

Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



Lloyd George portrayed

Alan Mumford

Images of Lloyd George LG in cartoons

Kathryn Rix

Party agents, 1880–1914 Professionalisation and political culture

David Dutton

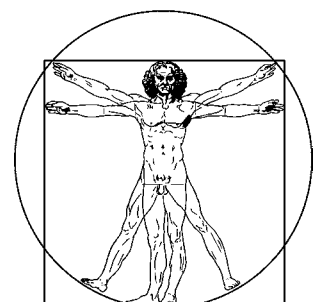
Walter Runciman and the decline of the Liberal Party

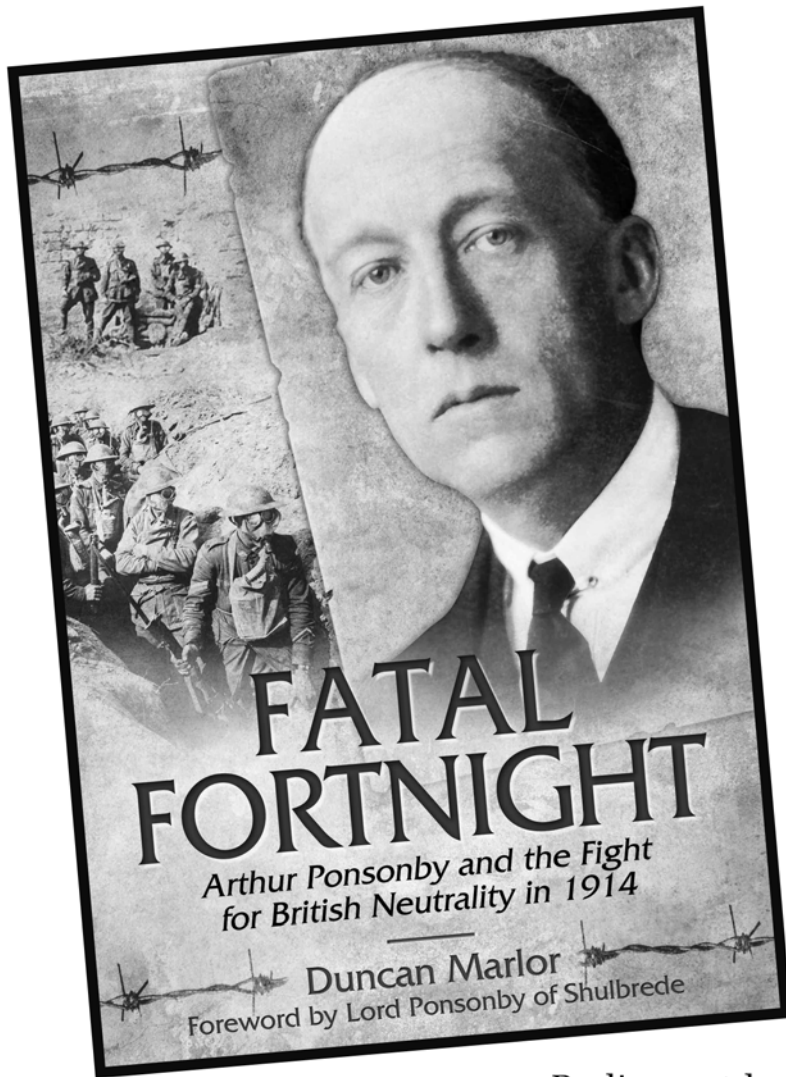
Graham Lippiatt

Liberal Party colours

David Cloke and Douglas Oliver

Reports The Rowntrees and their legacy; Liberalism, peace and the First World War





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Duncan Brack (Editor)

54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN
email: journal@liberalhistory.org.uk

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Patrick Mitchell

6 Palfrey Place, London SW8 1PA;
email: subs@liberalhistory.org.uk

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Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the *Journal of Liberal History* and other occasional publications.

For more information, including historical commentaries, details of publications, back issues of the *Journal*, and archive and other research sources, see our website at: www.liberalhistory.org.uk.

Chair: **Tony Little** Honorary President: **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**

LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS

AUTUMN 2014

Joseph Chamberlain: Imperial Standard Bearer; National Leader, Local Icon: Birmingham 4–5 July 2014

In early July about 100 people attended the conference in Birmingham, organised by Newman University and partly funded by the Liberal Democrat History Group, to mark the centenary of the death of Joseph Chamberlain. **Tony Little** was there.

The opening address by Sir Alan Beith summarised Chamberlain's career as a pioneering political organiser and successful executive mayor of Birmingham who went on to split both the Liberal and Conservative parties. The keynote

speech by Peter Marsh, the leading Chamberlain biographer, reinforced the dynamic entrepreneurial approach of Chamberlain whose understanding of the nature of Birmingham business was the foundation of his political success.

Delegates heard fifteen papers on various aspects of Chamberlain's career over two days, though with a bias towards his Liberal Unionist period and his links with Birmingham rather than on his ministerial career in Gladstone's

second government. Those conference-goers who paid the necessary supplement dined at Chamberlain's home, Highbury, and heard from Stephen Roberts how the house was used as much as a political headquarters as a home.

The second day's proceedings opened with a newly composed 'Fanfare for Birmingham' played in the theatre of the city's recently opened central library, and speeches from the council leader, Albert Bore, and Cities Minister Greg Clark. This was followed by

a contestation of Chamberlain's political legacy by representatives of the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties.

The second day also included an introduction to some of the library's Chamberlain archives, including the local architect's original plans for Highbury, and ended with a tour of Birmingham's magnificent Council House, led by some of the leading members of the current administration, showing some of the relics and artwork associated with

On This Day ...

Every day the Liberal Democrat History Group's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed carry an item of Liberal history news from the past. Below we reprint three of them. To see them regularly, look at www.liberalhistory.org.uk or www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup or follow us at: [LibHistoryToday](https://twitter.com/LibHistoryToday).

September

30 September 1872: Birth of Ramsay Muir, historian, politician and Liberal MP for Rochdale 1923–24. Muir made a key contribution to the development of Liberal political thought in the 1920s and '30s. His book *Liberalism and Industry* strongly influenced leading Liberal politicians including Lloyd George. In 1921 Muir was one of the co-founders, along with John Maynard Keynes, of the Liberal Summer School which was a major source of ideas for the party between the wars. From 1923 to 1926 he was editor of the *Weekly Westminster*. In the 1930s he was one of the key figures in the organisation of the Liberal Party, serving as Chairman of the National Liberal Federation 1931–33 and its President 1933–36. As President he wrote much of the NLF's *The Liberal Way* (1934), which was a strong statement of Liberal policy and of the principles underlying modern social Liberalism.

October

24 October 1993: Death of Jo Grimond, Baron Grimond, Liberal MP for Orkney and Shetland 1950–83, Leader of the Liberal Party 1956–67 and 1976. A man of considerable charm and intellect, Grimond's period as leader saw the Liberal Party undergo a notable revival. Grimond reversed the seemingly inexorable Liberal decline and brought dynamism and ideas back to the party. His writings, in particular *The Liberal Future* and *The Liberal Challenge*, and his formation of the Unserved State Group, gave political Liberalism a new direction and placed it on the left of British politics. Grimond resigned the leadership after eleven years during which time the Liberal Party's vote had risen from 722,000 to over 2.3 million and the number of MPs had more than doubled. In 1976 Grimond returned briefly to the leadership in the wake of the resignation of Jeremy Thorpe, when he steadied the party's nerves and oversaw the first leadership election that involved a vote of the whole party.

November

8 November 1973: Alan Beith wins the Berwick-on-Tweed by-election by a majority of 57 votes, taking the seat from the Conservatives. The by-election was called following the resignation of Lord Lambton after he was involved in a sex scandal.

13 November 1905: The 'Relugas Compact' – an informal agreement between Asquith, Haldane and Grey that they will not serve any government led by Campbell-Bannerman unless he goes to the Lords – is almost broken by CB when he states to Asquith that the Balfour government is days from resignation and he expects to lead a new one. He goes on to ask Asquith, 'what would you like? The Exchequer, I suppose?'

Chamberlain and the council chamber in which he established his reputation.

Details of the programme and text of some of the keynote speeches can be found at the Newman University website (www.newman.ac.uk/media-centre/3596/conference-joseph-chamberlain-imperial-standard-bearer-national-leader-lo). A full report will appear in the next issue of the *Journal*.

Information wanted: Liberal Party HQ

Curiously, I cannot find a consolidated list of Liberal headquarters' addresses since the party's formation. I have endeavoured to put a list together from contemporary sources but I am not convinced that it is entirely accurate. Can any reader help, please? Email Michael Meadowcroft on meadowcroft@bramley.demon.co.uk.

Liberal Democrats in Manchester: correction

The article 'Who votes for the Liberal Democrats?' in *Journal of Liberal History* 83 (summer 2014), by Andrew Russell, contained the statement (on page 55) that 'local Liberal Democrat representation has been wiped out in Greater Manchester'.

This is of course an error: several of the councils in Greater Manchester, including Bolton, Bury, Oldham,

Rochdale, Stockport (where the council is Liberal Democrat-led) and Trafford, retain Liberal Democrat representation. The article should have referred to the City of Manchester Council, where the last Liberal Democrat councilors lost their seats in 2014. Our sincere apologies to all concerned.

