inducing the Irish to help themselves, however, also assumed a more positive form. Many observers identified a dysfunctional agrarian social structure as a remote cause of the famine. Neither undercapitalised landlords nor rack-rented peasants had the requisite means for material or moral improvement. Under these circumstances, government intervention was justified, if only

A young girl and boy dig for potatoes; the fields have already been harvested so the children are gleaning any chance leftovers. (© Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans)

to facilitate the establishment of a reconstructed Irish society in which further state interference would prove unnecessary.³⁰ It was possible to derive multiple policy prescriptions from this analysis. Ulster Liberals and Irish nationalists endorsed the legal recognition of tenant right as the basis for social transformation, as did many British Radicals.³¹ Despite his advocacy of Ulster custom some twenty years later, Gladstone evinced no interest in tenant right during the famine. He did not vote, for example, in the crucial division on William Sharman Crawford's failed bill of 1848, which proposed to provide compensation for improvements made to the land by outgoing tenants.³²

A different approach, which received the approbation of a broad spectrum of British public opinion, traced its genealogy back to the Devon Commission Report, issued on the eve of the famine in 1845. The commissioners, appointed by the Peel ministry to inquire into the relations between Irish landlords and tenants in response to Daniel O'Connell's agitation for the repeal of the Act of Union, had studiously refrained from supporting the more advanced demands of the advocates for tenant right. But they had recommended a relaxation of the restrictions upon the sale of land, and they had expressed the hope that small allotments might be sold to resident farmers, in order to create a class of Irish yeoman.³³ During the famine, free trade in land and peasant proprietorship were favourably re-evaluated by prominent political economists and self-appointed Irish 'experts'. Proponents lauded small farms as not only economically efficient, but also as conducive to peasant morality, because landownership was believed to incentivise such virtues as work, discipline and prudence.³⁴ With the famine at its lethal zenith in 1847 and 1848, Gladstone read widely – though not, by his standards, voraciously – on the subject of peasant proprietorship, consulting works by George Poulett Scrope, William Thomas Thornton, Jonathan Pim and Aubrey de Vere, which recommended an expansion of small owner-occupied farms in Ireland.³⁵

A group of enterprising Irish landlords, meanwhile, had organised a Farmers' Estate Society, in

order to purchase encumbered Irish estates, divide them into plots of twenty acres, and resell them to resident farmers for a modest profit. The object of this initiative, according to Lord Devon, who lent his assistance to the endeavour, was social and moral rather than financial. The experience of the famine, he believed, confirmed the findings of the Devon Commission Report, which had concluded that the extension of peasant proprietorship would increase the 'proportion of the population ... interested in the preservation of peace and good order; and the prospect of gaining admission into this class of small landowners would often stimulate the renting farmer to increased exertion and persevering industry'.³⁶ To capitalise the venture and render it a going concern, the society required parliamentary permission to incorporate, and in the summer of 1848 its projectors applied for an act to do so. After receiving its first reading, the Farmers' Estate Society Bill was referred to a select committee, which Gladstone was appointed to chair. Although the committee altered some of the bill's details – most notably by increasing the minimum prospective size of an allotment from twenty to thirty acres – Gladstone was favourably impressed by the measure, recommending the recommitment of the bill to the whole house 'on account of the important considerations of public policy' that it involved.³⁷ He personally introduced the bill on its second reading, approvingly explaining that its object was 'to create a body of independent yeomanry in Ireland'.³⁸ The Farmers' Estate Society Act passed with little adverse comment though, as one leading Irish Tory predicted, it proved inoperative.³⁹

Inoperative, but not, in the longer term, insignificant. For if Gladstone's providential interpretation of the Great Irish Famine was relatively conventional, and if his policy preferences were inadequate to relieve suffering and starvation, his endorsement of peasant proprietorship in Ireland was fraught with consequence for the future. When Gladstone informed John Bright, during their preliminary discussions of his first Irish Land Bill some twenty years later, that 'a native and a small

