

and electioneering in favour of a narrow focus on high-level political manoeuvre, doctrine, and the relationships between elites at Westminster (the so-called 'high political' approach).

Most substantially, *Morley of Blackburn* challenges Hamer's rather critical interpretation, recasting Morley as a more principled and less self-interested figure. His legacy, Jackson argues, was as an influencer and moulder of Liberal opinion, especially during the barren years of opposition, whose impact was greater than his seemingly meagre record of public achievements seem to suggest. Morley's suspicion of government intervention to seek rapid fixes to social problems also emerges more favourably today than it did in works written in the more statist and sociologically influenced 1960s. When Hamer was writing, it was easy to see Morley as a classical throwback and an obstruction to the march of progressivism. While Jackson doesn't do enough to conclusively reclaim Morley's reputation, he has certainly reopened the debate.

The book, however, is certainly not without its shortcomings. The most major is that it contains little that is especially new. The impact of Morley's newly released diaries and papers is a little disappointing. Given that the book (like most biographies from this era) is overwhelmingly evidenced by politician's private papers and correspondence, the 120 footnotes that Morley's papers generate throughout is greatly outweighed by references to several other established collections which have already been heavily mined by historians. The result is that, while an occasional interesting insight and quotation adds the odd jewel to the prose, the Morley that emerges is mostly a very familiar figure. Indeed, some recent biographies (such as Jenkins' work on Gladstone and Kuhn's on Disraeli) have explored the personality and character of the public men who shaped the political landscape of Britain and the empire in this definitive and fascinating age. Despite access to the private papers, and writing that they 'tell us a good deal about their subject's human weakness' Jackson does relatively little to bring the human side of Morley to life. The personality, character, and emotions of

**Overall, *Morley of Blackburn* is an authoritative and mature work of scholarship, and can reasonably claim to be the most complete and satisfactory biography currently available.**

a clearly complex and fragile man very much take a back seat to a traditional examination of his public acts and political writings.

Partly because of this, many will find *Morley of Blackburn* a heavy read. It is largely a traditional work of 'high politics'. There is nothing wrong with that in itself (indeed, high political works are subjected to much unfair criticism) but the book also relies on a strong pre-existing knowledge of the era, doing relatively little to illuminate and explain the issues and controversies that Morley wrestled with, or the wider political world that he operated in.

Overall, *Morley of Blackburn* is an authoritative and mature work of scholarship, and can reasonably claim to be the most complete and satisfactory biography currently

available. However, it is a dense and occasionally over-focused study that will (especially at this price) be of most interest to professional historians and postgraduate students. Jackson certainly deserves considerable credit for writing an ambitious and thorough book that has helped reclaim Morley's reputation. But a lighter touch and a broader focus would have helped both contextualise and bring to life this important but rather forgotten statesmen for a wider audience.

*Luke Blaxill is Visiting Research Fellow in History at King's College London. From late 2013, he will also be the Drapers' Company Junior Research Fellow in History at Herford College, Oxford. He completed his doctorate, on the language of British Electoral politics, 1880–1914, at King's College London in 2012.*

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## Don't buy this book!

Jesse Russell and Ronald Cohn, *Wallace Lawler* (Bookvika Publishing, 2012)

Reviewed by **Graham Lippiatt**

**D**O NOT BUY this book. You may think you are getting a proper biography of Wallace Lawler, the Liberal MP who won the Birmingham Ladywood by-election in 1969. You are not. What you do get is the information about Lawler which appears on Wikipedia, the free online encyclopaedia. This amounts to the first six pages of this publication and there are a further two pages about the Ladywood by-election itself. The rest of the book consists of other Wikipedia material about Birmingham, parliament, Lawler's predecessor and successor as Ladywood MP and finally, making up most of the content, the Wikipedia pages about the United Kingdom – all with pages and pages of printed notes and sources. To repeat, under no circumstances pay money for this book. Everything it offers has been cloned from Wikipedia, which is of course free online.

To be fair, the book does advertise itself as 'high quality content by Wikipedia articles' and this can usually be seen on the image of the front cover viewable on the sites of

online booksellers, or if you happen across one on a bookshelf. Cloning like this is not illegal. Indeed, Wikipedia cautions its contributors that their work can and will be reproduced. Now, I have nothing against Wikipedia. I have contributed to it and I also wrote an article for the *Journal of Liberal History*, published in issue 65, exploring the possibilities and limitations of using Wikipedia to find out about Liberal history. My conclusion at that time, and I would not change it today, was to agree with those academics and teachers who advise that, while Wikipedia cannot be accepted or cited as an authoritative source, it remains a useful starting point from which to gain contextual information about your subject matter and can point the way to more reliable and fuller source material.

Of course, while there may be lots of good, factual information free on Wikipedia, its content is distributed under open licence and there is nothing to stop anyone reusing or redistributing it at no charge. You can find such 'mirror sites' on the internet

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A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

# DECLINE AND FALL

## THE LIBERAL PARTY AND THE ELECTIONS OF 1922, 1923 AND 1924

For the Liberal Party, the three general elections of 1922, 1923 and 1924 represented a terrible journey from post-war disunity to reunion, and near-return to government to dramatic and prolonged decline. Arguably, this was the key period which relegated the Liberals to the third-party status from which they have never escaped.

The Liberal Democrat History Group winter meeting will look in detail at these elections and what they meant for the Liberal Party and the changes they brought about in British politics.

Speakers: **Michael Steed** (Honorary Lecturer in Politics, University of Kent, and noted psephologist); **Professor Pat Thane** (Professor of Contemporary History, King's College, London). Chair: **Dr Julie Smith** (Cambridge University).

**7.00pm, Monday 10 February** (following the History Group AGM at 6.30pm)  
Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, SW1A 2HE

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A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

# SOCIAL REFORMERS AND LIBERALS: THE ROWNTREES AND THEIR LEGACY

Joseph and Seebohm Rowntree were successful businessmen, pioneers of social investigation – and committed Liberals.

Discuss their careers and political legacy at the History Group's meeting at the Liberal Democrat spring conference, with **Ian Packer** (Lincoln University), and **Tina Walker** and **Lord Shutt** (Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust). Chair: **Lord Kirkwood**.

**8.00pm, Friday 7 March**

Riverside Room, Novotel Hotel, Fishergate, York YO10 4FD (*no conference pass necessary*)

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and increasingly in print-on-demand (POD) or print-to-order (PTO) book format. That is what the publishers Bookvika have done with this Lawler publication and dozens more like it. There are other publishers, such as the US firm Books

LLC and the German publisher VDM and its subsidiaries which have done the same.

So, if you see an advert for a book about a figure from Liberal history (or any topic which interests you, really) and you do not recognise the

author as being an established academic or subject matter expert, do look closely at the cover image or publisher's information. Before you part with your money always check the author's name or publishing house to see if there is

a connection to Wikipedia cloning.

Oh, and did I mention already? Do not buy this book.

*Graham Lippiatt is a Contributing Editor to the Journal of Liberal History*