The Liberal Party and the First World War

A one-day conference organised by the *Journal of Liberal History* and King's College, London. Saturday 1 November 2014, Room K2.40, Strand Campus of KCL

0930 Registration

0950 Introduction | **Lord Wallace of Saltaire**, President of the Liberal Democrat History Group

1000 The Liberal Party and the First World War – an overview | **Professor Pat Thane**, King's College

1030 Sir Edward Grey and the road to war | **Professor Thomas Otte**, University of East Anglia

1115 Coffee break

1145 Gilbert Murray v. E.D. Morel: Liberalism's debilitating Great War divide | **Professor Martin Ceadel**, New College, Oxford

1230 Lunch break

1315 The papers of Asquith and Harcourt | **Mike Webb**, Bodleian Library

1400 Asquith as War Premier and Liberal Leader | **Dr Roland Quinault**, Institute of Historical Research

1445 Coffee break

1515 Comparing Lloyd George and Winston Churchill as war leaders | **Professor Richard Toye**, University of Exeter

1600 Panel discussion on the impact of the war on the Liberal Party | **Michael Steed, Professor Vernon Bogdanor, Roland Quinault, Pat Thane**

1700 Close of conference

The cost of the conference will be £15 (students and unwaged £10) to include morning and afternoon refreshments. (Lunch is not provided but there are plenty of cafes and sandwich shops in the vicinity of the campus.)

To register please send your name and address to **Graham Lippiatt**, 114 Worcester Lane, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, B75 5NJ, or gjl29549@aol.com. Payment can be taken on the day.

IMAGES OF LI

The winter 2012 issue of this *Journal* depicts on its front page the standard, rather intense photographic treatment of David Lloyd George. Like most photographs, it gives no indication of the Lloyd George seen in other images, such as cartoons, paintings, mugs and ceramics. Biographies and general histories contain a number of differing versions of what Lloyd George did, his motivation, the impact of his actions and the personality through which he delivered those actions. There are largely favourable biographies by Thomson and Owen, stridently critical versions by Lloyd George's son Richard and by McCormick, and more balanced views by Rowland and Hattersley.¹ **Alan Mumford** reviews images of Lloyd George.



LOYD GEORGE

SUCH 'OUTSIDER' VIEWS are complemented and occasionally contradicted by Lloyd George's own direct contribution, both from reports of his speeches and through his articles and books. The books were, of course, substantially concerned with presenting his own image of his role during the First World War and in creating the peace treaties, and they conflict in places with the memoirs and biographies of other people, particularly generals, that cover the war.² Frances Stevenson (his secretary and mistress) recorded in 1934 that 'some of his friends think that he would do better sometimes to admit that he has occasionally made mistakes, and been in the wrong but he seems incapable of doing this'.³ He did not keep a diary during this parliamentary career; and his letters to Dame Margaret and Frances, unsurprisingly, sustain his self-image.⁴ A lot of Stevenson's material probably reflects what Lloyd George wanted recorded as his views; his other main secretary, A. J. Sylvester, reveals less attractive aspects of his boss.⁵

However, the image that has been most frequently seized upon in books is that of J. M. Keynes:

How can I convey to the reader, who does not know him, any just impression of this extraordinary figure of our time, this syren [sic], this goat-footed bard, this half-human visitor to our age from the hag-ridden magic and enchanted woods of Celtic antiquity. One catches

in his company that flavour of final purposelessness, inner irresponsibility, existence outside or away from our Saxon good and evil mixed with cunning remorselessness, love of power.⁶

This caricature in words was written at the height of Keynes' anger with Lloyd George, during the 1919 peace-treaty negotiations. When he eventually published it, in 1933, he confessed that it was an unfair portrait, having worked in harmony with Lloyd George on unemployment in the 1920s. Lloyd George, however, retaliated in his *War Memoirs*: 'He is an entertaining economist whose bright but shallow dissertations on finance and political economy when not taken seriously always provide a source of innocent merriment to his readers.'⁷

Yet another image of Lloyd George is presented through drawn caricature or cartoons (the word used throughout the rest of this article). The most frequently used illustration is that by David Low, and he is a totally different figure in this image from the one seen in most photographs: a twinkling figure engaging the viewer in a sense of fun, enjoyment, participation. However, just as with the written word, the various cartoonists depicted a wide variety of images of Lloyd George, as will be shown in this article.

The context for cartoons – electorate and press

The significance of cartoons is best understood within the context of

the people who viewed them. For Lloyd George, the main change in the political environment was the increase in the electorate – from 6.7 million in 1900, to 7.7 million (all male) in 1910, to 21.3 million including many women in 1918, then to 28.8 million in 1930.⁸ Two parallel changes were the continuing increase in adult literacy and corresponding proliferation of newspapers (there was no radio until the 1920s and, of course, no TV). Lloyd George's response to these changes found expression in his relationship with the press – which he said 'must be squared or must be squashed'.⁹ Thus he can be viewed as the first modern prime minister in the way he developed that relationship, for example, holding in 1922 the first press conference ever given by a prime minister.¹⁰ (Unlike Churchill, radio was not a major contributor to his image).

Lloyd George's predecessors had shuddered with distaste at the thought of trying to influence newspapers; he, on the contrary, was obsessed with the cultivation of his image. Beaverbrook wrote, 'Mr Lloyd George likes praise but not from a delight of flattery. He likes a good Press as a shopkeeper likes a good customer.'¹¹ Salisbury's comment about the *Daily Mail* – 'a paper written by office boys for office boys'¹² – perhaps recognised the revolution in newspaper style and circulation which formed so significant a feature of Lloyd George's relations with the press, and through which cartoon images of Lloyd George became more relevant.

LG (*Low, New Statesman*, 16 March 1926)
From 1919 to 1922 Low had drawn critical cartoons of Lloyd George, but this cartoon (part of a series on important people) brings out his attractive side. It also indicates LG's large head and short legs.

IMAGES OF LLOYD GEORGE

The coincidence of vastly increased adult literacy and the innovative ideas of Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe) created a larger readership. At the start of Lloyd George's parliamentary career in 1890, *The Times* sold 40,000 copies, and the top-selling London morning papers sold perhaps 300,000. Of the Sunday papers, *Reynolds* sold 350,000 – but the *News of the World* only 30,000. Only ten years later, in 1900, the *Daily Mail* was selling more than 700,000 copies. By the time the First World War broke out in 1914, the *Daily Express* (not yet under Beaverbrook's control) was selling 400,000; the *Mail*, 800,000; and the *News of the World*, 2,000,000; and *The Times* went up to 165,000 as the result of a massive price reduction. By the end of Lloyd George's premiership, the *Daily Express* was nearly up to the 1,000,000 of the *Daily Mail*, compared with the *Liberal Daily News* at 300,000. The *Daily Herald*, supporting Labour, increased from 40,000 before 1914 to 200,000 in 1921. Conservative-supporting newspapers outsold the Liberal papers (*Daily News*, *Daily Chronicle*, *Westminster Gazette* and *Manchester Guardian*) by two to one over the period 1900 to 1922.¹³ There was also a large readership for a substantial number of provincial papers – the *Manchester Guardian*, for example, was influential outside Manchester. In 1910, national and provincial papers both sold 3.5 million copies daily. The readership – and so the number of people who saw cartoons of Lloyd George – was three or four times this. We can compare this readership with the number who saw political prints in the early nineteenth century, which was perhaps 40,000 for best sellers.

Unlike Asquith, as in so many other respects, Lloyd George frequently met editors and particularly those of Liberal papers. The most important relationship was with C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* – who supported, encouraged, but then finally became critical of Lloyd George – from 1900 to the mid-1920s. The relationship with Scott is particularly interesting because it was most frequently Lloyd George who called C. P. Scott to come and see him, often over working breakfast meetings. The relationship was symbiotic

Stop Thief
(J. J. Proctor, *The People*, 9 May 1909)

Caption: Taffy was a Welshman; Taffy was a thief; Chief of hen-roost robbers; May his run be brief.

In 1908 Lloyd George said 'I have no nest eggs. I am looking for someone else's hen roost to rob next year'. The famous People's Budget of 1909 proposed new taxes. The caption makes use of a then familiar gibe about Welshmen. The dog is presumably a reference to A. J. Balfour's description of the House of Lords as the watchdog of the constitution.



– Scott hoping to influence Lloyd George while Lloyd George tried to influence the content of Scott's editorials, saying: 'Come and see me sometimes and correct my faults or help my better self.'¹⁴ In contrast, he was involved in the removal of Donald, editor of the *Liberal Daily Chronicle*, when he diverged from LG's policies. There is little evidence of contact with the editor of the *Daily Mail* at one extreme or *The Times* at the other.

He frequently (at least 700 meetings)¹⁵ saw Riddell, who was the main director of *Reynold's News* and the *News of the World*. Riddell bought a house for him at Walton Heath in 1912, frequently played golf with him and recorded their conversations in two published diaries. This seems, however, to have been a relationship as close to that of friendship as Lloyd George was ever prepared to engage in, as much as an attempt to influence what went into those two papers.

