



scription in 1916, and Sir Henry Morris-Jones, who defected to the Simonite Liberals in August 1931 and became thereafter a prominent long-term member of the National Liberal group at Westminster.

The chapters are packed with fascinating, often newly discovered, detail, thoroughly and lovingly culled from the source materials and presented clearly and logically. Throughout, the text is further embellished by a number of numerical tables which add so much to the value and appeal of the book. The structure of the volume, too, is eminently logical. A general survey of 'defectors and loyalists' leads to a detailed survey of those Liberal MPs who changed party to, in turn, Labour, the Conservatives, and the minor parties, followed by an account of those who migrated into the Liberal Party. There is some fascinating material on the formation of the SDP in 1983, its converts, and its subsequent merger with the Liberal Democrats.

Dr Wyburn-Powell's conclusions are crisp and unequivocal. In his considered view, the British Liberal Party was basically in sound health up until the First World War, and could possibly have been 'recovered' in 1918, but had lost

hope by 1922 (p. 192). He pinpoints Lloyd George, 'due both to his personality and to his politics', as the primary reason for most subsequent defections (*ibid.*). The Labour Party under Ramsay MacDonald, he argues, did little to court actively dissatisfied Liberal politicians who defected to the other parties mainly as a result 'of the breakdown of the Liberal Party organism' (p. 194). Those who defected to the Conservative Party were far more likely to remain in their new political home than those who went over to Labour, many of whom later came to rue their decision. Factors causing or increasing the rate of defections are discussed in the final pages of the conclusion.

It is, of course, an easy task for the reviewer to list some niggling or petty criticisms. Describing Clem Davies as widely considered 'a short-term stand-in leader' in 1945 (p. 84) misses the key point that the defeated former party leader Sir Archibald Sinclair was then widely expected to return to the House of Commons at a by-election, or at the very latest at the next general election, and then resume the reins of leadership from Davies. Cardiganshire did not witness four consecutive parliamentary elections 'where the only candidates were Liberals' between 1921 and 1924 (p. 68). A Conservative (or possibly Unionist) candidate in the person of the Earl of Lisburne stood there in November 1923, thus allowing Rhys Hopkin Morris to capture the division as an independent, anti-Lloyd George Liberal. Did John Hugh Edwards really publish 'three biographies of Lloyd George' as is claimed here (p. 111)? Was Gwilym Lloyd-George

really 'offered' the leadership of the party in 1945 (p. 135)? He was certainly considered for it at least.

Lord Davies did indeed 'tr[y] to exert an excessive influence over his successor Clement Davies' (p. 120). But the key point is not made here that, to his eternal discredit and shame, he blatantly attempted to have his personal nominee W. Alford Jehu 'installed' under his personal patronage as his successor as the Liberal candidate for Montgomeryshire in 1927. Finally, the author claims that the ageing Lloyd George 'lost his way after the 1931 debacle' (p. 155), but fails to note his 'New Deal' proposals and the setting up of the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction in 1935 – a damp squib though these initiatives undoubtedly were. But these are all very minor quibbles which do not detract in the least from the value and relevance of Dr Wyburn-Powell's timely study.

The bibliography, though useful, is highly selective, does not refer at all to newspapers or to some of the sources already referenced in the helpful endnote references. As was the case with the author's biography of Clement Davies, important articles in Welsh academic journals have not been consulted and would have provided valuable additional detail. For all those interested in the history of the Liberal Party, however, this impressive book will be a good read from cover to cover and will prove most useful as an authoritative, lasting, accurate work of reference.

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LETTERS

Election agents (1)

Michael Steed asks in his letter (*Journal of Liberal History* 81, winter 2013–14) whether his solicitor grandfather, who was agent for his Conservative MP in the 1920s, could have been serving in a professional non-partisan capacity.

I think this is most unlikely. Certainly in the period I know best – 1884–1918 – the agent was always partisan. Ideally a candidate had a full-time agent who ran the local party organisation, arranging meetings, campaigns, social



Joseph Chamberlain

Imperial Standard Bearer; National Leader; Local Icon

On **4th and 5th July**, Newman University, in collaboration with Birmingham City Council, are holding a two-day conference to commemorate the centenary of Joseph Chamberlain's death on 2nd July 1914.

The first day's event will take place at Newman University and will focus on Chamberlain's national and international career, followed by a three-course dinner with speaker at Highbury Hall, the Birmingham home that Chamberlain built in 1878.

The second day will take place in Birmingham City Centre at the Birmingham Midland Institute and will address Chamberlain's local significance. There will be the chance to examine artefacts and documents relating to Chamberlain's career, a documentary film on his life and a tour of sites associated with Chamberlain, including his office in the Council House.

