

(the equivalent to the local council). If he had resisted the temptation to stick to Chamberlain, he temporarily succumbed to the lure of the socialist Independent Labour Party in the 1890s. Williams outlines the reasons for his joining the ILP more fully than his subsequent retreat back to Liberalism but hints that again the politics are entangled with the religion.

Leach participated with other Nonconformists in the campaign against the Tory 1902 Education Act and his political career reached an apex when, in the first general election of 1910, he defeated the charismatic but mysterious socialist Victor Grayson who had captured Colne Valley in a 1907 by-election. Still energetic but in his sixties, it would have been no surprise that Leach served as a chaplain during the First World War and, given what we know of war time hospital conditions even in England, still less a surprise that for a caring man the mental strain proved too much. He died in 1917.

Inevitably, most MPs become no more than backbenchers but the career path that took them to Westminster can itself throw a spotlight on the nature of the political culture that sustained them. We tend to know far more about the very untypical leadership of the Liberal Party when it was the natural party of government than we do about the rank and file. J. B. Williams' book is therefore much to be welcomed.

Williams is the great grandson of the Rev. Charles Leach and his book shows both the possibilities and limitations of a family history approach to biography. From the notes, he does not appear to have had access to any great wealth of family papers or letters but instead has mined the public records – in particular the provincial press, church records, Leach's own writings and Hansard. As more of this documentation becomes available online, the scope for investigating the lives of other backbench Liberals is opened wider. For the nineteenth century this could supplement the work of the History of Parliament Trust which, I believe, is now working on the period 1832–68.

Williams seems more comfortable with the church history than with the politics of the late Victorian period, I suspect that

If Leach is remembered at all, it is – as this book's cover proclaims – because he was the only MP to lose his seat for being of unsound mind, a distinction one instinctively feels should have been much more common.

more could be made of Leach's part in Birmingham politics but this should not deter the sampling of this work if only to gain the inspiration to bring other historic Liberals back to notice. The book is available very cheaply as

an e-book and in physical format as a reasonably priced, good-quality, illustrated, print-on-demand paperback.

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

Liberal defectors identified and explored

Alun Wyburn-Powell, *Defectors and the Liberal Party, 1910–2010: A Study of Inter-Party Relations* (Manchester University Press, 2012)

Review by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

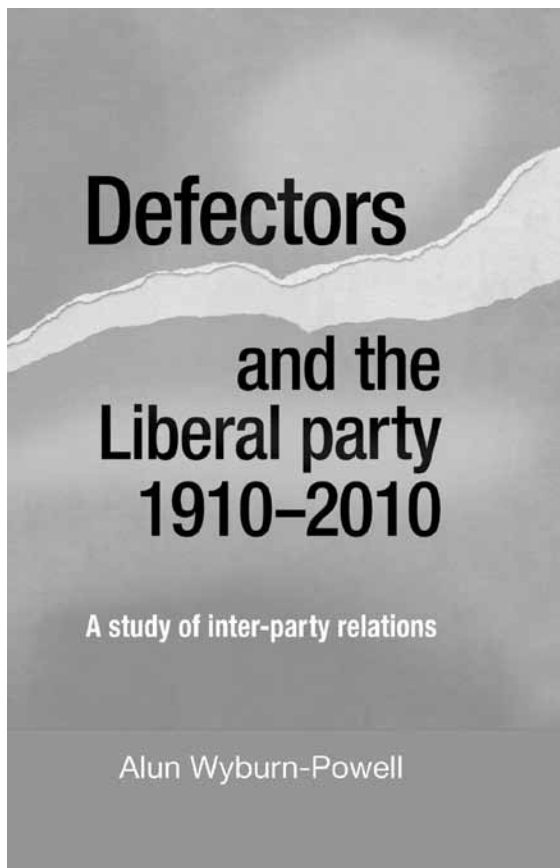
THE AUTHOR EARNED his spurs as the author of a competent, generally well-received biography of Liberal leader Clement Davies published in 2003 (reviewed in *Journal of Liberal History*, no. 43 (Summer 2004), pp. 39–41). The present volume is based on his doctoral thesis presented in the University of Leicester and supervised by Dr Stuart Ball. The author's original plan was to undertake doctoral research on Gwilym Lloyd-George, a project soon sadly jettisoned in the light of the inadequacy of the surviving source materials, and replaced by an ambitious strategy to examine all those MPs who defected from, or into, the Liberal Party (later the Liberal Democrats) between 1910 and 2010.

Dr Wyburn-Powell travelled far and laboured hard in the various archives to gather his fascinating material. His numerous research trips have certainly yielded fruit to enrich his truly pioneering, groundbreaking study. His main theme is that there was 'an enduring cultural compatibility between the Conservatives and the Liberals/Liberal Democrats' which finally led to the formation of a coalition government following the 2010 general election. Such a rapport, he insists, 'had not been the case with the relationship between the Liberals/Liberal Democrats and Labour' (back cover). During the century covered by this study, a total of 116 Liberal MPs defected; there is a helpful listing of them in a table on pp. 8–10.

All of these politicians are considered in varying detail in the main text where the author

carefully examines the many disparate reasons and motives behind the various changes of political allegiance. The time-scale of the volume is long, ranging from politicians like Charles Trevelyan and Arthur Ponsonby (and political maverick E. T. John in Wales) who defected from their party at the end of the First World War, to Emma Nicholson who joined it from the Conservatives in 1995 and Sir Anthony Meyer who emulated her example in 2001. Many names familiar to students of the party are considered here – Freddie Guest and Reginald McKenna, Sir Alfred Mond and E. Hilton Young, Edgar Granville and Wilfrid Roberts. Many fascinating sidelights are presented on these famous names, and the author clearly has an eagle eye for the telling quotation to enliven and illustrate his captivating analysis. One senses at times that the necessity to limit the size of the book no doubt precluded him from including further gems.

The present reviewer savoured the accounts of the Welsh Liberal politicians including those on Clement Davies (masterly, as might be expected from this author), Gwilym and Megan Lloyd George, David Davies, Llandinam, and Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris. Megan's slow gravitation towards the Labour Party, a long, tortuous process, might perhaps have been traced in a little more detail. More attention might have been given to more minor, though still significant, Welsh Liberal figures like W. Llewelyn Williams, who fell out big-time with Lloyd George over the necessity to introduce



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.

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

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