In contrast, his dealings with Northcliffe, owner of the *Daily Mail* and later of *The Times*, were strictly political and full of mutual distrust. In 1916, Northcliffe,

through his newspapers, said that Asquith had to go, though without necessarily supporting Lloyd George as a replacement. Northcliffe subsequently crowed to his brother, 'who killed cock Robin'¹⁶ – and believed he had had a major input. LG brought him into government to try and keep him quiet – unsuccessfully: from 1918 he was consistently an enemy of Lloyd George. On 16 April 1919 Lloyd George made a venomous attack on an unnamed newspaper proprietor (Northcliffe). He delivered a sarcastic description of what he claimed to be this man's 'diseased vanity' (tapping his head). In the same speech he spoke of *The Times* as being seen by people in France who did not recognise it as 'the three-penny edition of the *Daily Mail*'.¹⁷ Newspapers, including *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*, provided extensive coverage of the speech – but few cartoons. LG wrote his own speech; unlike Baldwin's famous attack on press proprietors in 1931, in which the crucial phrase was written by Kipling.

The other major involvement with a press owner was with Max

Aitken, who became Lord Beaverbrook at the time of the creation of the new government in December 1916. Beaverbrook wrote some brilliantly readable but not fully accurate accounts of his involvement in this change of government and the later fall of Lloyd George, and his (exaggerated) contributions to these events.¹⁸ (The 'honours scandal' of 1922, which contributed to Lloyd George's downfall, was initiated by the Duke of Northumberland, who protested about the number of honours for people in the press.)

In 1901 Lloyd George brought about changed ownership of the *Daily News*, which thereafter supported moderate pro-Boers instead of Liberal Imperialists. Much greater was his financial involvement in the purchase of the *Daily Chronicle* in 1918; not only did he direct its political views, but it added to the Lloyd George political fund when he sold shares in it in 1926. Perhaps the most extraordinary involvement, had it come off, would have been with *The Times* upon the death of Northcliffe in 1922. Lloyd George sought to get the financial backing to take over the paper and even discussed with Frances Stevenson the idea that he should become editor and give up his major political involvement. This was on top of having set up his own coalition Liberal magazine,

published between October 1920 and November 1923 with a print run of 30,000.

These attempts to create newspaper support must be seen in the context of a press environment in which the majority of newspapers were Conservative-supporting and presented him as at best devious and at worst as a liar (see, for example, the Marconi debates in 1913 and General Maurice in 1918). In such a newspaper context, more often unfavourable than complimentary, what was the contribution of cartoonists and how did they make it?

The significance of political cartoons

Political cartoons describe and evaluate, often with pungency. In the days before TV they created a visual image more powerful than photographs. Low's cartoon of Lloyd George is more likely to stay in the mind than the verbal caricature by Keynes. The award of a knighthood to John Tenniel in 1893 signified recognition of the fact that political cartoons had a more than trivial place in public interest. Beerbohm, Partridge and Low were later similarly honoured; the award to Francis Carruthers Gould (FCG), however, was explicitly for his support for the Liberal Party. All of these cartoonists were significant enough to

appear in the Dictionary of National Biography, as do Poy and E. T. Reed (but not, strangely, Strube).

The political impact of newspapers is now thought by experts in this field to be most often to confirm views that the readers have already developed. And this goes, too, for cartoonists, since they generally produce cartoons that fit the political views of their paper. When Illingworth took over from Staniforth on the *Western Mail*, his political views differed from those of the paper. But 'Nobody suggested ideas when I started on the *Western Mail*. I knew very well what the politics of the paper were, and I knew which side my bread was buttered. The cartoonist must have a pragmatic approach.'¹⁹

Style of cartoonists

Throughout the period of Lloyd George's career, cartoons were more often intended to produce a smile or even a laugh than many of today's cartoons. However, there were significant developments in the style of cartoons: a decline in references to the classics; more use of up-to-date symbols and metaphors. From the first significant cartoon of Lloyd George in 1894 in the *Western Mail*, and through to 1912, the general content was consistently moderate by today's standards – JMS, FCG and the *Punch* cartoonists in that sense remaining in the tradition of most of their predecessors. Criticisms of individuals and policies there were, but often more through the title and text accompanying the cartoon than by any portrayal of the participants in physically exaggerated form.

FCG deployed what Low later called 'tabs of identity' portraying Chamberlain with his ever present orchid and monocle, with a mild emphasis on his sharp nose. However there was no tab, no great exaggeration in his version of Lloyd George. FCG appears in cartoon histories frequently, although he worked for a small-circulation (though politically influential) newspaper, because he was the first, and because he republished his cartoons in a series of books. He made two comments which are of particular significance in relation to Lloyd George. He said that he aimed to use 'vinegar not vitriol'. And in relating his cartoons to his

The First Benefits (Will Dyson, *Daily Herald*, 1912)

Caption: [The Worker is supposed to get benefits from Lloyd George's Act while he is unwell, but the Insurance Financier certainly gets benefits from it all the time.] The Insurance Financier: 'I think now you may give what is left to the deserving poor, who have provided all this rare and refreshing fruit. Unfortunately they will not be able to judge of its refreshing qualities, but they will never be at doubt for a moment as to its rarity!'

Lloyd George's 1912 Insurance Act produced the first state-based scheme for sickness and unemployment. Most of the attacks on it had been from doctors and employers but this cartoon provides a different criticism.





The Responsible Party (JMS, *Western Mail*, 14 November 1904)

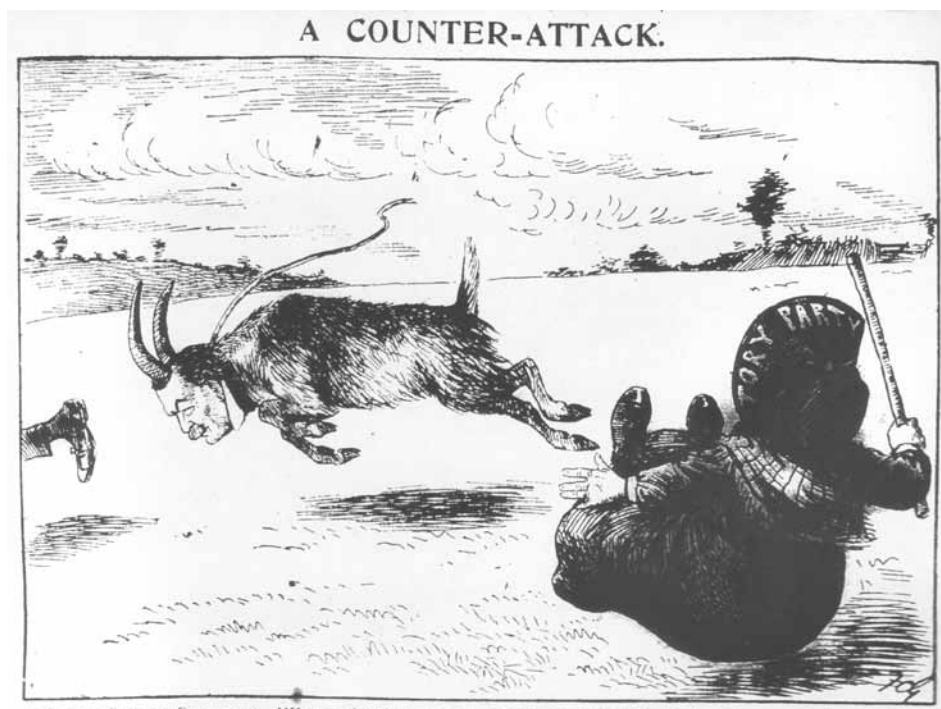
Caption: Robber (Mr Lloyd-George): If yer don't 'and over the blooming swag at once an' without no trouble, I shall 'old yer responsible for all the devastation an' damage as'll take place.

Lloyd George's political career had started with a victory over the established church in Wales. In 1904 he was battling to reduce the control that the church had on schools.

A Counter Attack (FCG, *Westminster Gazette*, 3 July 1913)

Caption: The Tory Party: Deary me! What a dreadful, savage, dangerous creature! And we were only beating him with a broomstick! [The Tory criticism of Mr Lloyd-George's speech at the National Liberal Club on Tuesday is on the lines of 'Cet animal est méchant; quand on l'attaque, il se défend'.

Lloyd George had a continuing belief that the taxation of land would provide him with the additional revenue he needed. His attack on landowners stimulated Conservative attacks on him.



Insurance Act, and post-war during the 1918 general election. His cartoons are of great significance to cartoon historians but they only appeared in a paper with a small circulation (40,000) in Dyson and Lloyd George's heyday, although Lloyd George reappeared when Dyson rejoined the *Daily Herald* with a much larger circulation (over a million) in 1931. However no other cartoonist followed his style.