The conference will feature a host of expert academic speakers, amateur historians, heritage specialists, research students and politicians, making this a truly diverse and interesting two days. The full programme is available at: <http://events.history.ac.uk/event/show/10755>

This event is sponsored by Severn Trent Water and is organised in collaboration with the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour History Groups, Birmingham Museums Trust, the new Library of Birmingham the Birmingham Post, the Centre for West Midland History at the University of Birmingham and the Lunar Society of Birmingham.

Registration fees are as follows:

Two-day conference, including dinner	£100.00	Saturday conference	£25.00
Two day conference	£60.00	Saturday conference (students and unwaged)	
Friday conference, including dinner	£80.00		£15.00
Friday conference	£45.00	Conference dinner only	£40.00

To register, please send your name, organisation (if any) and email address to:

email: BOAR200@newman.ac.uk; or

post: Ms E. Board, Newman University, School of Human Sciences, Genners Lane, Birmingham B32 3NT

Cheques can be made payable to 'Newman University'. Alternatively, card payments can be made to our finance office at finance@newman.ac.uk or by calling 0121 476 1181 ext. 2342.

For any queries, please contact Dr Ian Cawood (i.cawood@newman.ac.uk)

LIBERALISM, PEACE AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The First World War sent a shockwave through the Liberal Party, permanently affecting its politics, its people and the way it viewed the world and its own place in it. This meeting, jointly organised by the Liberal Democrat History Group and Liberal International British Group, and held a hundred years, almost to the day, after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, will explore key aspects of this crisis of Liberal internationalism.

Speakers: **Robert Falkner** (Associate Professor of International Relations, LSE) on the Great War and its impact on liberal internationalism, and **Louise Arimatsu** (Associate Fellow, International Law Programme, Chatham House) on war, law and the liberal project. Chair: **Martin Horwood MP** (Co-Chair, Liberal Democrat parliamentary policy committee on international affairs).

7.00pm, Monday 30 June (after the LIBG AGM – History Group members please wait until it's finished)
Lloyd George Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

events and fund raising, and before 1918 he also upheld the party's interest each year when the election registers were compiled by the local Poor Law Overseers. This was obviously a partisan activity, the aim being to get as many supporters as possible on the list and opponents off! A local solicitor could do this work but it really required specialist knowledge of franchise law.

The Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 required a candidate to appoint an election agent to carry legal responsibility for every aspect of the election campaign. If there were a professional agent in post he naturally became election agent, and this happened nearly always in this county between 1884 and 1914. The Liberals did occasionally find themselves without an agent in post, for example in Cheltenham in July 1895. Mr W.G. Gurney, who was a local solicitor, stepped in as election agent; he was certainly not non-partisan but a prominent member of the local Liberal party.

In 1910 the Cheltenham Liberals were again without an agent. For the January election an experienced long-serving professional agent was brought in, probably provided by party headquarters in London, but unfortunately he did not stay after the election and it was not until October that a full-time replacement was found. He then took charge of the December campaign, but this was a disaster! The agent, Mr Kessell, turned out to have no experience of running a campaign and a totally inadequate grasp of election law. Thus, although the Liberals won the seat, the Conservatives lodged a petition. Various corrupt and illegal practices were proved and the MP was unseated. The Conservatives then narrowly won the ensuing bye-election and it was not until 1997 that Cheltenham again elected a Liberal MP!

It is also worth noting that many local posts which might today be considered non-political were then filled by partisans. The town clerks of Cirencester

and Tewkesbury were prominent local Conservatives. In 1892 the Cirencester Borough Surveyor canvassed his workers for the Conservative candidate and gave them time off to vote. Poor Law Overseers who compiled the election registers were party nominees. The partisan bias of the local magistrates, overwhelmingly Conservative, was a frequent cause of Liberal complaints, and the radical local MP Sir Charles Dilke put pressure on the Lord Chancellor to nominate more Liberals. Even Returning Officers were partisan. In a council election in Cheltenham South Ward in 1893 the result was a tie, and the Returning Officer, a Conservative, gave a casting vote for the Conservative candidate. In Gloucester in the December 1910 general election the first count gave a tiny majority of only 4 votes for the Conservatives and the Returning Officer, a Conservative, refused a recount and declared the Conservative candidate elected!

So to conclude, I think that Michael Steed's grandfather

would have seen nothing wrong in being prominent in the local Conservative organisation while holding the various posts in local government that Michael lists. What local Liberals or Labour supporters thought is another matter!

J.R. Howe

Election agents (2)

Michael Steed (*Journal of Liberal History* 81, winter 2013–14) may well be right that a candidate's agent was historically seen as an legal or clerical and non-political role.

To this day Crown servants who are restricted in political activity are not necessarily restricted from being agents. A government department with which I am familiar has rules that in the same section restrict political activity but provide for time off to be an election agent, apparently without sense of contradiction. It must be that agenting is seen as an important public duty of, as Michael suggests, a clerical or legal nature.

Antony Hook