If Gladstone's providential interpretation of the Great Irish Famine was relatively conventional, and if his policy preferences were inadequate to relieve suffering and starvation, his endorsement of peasant proprietorship in Ireland was fraught with consequence for the future.

proprietary ... would be attended with great social and political advantages, and would be a very Conservative measure', he was not merely attempting to placate an occasionally obstreperous colleague with kind words.⁴⁰ On the contrary, though the elimination of the landlords as a class was never Gladstone's preferred method of resolving the problem of social order in Ireland, and financial considerations ensured his aversion to extensive schemes of state-sponsored land purchase in the absence of home rule, the encouragement of owner-occupied farms was a persistent feature of his mature Irish legislation, from the purchase clauses of his Disestablishment Act of 1869 through the abortive Land Bill of 1886.⁴¹ Gladstone's later policy initiatives were, of course, powerfully conditioned by the exigencies of the moment, but he was receptive to programmes of land purchase from the famine to the end of his career. Given that Gladstone's move in the direction of peasant proprietorship encouraged the more ambitious and successful land purchase bills of his Conservative and Unionist opponents,⁴² culminating in the Wyndham Land Act of 1903, it is perhaps not too bold to suggest, by way of conclusion, that the social revolution of twentieth-century Ireland had its origins in the social catastrophe of the nineteenth century.

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- 1 D. George Boyce, 'Gladstone and Ireland', in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone* (The Hambledon Press, 1998), p. 105.
- 2 William Ewart Gladstone to Sir John Gladstone, 30 June 1849 (Flintshire Record Office, Glynn-Gladstone Papers (hereafter GGP), MS 229, f. 133).
- 3 Gladstone to Catherine Gladstone, 3 Nov. 1845, Gladstone to John Gladstone, 12 Dec. 1845, 19 Dec. 1845 (ibid., MS 770, f. 155, MS 227, ff. 222, 230).
- 4 M. R. D. Foot and H. C. G. Matthew (eds.), *The Gladstone Diaries* (hereafter *D*), 14 vols. (Oxford University Press,

- 1968–94), iii, p. 506 (diary entry of 22 Dec. 1845).
- 5 Gladstone 'To the Electors of Wigan', [6] Apr. [1846] (British Library, Gladstone Papers (hereafter GP), Add. MS 44735, f. 174).
- 6 *D*, iii, p. 584 (diary entry of 20 Nov. 1846); for 'the day of solemn prayer and humiliation' in Ireland, see Peter Gray, 'National Humiliation and the Great Hunger: Fast and Famine in 1847', *Irish Historical Studies*, xxii, no. 126 (2000), p. 195.
- 7 Gladstone to Sir John Gladstone, 23 Jan. 1847 (GGP, MS 228, f. 14); D. C. Lathbury (ed.), *Correspondence on Church and Religion of William Ewart Gladstone*, 2 vols. (The Macmillan Company, 1910), ii, p. 275 (Gladstone to Henry Manning, 9 Mar. 1847).
- 8 Peter Gray, *Famine, Land and Politics: British Government and Irish Society, 1843–50* (Irish Academic Press, 1999), pp. 258–59; Gray, 'National Humiliation', pp. 195–99.
- 9 For an outstanding collective analysis of the sermons, see D. W. Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer, and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 85–97; Bebbington's tally of the sermons may be found at p. 85.
- 10 Account of 'Religion and Charity, 1841–50' (GGP, MS 1486, ff. 31, 35).
- 11 'Public Humiliation', 14 Mar. 1847 (GP, Add. MS 44780, ff. 179–84).
- 12 'The Public Fast', 23 Mar. 1847, 'The Gospel for the day of solemn & public humiliation', 24 Mar. 1847 (ibid., ff. 189–92, 193–97).
- 13 Gray, *Famine*, pp. 231–35, 337–38.
- 14 'Public Humiliation', 14 Mar. 1847 (GP, Add. MS 44780, ff. 179, 181).
- 15 'The Gospel for the day of solemn & public humiliation', 24 Mar. 1847 (ibid., ff. 193, 196).
- 16 Gladstone to Catherine Gladstone, 16 Aug. 1848 (GGP, MS 771, f. 85).
- 17 Gladstone to Robert Caparn, 16 Dec. 1845 (GP, Add. MS 44363, f. 20). The letter, however, was cancelled.
- 18 John Brooke and Mary Sorensen (eds.), *The Prime Ministers' Papers: W. E. Gladstone*, 4 vols. (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971–81), iii, p. 14 (memorandum of 20 Dec. 1845). Though Gladstone had resigned from the Cabinet over Peel's decision to augment the Maynooth grant, once out of office he had endorsed the Prime Minister's proposal.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 John Prest, 'A Large Amount or a Small? Revenue and the Nineteenth-Century Corn Laws', *Historical Journal*, xxxix, no. 2 (1996), p. 472.