Another major change came with the arrival of Low in *The Star* in 1919, with a much more emphatic line in drawing. Low in his autobiography said:

I always had the greatest difficulty in making L.G. sinister in a cartoon. Every time I drew him, however critical the comment, I had to be careful or he would spring off the drawing board as a loveable cherubic little chap. I found the only effective way of putting him definitely in the wrong in a cartoon was

political beliefs (he was awarded a knighthood at the suggestion of the Liberal Prime Minister Rosebery) he commented, 'I have never, since I devoted my pencil and my pen to the service of the party, seen any part of my duty to attack my own side. When my Conservative friends have asked me "why don't you sometimes caricature your own people", I have replied "that's your work not mine"'.²⁰

Will Dyson, whose cartoons began to appear as the full front

page of the *Daily Herald* in 1912, broke with this tradition. He criticised policies and individuals both through dramatic aggressive attacks on policies and sweeping physical exaggeration. He was a socialist drawing for a paper sympathetic to socialism and concerned to develop support for the working classes, regularly drawing a bloated capitalist figure. Lloyd George was one of the individual politicians he attacked, both pre-war, for example in relation to the National

Party Paint (Frank Holland uses the famous Three Graces statue in his cartoon for *John Bull*, 21 June 1913)

Caption: A Marconi Study in Black and White

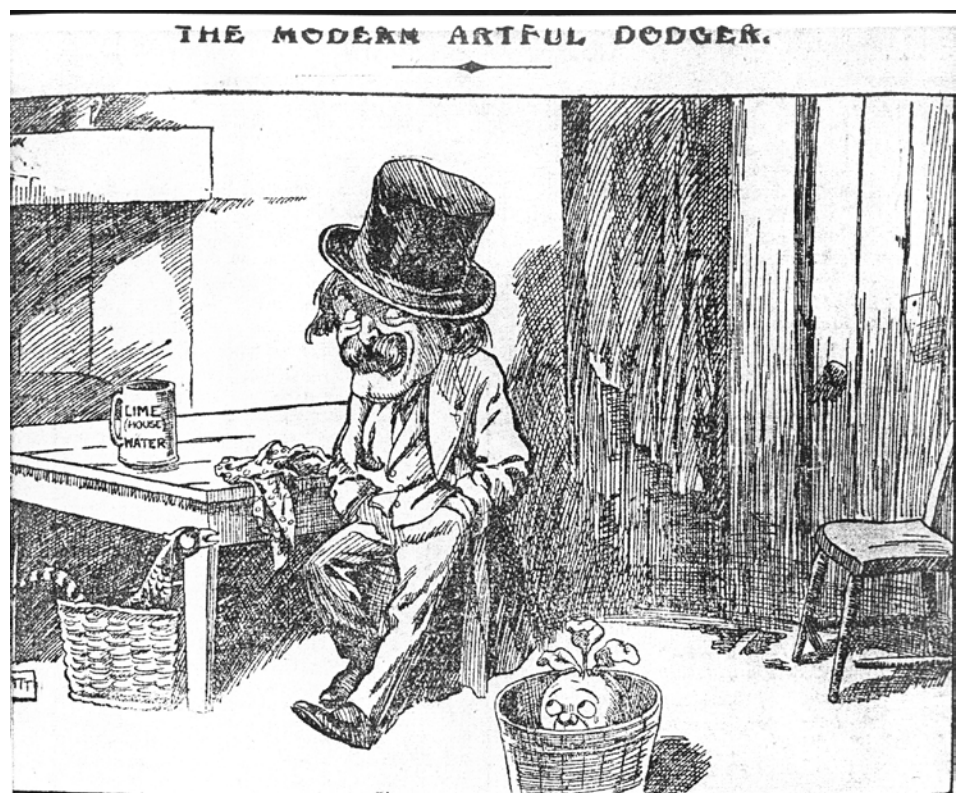
Lloyd George, Rufus Isaacs and the Master of Elibank were accused of profiting from inappropriate purchase of shares in the American Marconi company. A select committee of the House of Commons produced three reports: the Liberal majority exonerated (whitewashed) the three; a minority led by the Conservative Robert Cecil condemned them; and the third was selectively critical.



The Modern Artful Dodger (Matt, *Daily Dispatch*, October 1913)

Caption: In bringing this famous Dickens picture up to date our artist has adhered rather too closely to precedent by showing the modern Dodger with his hands in his own pockets.

Lloyd George's speech in Limehouse, London, on 30 July 1910 in defence of his budget was regarded by his opponents, both Conservative and Liberal, as an unacceptably violent attack on the aristocracy. This was still a reference point in October 1913 when Lloyd George referred inaccurately to pheasants eating mangel wurzels.



by misplacing his quality in sardonic incongruity – by surrounding the comedian with tragedy.²¹

I have difficulty identifying this in Low's cartoons of him. Certainly much more damaging to Lloyd George was Low's wonderful invention – in 1920 when he worked for *The Star* – of the coalition as a two-headed ass.²² Interestingly Low depicts this figure in a relatively abstract form, without applying the faces of Lloyd George and either Bonar Law or Austen Chamberlain. Lloyd George was still a significant figure when Low moved to the *London Evening Standard* in 1927, by which time Lloyd George's change to more

radical policies chimed with what seemed to be Low's own political beliefs. Like Dyson, Low was sometimes accused of being a socialist but, unlike Dyson, was in reality only mildly radical and mildly left wing, though strongly anti-establishment.

Low's companion in the Beaverbrook stable, Strube, differed in drawing for the larger-circulation *Daily Express* and *Sunday Express*, and in his political views – mildly conservative.²³ His cartoons were certainly very different from those of Low. Baldwin described Strube

as a gentle genius: 'I don't mind his attacks because he never hits below the belt. Now Low is a genius but he is evil and malicious. I cannot bear Low.'²⁴ Low in fact criticised Strube for being too kind to politicians; certainly Strube's cartoons of Lloyd George created mild amusement rather than shock. However he also created 'tabs of identity' for Lloyd George. In a speech in 1913 Lloyd George had claimed incorrectly that pheasants eat mangel wurzels (and that the pheasants of the rich were eating the mangel wurzels of the poor). Strube for

IMAGES OF LLOYD GEORGE

decades continued to draw Lloyd George with pheasants and mangel wurzels also present, as Lloyd George's son was delighted to point out in his nasty biography of his father. Earlier he showed Marconi shares peeping out of a pocket or the £100 per week Lloyd George was earning as Chancellor. Strube said that Lloyd George

... was the major reason why I took up political cartooning. He had all the qualities that a cartoonist dreams of. Apart from his great oratorical powers, he had expressive features, which were a delight to draw whether as a conjuror, wizard, pirate, puck, doctor, farmer or a wasp under an inverted tumbler ... Even if he were tucked away in an odd corner he was still the sparkle of the cartoon.²⁵

The pheasants lasted longest in the cartoons and were an example of Strube's mild humour rather than savage criticism. In later years Strube used Lloyd George's cloak and long hair as 'identifiers'.

In terms of the number of readers who saw his cartoons in the *Evening News* and *Daily Mail*, Poy was Strube's main rival. Northcliffe

described him as the 'first gentleman of Fleet Street', which perhaps sums up the nature of his cartoons.

The publication of cartoons

The decision by papers on whether to use political cartoons changed during Lloyd George's lifetime (and has changed twice since). Political cartoons gradually started to appear regularly in newspapers after first the *Pall Mall Gazette* (circulation around 10,000) from 1888, and then the *Westminster Gazette* (circulation 20,000 in early twentieth century), decided to publish FCG. Both were London evening papers. Only in the first decade of the twentieth century did a majority of the popular papers start to regularly include them – with the exception of the *Daily Mail*, which held off until 1918. The most important decision was by the *London Evening News*, which brought Poy from the *Manchester Evening News*: his cartoons were often reproduced the next day in the *Daily Mail*.

Newspapers had been much later in using cartoons than magazines, and it was the establishment of *Punch* in 1841, in particular, which gave impetus to the latter. *Punch* had a circulation of about

40,000 in 1870 and had reached 120,000 by 1930. Its rivals such as *Judy* and *Fun* had largely ceased to be important by the time Lloyd George achieved prominence. Another magazine, *Vanity Fair* (circulation 2,500), survived and published a cartoon of Lloyd George in its last year, 1913. Magazines such as *London Opinion*, *John Bull*, *Passing Show*, and *Bystander* regularly carried cartoons, as did the short-lived *Lloyd George Liberal* magazine – though the long-lived *Liberal* magazine rarely did. None of the 'heavy' political journals used cartoons, the one temporary exception being the *New Statesman*, which printed a supplement in 1926 of cartoons drawn for it by Low, including one of Lloyd George. (Circulation, however, was then around 10,000).

The national 'heavy' newspapers – *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* – published some cartoons during the First World War. *The Observer* did not use cartoons until the 1960s. The *Sunday Times* and provincial papers sometimes had cartoons by their own cartoonists but often repeated those from London papers.

The involvement of newspaper owners

There is very little information available about the decision to carry cartoons, and then which cartoonists to use and which line should be taken. Beaverbrook, as owner of the *Daily Express*, *Sunday Express* and *London Evening Standard*, was involved in all aspects of his papers while constantly denying it. His personal role in relation to cartoons was most evident in the case of David Low, who he pursued for several years to try and attract him from the *London Evening Star* to his own *Evening Standard*, finally achieving this in 1927. He already had Strube for his most popular paper, the *Daily Express*. The *Evening Standard* (circulation 334,000 in 1929) aimed at a slightly higher market than its evening rivals and was thought to be read by 'important people'.

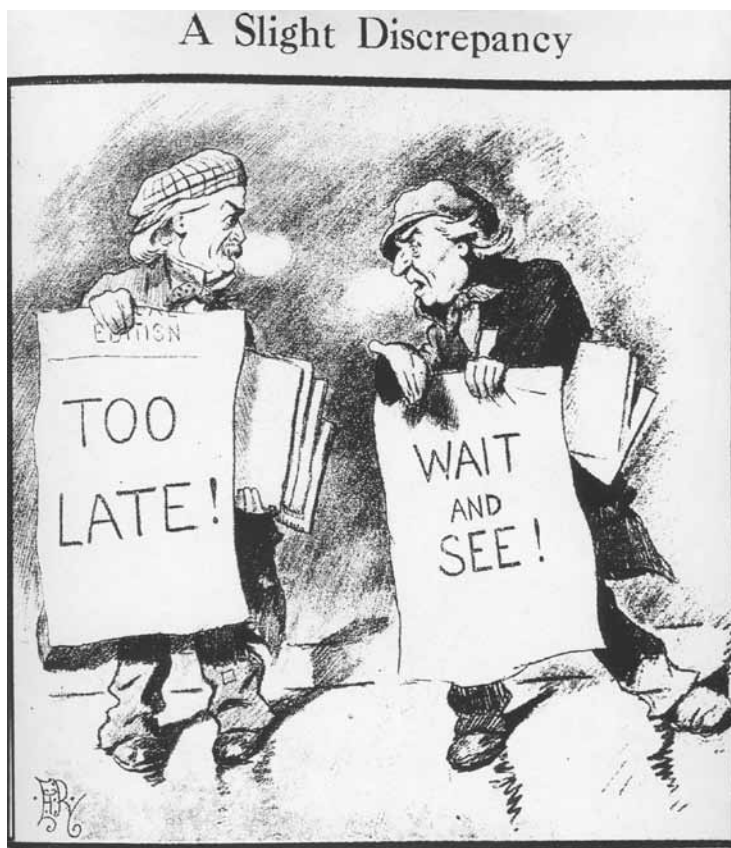
Low and Beaverbrook both claimed that he was never censored by Beaverbrook or anyone else at the *Standard*. In fact, at least forty of his cartoons were not used, usually after an editor or other executive had consulted with Beaverbrook;

A Slight Discrepancy

(E. T. Reed, *The Bystander*, 29 December 1915)

Caption: Hasquith (to his pal Jawge): 'Ere! Not s'much 'o your "Too Late"!!! What's the blinkin' good o' me a 'ollerin' aht what I'm a 'ollerin' aht, if you go a 'ollerin' aht what you're a 'ollerin' aht?!?!'

Asquith in 1910 told the Tories that they should 'wait and see' what might be done about the creation of a majority of Liberal peers. The phrase became a criticism of his general approach. In December 1915 Lloyd George made a speech regretting that actions were constantly too late. Lloyd George obtained the original drawing.



however, none of these relate to Lloyd George.²⁶ (Since Strube offered his editor a choice of five or six cartoons, the situation did not arise for him.) Beaverbrook had a continuing interest in cartoons about himself. Apparently he sought copies of all cartoons which included him in however minor a role,²⁷ and he particularly liked Low's version of him. Northcliffe is recorded as intervening once – in the form of an instruction to the night editor of the *Daily Mail* to publish fewer Tom Webster cartoons.²⁸ The only other proprietor about whose interest we have knowledge is Rothermere, who had complained to Beaverbrook about the Low cartoons in which he appeared. Low was told (successfully) to tone down his cartoons.²⁹

Cartoonists were often less responsive to speeches than would be the case nowadays. This was sometimes true for historically important Lloyd George speeches, for example there were no cartoons about his description of the House of Lords as Balfour's poodle in 1908. There were only two cartoons about Agadir in 1911, and even his great Queen's Hall speech about the need for war in 1914 resulted in only one cartoon.

Lloyd George had always been subject to criticism from cartoonists, for example, about his 1910 budget, the House of Lords, or the National Insurance Act (where he was depicted as the devil). They generally made use of the more radical elements of his speeches, although there were also complimentary cartoons about his success in resolving strikes. The attitude of cartoonists changed with the First World War, as he was recognised as the man who had been successful in the Ministry of Munitions. Most cartoonists welcomed his later appointments, first as Secretary for War, then as prime minister. With the exception of Dyson, most favoured him during the 1918 general election. Critical cartoons re-emerged over questions such as waste in government expenditure, some aspects of his struggles over payment of war costs by Germany from 1919 and, eventually, the honours scandal. Critical and favourable cartoons appeared following the peace treaty with Ireland in 1921.

It was easy to portray Lloyd George's actions: it was less easy to

The Crisis (Bert Thomas, *London Opinion*, 16 December 1916)

Caption: Lloyd George: 'A more vigorous war policy, or your job!' Asquith: 'Kamarad! Kamarad!'

Lloyd George, supported by Bonar Law, wanted to take full charge of the war. Asquith refused to accept this, but resigned on 5 December 1916 when he realised he lacked support.



show Lloyd George's personality. Whether you took the extraordinary depiction of him by Keynes, or the less elegant denunciations of him as a devious and intriguing Machiavellian politician, concerned only with power, these were more difficult to convey within the conventions then used by cartoonists. Though nowadays cartoonists would have no problem in portraying Lloyd George with lies spewing out of him.

Cartoonists enjoyed portraying Lloyd George in a variety of roles, which is most easily observable in the *Punch* collection of cartoons on him.³⁰ We see Lloyd George as an acrobat, snake charmer, Cockney, shepherd, and character from Dickens, amongst others. Other guises deliberately set out to present a view of Lloyd George's personality and nature – as the Artful Dodger, as Long John Silver with his political fund, or as Napoleon the man of destiny.

Cartoons of Lloyd George often highlighted his Welshness, most usually through putting him in a supposedly Welsh dress, for example as Dame Wales, a figure created by JMS in 1893. Sometimes, however, he was drawn as a goat. The most straightforward explanation for this is that a goat was a well-recognised symbol of Welshness, and nearly all of these cartoons were drawn before Keynes' description of him as 'goat footed' in 1933. It may also simply have occurred to cartoonists that he was nimble footed as he moved from one situation to another. In political circles the description of him by one of his civil servants, Sir George Murray, as 'my Welsh goat ... he feeds happily enough out of my hand at present'³¹ may have circulated in political circles, but may not have been known to cartoonists. A further interpretation is suggested by John Campbell's use of a cartoon of Lloyd George as a goat in his book



characteristics, they provide an opportunity for a degree of chronological examination of the changes in depiction of Lloyd George.

The collection of *Punch* cartoons referred to earlier took him up to 1921 (and followed the precedent of individual collections by *Punch* on Disraeli and *Judy* on Gladstone).

General histories covering Lloyd George's political life sometimes include cartoons; the *Low New Statesman* cartoon is probably the favourite. *Punch* cartoons are also frequently used, perhaps because *Punch* volumes are easier to research than newspapers. This is slightly misleading, because *Punch* artists tended towards observation rather than sharp criticism. Given the relatively small circulation of *Punch*, they were in fact less important in creating Lloyd George's contemporary image. Since he was interested in cartoons it is very surprising that Beaverbrook includes none in his three volumes about Lloyd George (although he did include them in his small book *Politicians and the Press*).³⁵ Not all biographies include cartoons: Lloyd George's great-grandson Robert leads the way with nineteen,³⁶ followed by Richard Toye's volume on the same subject who gives us seven.³⁷ The most recent biography by Roy Hattersley³⁸ sadly includes only the Spy cartoon. A most interesting absence of cartoons is to be found in Frank Owen's biography, the first to be based on the collection of papers sold to Beaverbrook by Frances Stevenson. The absence is interesting not just in itself, but because Owen had been sent details of original cartoons and scrapbooks held in those papers. Lloyd George did not include cartoons in his six volumes on the war and the peace treaties.

Collections of cartoons

Institutions such as the Lloyd George Museum, the National Library of Wales and the National Portrait Gallery have small collections of Lloyd George cartoons. The British Cartoon Archive at the University of Kent also has a number of cartoons related to LG.

Commemorative ceramics

As well as standard portraits, cartoons were occasionally either copied or developed especially for

The Goat in the Wilderness,³² which raises the possibility that the cartoonist was deliberately referencing the passage from Leviticus about the scapegoat.³³ Finally, there remains the question of Lloyd George's sexual activities, which have led to an assertion that he was a goat in that sense. But were cartoonists aware of that aspect of Lloyd George's life and did they mean that sort of double reference? This would not be an issue nowadays, since references to sexual activities by politicians are more frequently made, for example in relation to George Osborne and his supposed association with a dominatrix.

The physical characteristics of Lloyd George which cartoonists increasingly drew upon were

his long white hair, which he grew from the 1920s, his cloak, and occasionally his pince nez. Physical exaggeration is not usually part of the picture. Northcliffe once remarked, 'it's his big head on a little body that I don't like.'³⁴ However only two cartoonists seem to have seen the same thing: Low (see earlier), and Spy in *Vanity Fair* in 1913, although this was a characteristically dull cartoon otherwise. (Photographs indicate that Northcliffe's description was accurate).

Cartoons in books

Lloyd George is, of course, featured in the collections of cartoons by FCG, Poy, Dyson, Strube and Low. Aside from their individual

The Tie That Binds

(B. Cory Kilvert, *Life*, 8 June 1922; Parliamentary Archives LGF/10/3/4) At first sight this resembles the chuckling Lloyd George image of the 1926 Low cartoon. But look at the eyes. This was sent to Lloyd George by Churchill with the comment 'Prime Minister. Rather nice'

commemorative ceramics. The most famous (and most expensive to buy) is the Toby jug version produced by FCG as part of his collection on war leaders.