- 21 Gladstone to Sir John Gladstone, 30 June 1849 (GGP, MS 229, f. 134).
- 22 Gladstone to F. R. Bonham, 2 Feb. 1847 (GP, Add. MS 44110, f. 214).
- 23 Gladstone to Sir John Gladstone, 15 Feb. 1847, 27 Feb. 1847 (GGP, MS 228, ff. 28, 37–38).
- 24 *3 Hansard*, cii. 630 (12 Feb. 1849).
- 25 'Public Humiliation', 14 Mar. 1847 (GP, Add. MS 44780, f. 180).
- 26 *The Times*, 15 Oct. 1864.
- 27 *3 Hansard*, xcvi. 130 (10 Apr. 1848).
- 28 Gladstone to Catherine Gladstone, 22 July 1848 (GGP, MS 771, ff. 78, 80).
- 29 *3 Hansard*, cii. 369, 556 (6 Feb. 1849, 9 Feb. 1849).
- 30 Clive J. Dewey, 'The Rehabilitation of the Peasant Proprietor in Nineteenth-Century Economic Thought', *History of Political Economy*, vi, no. 1 (1974), pp. 40–41.
- 31 Gray, *Famine*, pp. 151–52, 171–77.
- 32 *3 Hansard*, xcvi. 865, 1342–43 (22 Mar. 1848, 5 Apr. 1848).
- 33 Gray, *Famine*, pp. 56–57, 69–71.
- 34 Dewey, 'Peasant Proprietor', pp. 30, 32, 34–35.
- 35 *D*, iii, pp. 618, 671, iv, pp. 13, 16, 27, 32–34 (diary entries of 8 May 1847, 26 Nov. 1847, 25 Feb. 1848, 8 Mar. 1848, 14 Apr. 1848, 28 Apr. 1848, 29 Apr. 1848, 1 May 1848, 2 May 1848, 3 May 1848, 8 May 1848, 9 May 1848).
- 36 *Report from the Select Committee on the Farmers' Estate Society (Ireland) Bill*, PP, 1847–48 (535), xvii. 364.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 361.
- 38 *3 Hansard*, c. 978 (28 July 1848).
- 39 *Ibid.*, ci. 258 (18 Aug. 1848).
- 40 Gladstone to John Bright, 22 May 1869 (British Library, Bright Papers, Add. MS 43385, f. 31).
- 41 H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809–1898* (Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 496–500; Allen Warren, 'Gladstone, Land and Social Reconstruction in Ireland, 1881–1887', *Parliamentary History*, ii (1983), pp. 155–57.
- 42 E. D. Steele, *Irish Land and British Politics: Tenant-Right and Nationality, 1865–1870* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 312; K. Theodore Hoppen, 'Gladstone, Salisbury and the End of Irish Assimilation', in Mary E. Daly and K. Theodore Hoppen (eds.), *Gladstone: Ireland and Beyond* (Four Courts Press, 2011), p. 53.

maybe Mr Goodlad was behaving professionally rather than whimsically.