Lloyd George's reaction to cartoons

Grey and Peel in the early to mid-nineteenth century collected prints of themselves. There is no indication other prime ministers did likewise until Lloyd George, who certainly did. However, there is no reference in the biographies of him that this author has read to Lloyd George's attitude or response to cartoonists. For example there is nothing in Frances Stephenson's diaries. However information from the Lloyd George papers,³⁹ and from cartoonists tells us that he collected cartoons featuring himself. (It is not known whether he paid for them).

J. M. Staniforth of the *Western Mail* received compliments from Lloyd George, and even more significantly an engraved cigarette case. Staniforth's cartoons were advertised in 1918 as being available for sale 'at 2 guineas each'. The obituary for Staniforth in the *Western Mail* says 'The Prime Minister often asked for the original drawings. Many of these are hung on the walls of 10 Downing Street or at Mr Lloyd George's private residence.'⁴⁰ Lloyd George wrote in the same paper that Staniforth's cartoons 'were always free from malice and any suggestion of coarseness.' Lloyd George regarded 'The responsible party' as one of Staniforth's greatest successes and 'it is always kept in Mr Lloyd George's own house'.⁴¹ It is rather puzzling as to why this should be Lloyd George's favourite. The 4th Earl Lloyd George has thirty-four original cartoons which were probably held by Lloyd George at Churt. Unsurprisingly the original cartoons he held were not strongly critical.

Lloyd George, apart from collecting cartoons, sent compliments to a number of cartoonists, such as Staniforth, Low and Strube. An interesting demonstration of his views was that he persuaded Raemakers, the Belgian cartoonist, to go to the USA to enlist American help in the war.⁴² Low in his autobiography says that Lloyd George 'had a little collection of originals

of what he thought were my best efforts.'⁴³ One included in this article was 'You're Next', showing him as the only surviving leader from the 1919 Peace Treaty.

In 1933 Lloyd George was asked how he managed to keep so cheerful with all the anxieties and work which he encountered when he was prime minister.



Studies in Expression

(Harry Furniss, publication details unknown) Untrustworthy and devious were some of the adjectives used about Lloyd George by opponents. Others saw him as creative and imaginative. This is the antithesis to the familiar Low cartoon.

IMAGES OF LLOYD GEORGE

The first thing I did, even before I got out of bed was to take up the *Daily Express*, a paper with whose policy I often firmly disagreed, and look at Strube's cartoon. That put me in good humour for the rest of the day. Strube taught me how to laugh at myself and that, believe me, is a virtue which many eminent men would do well to acquire.³⁴

We have no evidence that Lloyd George's interaction with editors and owners affected how cartoonists portrayed him. The fact that he obtained cartoons and commented on them favourably is not matched by any recorded response by those cartoonists. We do not know whether they were more inclined to present a softer view of him.

Returning to the caricature of Lloyd George by J. M. Keynes, we can see that some of it appears in the work of cartoonists: the siren, the goat, the bard and Keynes' implication that Lloyd George was a magician. What cartoonists could not capture was Keynes' observation

of inner irresponsibility, absence of Saxon good and evil (whatever that was) and cunning remorselessness. Moreover, whatever the contribution of Keynes' description to the views of historians and biographers, it was only read from 1933. The views of cartoonists had been influential for three decades before that.

Alan Mumford is the author of David Lloyd George: A Biography in Cartoons. He has previously published collections of cartoons on the Conservative and Labour parties and two on general elections, the most recent being Drawn at the Hustings (2011).

Note: For copyright reasons some cartoons are not available for inclusion in the article.

Acknowledgments

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the 4th Earl Lloyd George, and Dr Nick Hiley at the British Cartoon Archive.

Approval of the use of cartoons was given by Solo Syndication (Low), Parliamentary Archives (Kilvert), and National Library of Wales (Matt).

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DAVID LLOYD GEORGE A BIOGRAPHY IN CARTOONS



Maynard Keynes famously described Lloyd George as "This siren, this goat footed bard, this half human visitor". Other writers described a man of many parts- the wizard, the bounder, the spellbinder, circus performer and robber of wealth. Cartoonists delighted in showing him in these and other roles.

This fascinating book by Alan Mumford provides first as context a narrative of his career and an analysis of his position as an outsider. Further context is given in a review of the huge increase in circulation of newspapers, amplifying the number of people who saw cartoons and were potentially influenced by them.

The 160 cartoons in the book focus on the main events in Lloyd Georges life- early struggles over education in Wales, The Boer War, the 1909 Peoples Budget and the House of Lords, Marconi, the "man who won the war" and then the man to conquer unemployment.

Readers of the Journal can obtain the book at a 30% discount by ordering online, quoting the Journal at Troubadour Bookshop via www.troubadour.co.uk or Troubadour, 9 Priory Business Park, Wistow Road, Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire, LE8 0RX. Tel: 0116 279 229. Regular Price £20.00 +p&p.

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LETTERS

Party Agents

It is always a pity to spoil a good anecdote, but I am impelled to do so in deference to this *Journal's* reputation as a source of accurate history. The correspondence on this subject was stimulated by David Steel's story about Jo Grimond being asked about his politics by a Lerwick solicitor, Mr Goodlad, after, not before, that solicitor had agreed to be his election agent (*Journal of Liberal History* 80, autumn 2013).

I have now come across an earlier reference to Peter Goodlad; he was the Liberal agent in the Shetlands in 1938, not at an election, but as organising a summer vacation campaign tour by the President of the Glasgow University Liberal Club, in support of Lady Glen-Coats, then the constituency's newly-selected prospective Liberal candidate.

The Liberal student concerned did later twice come close to becoming a Liberal MP himself, in West Aberdeenshire in 1945 and Dundee West in 1951; much later he became

better known as a right-wing journalist. John Junor tells the full story of his youthful campaigning in the Northern Isles and with Lady Glen-Coats on pages 7–11 of his *Memoirs* (1990).

Incidentally, Orkney & Shetland was only twice won by a Conservative, in 1935 and 1945; apart from being local Liberal organiser, Peter Goodlad would have been well aware that Jo was the sitting Tory MP's challenger.

Michael Steed

John Buchan and the Liberal Party

Two memories came flooding back when reading of Liberalism in John Buchan's life ('Liberalism and Liberals in John Buchan's life and fiction', by Malcolm Baines, *Journal of Liberal History* 82, spring 2014). I regret I cannot recall the exact quote nor its location, but I remember coming across the statement attributed to Buchan when he resigned as prospective Tory candidate for his native

Peebles and Selkirk (later part of my own constituency). He declared that the Borders was a real hotbed of Liberalism and went off instead to become MP for the universities seat.

My second recall was triggered by your report that the Buchan family became Tories because of Gladstone's 'weakness in leaving General Gordon to be killed in Khartoum'. In the 1966 general election when I was fighting to retain the seat I had won in the by-election the previous year, my wife was told on the doorstep by one woman: 'I quite like your husband as our MP, but I could never vote Liberal'. 'Why not?' Judy enquired. 'Because they did not send help for General Gordon!' Years later when I saw the plaque in Khartoum on the murder spot I reflected 'that cost me a vote'.

David Steel

Queries

Two queries following the excellent spring edition of the *Journal* –

First, how was it that the individual votes in the different boroughs were apparently officially known? ('Lloyd George and the Carnarvon Boroughs', by Dr J. Graham Jones). My understanding was that, following the Ballot Act 1872, in order to guarantee the secrecy of the ballot, given that the ballot paper number was recorded on the counterfoil, once the number of ballot papers in the ballot box had been verified, all the papers from all the boxes were mixed so that there were so many consecutive series of the same numbers that it would be impossible to identify a particular voter's ballot paper. Was there a different rule in Wales, or was it not introduced until after the period dealt with?

Second, there is a review of J. B. Williams' biography of Dr Charles Leach MP, on the cover of which it is stated that he was 'The only MP to lose his seat for being of unsound mind.' However, the inquest on

concluded on page 51

PROFESSIONALISATION AND PARTY AGENTS

The decades after 1880 were formative ones for the evolution of mass electoral politics in Britain. **Dr Kathryn Rix** considers some of the key developments in British political culture during this crucial period, and assesses the significant effects which the emergence of an expanding network of professional constituency agents, both Liberal and Conservative, had on electioneering and political organisation in the period after the Third Reform Act of 1884.

THE SLAVE TO DUTY.



POLITICAL PARTY AGENT: "Wish I could get a holiday like the M.P.'s -- and people call this a "lull in politics"!"

AND POLITICAL CULTURE 'S, 1880–1914

IN 1894 THE chairman of the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations, James Rankin MP, described the Conservative party's professional agents as 'the foundation of our present electoral system'.¹ In a similar vein, the Liberal leader, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, praised the Liberal agents in 1901 for their role 'as channels of communication between our supporters in the country and those who direct the headquarters of the party'.² Contemporaries were in no doubt about the significant part which the growing network of professional constituency agents played in the workings of the representative system in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This group, whose duties included overseeing the registration of voters, election campaigning and the day-to-day management of party organisation, formed a vital link between politics at Westminster and at grassroots level, helping to connect political parties with the electorate. They had a major impact on political culture in this period, which was a critical one for the evolution of mass electoral politics, as politicians sought to adapt to the new electoral conditions created by the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act (1883) and the Third Reform Act (1884–85). These landmark reforms had placed strict limits on election expenditure, greatly

extended the electorate, and completely redrawn the electoral map.

This article – which is based on a paper given to the conference on 'The Liberal Party, Unionism & political culture in late 19th and early 20th century Britain' organised by Dr Ian Cawood at Newman University, Birmingham, in November 2012 – draws on research on the Liberal and Conservative party agents to examine some of the key developments in political culture between 1880 and the First World War.³ It focuses firstly on the emergence of professional political agency in the period after 1880, replacing the earlier model whereby the work of registration and electioneering was undertaken on a part-time basis by solicitors. The second key theme is to explore some of the perceived differences between the Liberal and Conservative parties in terms of the prevailing cultural attitudes within those parties, looking at these from the perspective of the constituency agents. In particular, this article reassesses how the rival parties approached what contemporaries termed the 'social side' of politics, and argues that the differences between Liberalism and Conservatism in this respect were not as clear-cut as might be supposed. The article concludes by engaging with the ongoing debate among historians about how far elections during this period continued to

be influenced by local rather than national concerns. As a crucial point of interaction between the central party organisations and the constituencies, the agents provide valuable insights into the relationship between politics at the local and the national level.

The professionalisation of political agency

The decades after 1880 saw a key transition from the solicitor agents who handled registration and electioneering on a part-time basis alongside their legal practice to full-time professional agents undertaking the work of party organisation in the constituencies all year round. Keen to develop links with fellow members of the profession and to improve their status, the agents established their own professional organisations. Founded in 1882, in anticipation of the major electoral reforms of 1883–5, the Liberal Secretaries and Agents Association was subsequently renamed the National Association of Liberal Secretaries and Agents (NALSA). A rival body, the Society of Certificated Liberal Agents (SCLA), was set up in 1893 with the object of providing 'a real practical test to keep out interlopers and duffers'.⁴ Although the two organisations initially disagreed on whether agents should have to hold certificates of proficiency,

'The slave to duty'
(*Manchester Evening News*, 19 August 1910)

they overcame their differences and formally merged in 1901 as the Society of Certificated and Associated Liberal Agents.⁵ On the Conservative side, the National Society of Conservative Agents was created in 1891, although several regional Conservative agents' associations were already in existence before that date, the earliest of which had originated in 1871.⁶ Both the Liberal and Conservative agents published their own professional journals from the 1890s onwards – the *Liberal Agent*, which developed out of an earlier publication, the *SCLA Quarterly*, and *The Tory*, which was later replaced by the *Conservative Agents' Journal* – to provide information and advice to members, and held regular meetings at national and regional level, at which they discussed matters ranging from the technicalities of registration and election law to the best methods of canvassing.

Although the agents' professional bodies did allow solicitors to join their ranks, most of their members came from a diverse range of non-legal backgrounds. One of the leading Liberal agents, James Linforth, who served in turn as Liberal agent for Lichfield, Nottingham and Leeds, had previously been a cabinetmaker and joiner, and had produced much of the oak paneling for the Council House in Birmingham. He had also worked as a local correspondent for the *Birmingham Daily Post*.⁷ Among Linforth's Liberal colleagues and Conservative counterparts were several former teachers and journalists, a miner, a bank clerk, a handful of agricultural labourers, a tailor, an antiques dealer, several army officers and a carpet-weaver. Like Linforth, who first became involved in political work when he campaigned for a Liberal candidate at the 1874 general election, these individuals had typically undertaken voluntary activity for their party before making political agency their profession. The agents' ranks were filled particularly with those from lower middle-class and working-class backgrounds. There appear to have been more agents from working-class backgrounds among the Liberals than the Conservatives, although what these working-class Conservative agents lacked in numbers, they made up for by being notably active in speaking and

lecturing on their party's behalf.⁸ Michael Sykes, a former apprentice clog-maker from Yorkshire, who undertook several speaking tours in that region with the Conservative party's 'Balfour' van, provides one such case.⁹

The shift away from solicitor agents towards professional agency was prompted by the growing demands of political organisation in the late nineteenth century. The restrictions on election spending and the stringent regulations imposed by the 1883 Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act were an important stimulus for change, making expertise at elections and preparatory work between elections essential. The extension of the franchise under the Third Reform Act saw the number of voters in the United Kingdom rise from 3,040,050 in 1880 to 5,708,000 in 1885, and 7,264,608 in 1906.¹⁰ This increased the burden of registration work and gave a further boost to the growth of local political organisations to harness the support of a mass electorate. After these two key reforms it was, as the chairman of the National Society of Conservative Agents noted in 1895, no longer easy for solicitors 'to manage constituencies in a great rush at election times'.¹¹

Added to this, it is important to remember the growing number of local election contests taking place, with the creation of county councils in 1888 and parish and district councils in 1894. Although these elections, and those for other bodies such as school boards and municipal councils, were not always conducted on political lines, many constituency agents were keen to see that they should be. Alfred Mills, Liberal agent for Birkenhead, advised his fellow professionals in 1902 that 'local elections are capital training grounds for parliamentary elections, both for agents and canvassers, and it is only by fighting such elections that the machinery can possibly be kept up-to-date and oiled'.¹²

The increased responsibilities of the political agent are strikingly illustrated by a perusal of one of the leading election handbooks of the day, *Rogers on Elections*, which was the set textbook for candidates sitting the Conservative agents' examination. The thirteenth edition, published in 1880, consisted of one volume covering registration and

local and parliamentary elections. By the time of the seventeenth edition in 1895, the requisite material on these matters filled three volumes.¹³ The chief Conservative agent, Richard Middleton, encapsulated the transformation which had taken place when he observed in 1897 that 'the work of the political agent of to-day ... if it was to be successful, must be the work not of a few days but of a lifetime'.¹⁴

While local Liberal and Conservative associations were increasingly choosing to employ full-time professional agents, it is important to recognise that this shift away from solicitor agency was a gradual and uneven process. At one end of the spectrum, there were constituencies where professional agents had appeared even before the reforms of the 1880s, notably large boroughs where the demands of registration work were particularly onerous. In Manchester, the Conservatives employed a professional agent from 1870, and the Liberals followed suit in 1874, appointing Benjamin Green, a former publisher and bookseller.¹⁵ At the other end of the scale, some constituencies had no agents and indeed little organisation at all. Liberal organisation in London was notoriously weak, and the *Liberal Agent* in 1896 bemoaned that 'in the Metropolitan Constituencies there are hardly any skilled and paid Agents; and the number seems diminishing'.¹⁶ Other constituencies continued to rely on solicitor agents throughout this period, and even in constituencies which had professional agents, candidates often still turned to solicitors to act as their election agents, much to the professional agents' disgust. The *Liberal Agent* recorded concerns in 1900 about registration agents who were made 'mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, at election times, for solicitor agents who have done no party work, probably, for years'.¹⁷

For some candidates their decision to eschew a professional election agent reflected the fact that the election agency remained a valuable piece of patronage, which they preferred to give to a friend, relative or other leading supporter; for others, it may have stemmed from a lack of enthusiasm about the advent of professional 'machine politics'. The suspicion which had surrounded the emergence of the

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Liberal ‘caucus’ and its ‘wire-pullers’ in the 1870s lingered, and as late as 1910, Robert Hudson, the chief Liberal agent, felt compelled to defend the notion of professional agency, arguing that:

... it is a little odd that only in politics, in the science of governing, is the professional considered so dangerous ... We don't seek out the uncertified doctor or the unqualified lawyer. We employ a professional and we pay him ... I cannot see why in politics alone the presence should be maintained that it is only the services of the amateur which are of value.¹⁸

The low number of professional Liberal agents employed in London, where the party's electoral chances at parliamentary level were poor, suggested that there was some degree of correlation between the marginality of a constituency and the employment of an agent. There was little point in expending funds in organising a constituency which would not even be contested. However, in other areas where Liberal electoral prospects were equally bleak, such as Birmingham, an impregnable stronghold of Conservatism and Liberal Unionism after Joseph Chamberlain left the Liberal party, agents were nonetheless employed. The endeavours of William Finnemore, secretary to the Birmingham Liberal Association from 1897, were lauded by the *Liberal Agent*, which recorded that ‘no agent has had a lonelier furrow to plough than he’ in this ‘politically pagan’ city.¹⁹

A discernible pattern was a degree of ebb and flow between elections with regard to professional agency, with agents being appointed when an election was imminent, aided by the presence of a candidate to contribute towards local party funds. Thus in July 1905 the Lancashire and Cheshire district of the Liberal agents' association reported that ‘qualified Agents have been appointed in almost every constituency’.²⁰ Conversely, some agents lost their posts in the wake of general elections. The *Liberal Agent* ended its reports of agents left unemployed after the party's 1906 landslide victory with the words ‘ditto, ditto, ditto’, indicating the extent of the problem,

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and the Conservative agents experienced similar difficulties at this date.²¹ While it was particularly the case that organisation might be wound down after a defeated candidate (and his purse) withdrew from a constituency, even victory was no guarantee that an agent would keep his place. Indeed *The Tory* claimed in 1894 that ‘the greater the success achieved the more likely the party is to dispense with the Agents’ services’, as complacency set in.²²

The critical factor in deciding whether an agent would be appointed was local party finance, because the agent's salary, typically ranging from £150 to £300, was a major component of local party expenditure.²³ Both the Liberal and Conservative agents' associations appealed on occasion to central party headquarters to intercede to improve their status, pay and employment conditions. In 1907, for example, the annual meeting of the National Society of Conservative Agents asked Conservative Central Office to advise local associations to give preference to ‘men who have had expert training’, a plea which bore little fruit in terms of central party action.²⁴ The fact that the national party organisers, while sympathetic to the agents' claims, were unable to dictate to local party associations on such matters provides a useful reminder of the ongoing limitations of central party influence over the constituencies. It also highlights the fact that the professionalisation of political agency should not be regarded as straightforwardly synonymous with the centralisation of party organisation.