Michael Steed

Jo Grimond

I very much enjoyed reading the various articles about Jo Grimond in the Autumn 2013 edition (*Journal of Liberal History* 80). I twice chaired meetings with audiences of over a hundred in North East Fife in support of Menzies Campbell when Jo was guest speaker. One of my best memories was at a packed meeting in the Corn Exchange in Cupar, when Jo talked at length and in detail for over 45 minutes. He had one scrap of paper with his notes containing three words: 'farming, fishing, forestry'.

Your readers may be interested to know that, in addition to David Steel's Grimond memorial lecture, a second such lecture has been held in Jo's birthplace, St Andrews in North East Fife, organised by Lord Steel's brother, Professor Michael Steel. Jo wrote a short, attractive book about his birthplace: *The St Andrews of Jo Grimond*.

The well-attended lecture, on 15 November 2013, was jointly hosted by the University of St Andrews and North East and Central Fife Liberal Democrats, with financial support from the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, of which Jo was a director for many years. The lecture was delivered by Dr Ian Bradley, the Principal of St Mary's College, the Divinity College, in St Andrews University, and chaired by the Chancellor of the University, local MP Sir Menzies Campbell (see photo, right). Six members of the Grimond family were present as invited guests.

Dr Bradley knew Jo well, particularly in the period before he changed careers from journalism to the academic life. Dr Bradley wrote the entry about Jo Grimond in the *Dictionary of National Biography* and also the obituary which appeared in *The Times*, along with many articles about Jo and interviews with him..

Dr Bradley was attracted to the Liberal Party, like so many of my generation, by Jo and indeed was himself a Liberal candidate in the two general elections of 1974. He is currently an active supporter of the 'Better Together' campaign seeking a 'No' vote in the September 2014 referendum on Scottish Independence.

Derek Barrie

Jesse Collings (1)

With reference to David Boyle's interesting article on Jesse Collings (*Journal of Liberal History* 80), may I add some other facts about Collings' political career and its more general impact?

As an associate of Joseph Chamberlain, having been Mayor of Birmingham in 1878–79, he was originally elected as a Liberal in the two-member constituency of Ipswich in 1880. He did indeed move the successful amendment (carried by 331 votes to 252) to the Conservatives' Address in Reply to the Queen's Speech on 25 January 1886 which resulted in the resignation of the minority Conservative government on 29 January and the formation of Gladstone's third Liberal administration.

However, although Collings' amendment was of an agrarian nature, the division on 25 January was in reality a precursor of the Liberal split on Irish Home Rule a few months later. Seventeen Liberals and one Independent Liberal, including two former Liberal Cabinet Ministers (George Goschen and the Marquis of Hartington) and Sir Henry James (a former Liberal Attorney-General) voted with the Conservatives. Some seventy other Liberal MPs, including two other former Liberal Cabinet Ministers (John Bright and C.P. Villiers), were absent or abstained.

Although Collings accepted office in the new Liberal administration as Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board, he resigned when Joseph Chamberlain and George Otto Trevelyan left the Cabinet in opposition to Irish Home Rule. However,

LETTERS

Party agents

David Steel's story (in *Journal of Liberal History* 80, autumn 2013) about Jo Grimond asking a Lerwick solicitor, Mr Goodlad, to be his agent in 1945 and receiving his assent before he asked of Jo's party, no doubt raised a chuckle. But was it more normal than we might suppose?

I raise the question because my solicitor grandfather, F. A. Cloke, was in the 1920s variously clerk to the Eastry District Council and to its Poor Law Union, plus secretary of the East Kent Joint Town Planning Committee – as well as

agent for the Conservative MP for Dover.

He was, I believe, a Conservative in his politics – though his oldest daughter, a flapper voter in 1929, stuck up a Liberal poster in her bedroom window facing a main street in Sandwich. But I have understood that, as a solicitor, he performed an essentially legal and clerical role for the MP rather than a political one, and so could combine it with his non-political roles in local government.

Does any reader know whether this is correct? If so,