Despite these caveats, the reach of professional agency expanded significantly in this period. In 1906 the Society of Certificated and Associated Liberal Agents had 321 members in England and Wales.²⁵ These professional agents served as important representatives of their parties in the constituencies, with crucial implications for political culture. The contact which MPs and candidates had with the electorate was often sporadic, and – away from the hurly-burly of election meetings – undertaken in a rather stage-managed and controlled way, such as giving set-piece addresses at ticketed meetings. In contrast, the agents were a permanent presence in the constituency.

This allowed them to take some of the burden off MPs when it came to matters such as the ‘political education’ of voters through meetings and party literature. It also gave them the opportunity for much more direct and informal interaction with voters. The Liberal agent for the extensive rural division of Wellington in Somerset, Stanley French, described how he came into contact with those in even the most remote parts of the constituency. Each summer, accompanied by his wife, child, maid, office lad and dog, French cycled around the constituency, camping overnight, and collecting the information necessary for making registration claims for party supporters qualified to be on the electoral register and objections to the enrolment of opponents. Locals were attracted to his evening campfires, and French observed that ‘a pleasant hour can be spent in chatting with the farmer on whose ground you are pitched, or in sympathising with a disappointed applicant for small holdings, or settling the politics of the nation with the local Liberal workers’.²⁶

The ‘social side’ of politics

Alongside the work of registration and electioneering, the professional agents were involved in efforts to attract supporters for their party by adding a social dimension to their organisational activities, whether through the provision of entertainment and refreshments at meetings, or through auxiliary bodies such as cycling clubs and benefit societies. Although both parties deployed such methods, the Conservatives have generally been regarded as more proficient at exploiting what contemporaries referred to as the ‘social side’ of politics. In his survey of party organisation published in 1902, Moisei Ostrogorski lauded them as ‘the past masters in the organization of “social meetings” and in the art of making them attractive’.²⁷ Historians have also highlighted the differences between the parties in this regard. As Jon Lawrence notes, ‘where Liberalism was associated with the dry procedural debate of the branch meeting, Conservatism was associated with entertainment and spectacle’.²⁸ The Primrose League, with its tea parties and garden fêtes, provides the

most notable example of a resource which the Liberals found hard to match. Lawrence's research has also highlighted a second key element of the Conservatives' social appeal: their identification with traditional masculine pastimes such as sport and the public house, in contrast with the dull, temperance-abiding, killjoy Liberals.²⁹ This theme has been developed more recently in the work of Matthew Roberts on Leeds and Alex Windscheffel on London, among others.³⁰ The corollary of this is that the Conservatives have been seen as paying less attention to the political education of the electorate. John Ramsden, for example, has described them as 'social rather than truly political'.³¹

As a broad interpretation this contrast between the more rational, sober-minded Liberal approach and the convivial and sociable Conservatives has considerable merit, and does much to explain the differing appeals of the parties to voters in this period. A shared political culture could be as important as political beliefs in binding parties together. The divergent attitudes of the two parties were nicely captured in the memoirs of John Bridges, chairman of the East Worcestershire Conservative Association. This was a constituency in which Conservatives and Liberal Unionists found themselves having to work together after 1886. Yet their mutual opposition to home rule did not prove sufficient to overcome the cultural divide between them. As Bridges reflected:

... our ways were not their ways. Smoking concerts ... which we frequently found so serviceable, were, I feel sure, an abomination to the Liberal Unionists. I have seen a few of them there, but if not always like skeletons at a feast, they never seemed comfortable. They gave the idea of condescending to what they considered a regrettable waste of their valuable time. We, on the other hand, thought their political tea parties... jejune affairs. It appears that there is something in the professing of Liberal politics that makes a man averse to joviality.³²

Approaching this question from the agents' point of view, a more

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nuanced picture emerges. When it came to the practicalities of party organisation, there are strong indications that agents were aware of the dangers of conforming to the cultural stereotypes associated with their parties, and tried to overcome these by modifying their organisational activities. The agents' professional journals confirm the Conservatives' adeptness at adding a social component to their meetings. One Conservative agent recommended 'Music, Mirth, and Mimicry' as 'the popular and proper line to take with just enough politics to make meetings political'.³³ However, at the same time, concerns were creeping in about the need for the Conservatives to pay sufficient attention to the vital work of political education, which was in danger of being lost among their social activities. James Bottomley, Conservative agent for Lancaster, complained in 1899 that some Primrose League habitations in the North of England 'had recently degenerated into mere entertainment caterers'.³⁴ Bottomley, one of the small but significant number of Conservative agents from a working-class background, was notably active in the work of political education on his party's behalf, having addressed political meetings in every county in England by 1895.³⁵ The Primrose League itself took steps to tackle the perceived imbalance between the social and political aspects of its activities: its Grand Council decided in 1891 that it would not provide speakers unless they were given at least thirty minutes to speak, arguing that 'it is impossible for any one (except perhaps Mr. Gladstone out of a railway carriage window) to do more than "say a few words" in fifteen minutes'.³⁶

Conversely on the Liberal side, the professional agents periodically discussed how best to counter the Conservatives' social appeal by providing their own social activities. In 1896, under the heading 'How to Make Politics Popular', the *Liberal Agent* reprinted the programme of a Liberal fête at East Grinstead, with attractions including sports, minstrels and dancing alongside the political speeches.³⁷ Following the Liberal election defeats of 1895 and 1900, the Home Counties Liberal Federation enlisted the advice of agents on how the Liberals could

extend their social activities, asking them to supply information on local efforts, with 'an estimate of their value to the Party', and in 1901 it formed a Central Committee, assisted by representatives from the National Liberal Club and from women's Liberal organisations, to encourage 'the social side of Liberal work'.³⁸ The need for the Liberals to counteract accusations that they were 'a dry lot' was recognised by Fred Harrison, agent for the Wirral, who urged that 'in addition to being serious politicians we must also be sociable beings, and occasionally drop down from our exalted position and take a real part in their social life'.³⁹ However, underlying this, there were some genuine qualms that when engaging in such activities, the Liberals must take care not to 'degrade' political life. James Martin, Liberal agent for Woodbridge in Suffolk, acknowledged that the Liberals 'must recognise that there is a social side to human nature which has its needs', but he disdained the acrobats, Punch and Judy performances and tea parties offered at Primrose League gatherings. His suggested social activities were more high-minded, including debates, a 'political question box', lantern lectures, music, singing, and informal discussion meetings in people's homes, where the host would read an original paper or an article from a Liberal publication.⁴⁰ Despite the keenness of some of his colleagues to broaden the Liberals' social appeal, Martin's proposed social programme demonstrated the influence which the Liberals' more sober and rational approach to politics continued to have on the party's organisational efforts.

Undoubtedly one of the most difficult subjects for Liberal organisers was the drink question. Reflecting their party more generally, the Liberal agents' ranks contained several temperance activists.⁴¹ However, scrutiny of their professional journals also reveals a degree of recognition among the agents of the problematic nature of the temperance issue for their party, particularly if they wished to win support beyond the Nonconformist faithful. The *Liberal Agent's* editors in 1898 argued for the importance of representing Liberal clubs – a significant number of which did sell alcoholic drink – on the executive

committees of local Liberal associations. They were worried that these committees too often comprised:

... the puritan section of the party, in an altogether overwhelming proportion; the consequence is that the Liberal party has in many cases associated itself with attacks on the pleasures of the people, which were certainly not endorsed by the Liberal electors at large. There are plenty of Liberal electors who like their “pint of mild”, their “three of scotch”... if by any means this section can be represented on the councils of the party, some serious mistakes may be avoided.⁴²

The views of one veteran Liberal agent in 1909 echoed this concern that the party’s stance on the evils of drink diminished its ability to win broader electoral support. He argued that an agent could not possibly get to know the different elements of the electorate if he divided his time between his office, home and church, encountering only those who drank ‘lemonade and soda-water’.⁴³ The agents’ day-to-day contact with ordinary voters gave them a different take on matters from that of party leaders, MPs, candidates and other prominent partisans. There was an evident tension between high-minded party idealism and the realities of politics on the ground, and agents of both parties realised the importance of trying to move beyond the party stereotypes to appeal to a wider section of the electorate. This prompted something of a juggling act, particularly for Liberal agents, as they sought to balance the ingrained cultural attitudes of the party faithful with the desire to reach beyond their established constituency.

Electoral politics: local or national?

The agents can also help to shed light on another question which has attracted considerable attention from historians: when did the national rather than the local arena become the primary focus in election campaigns? Among those who have identified the 1880s as the formative decade in which British electoral politics acquired a more

national focus are H. J. Hanham and Martin Pugh.⁴⁴ Others have dated the critical turning point much later. Peter Clarke’s work sees the ambit of politics switching from the local to the national during the Edwardian period.⁴⁵ Jon Lawrence has pushed the timing of change later still, for while he sees the First World War as marking a new phase in the nationalisation of political debate, he also emphasises the continued significance of ‘the politics of locality’ in the inter-war period.⁴⁶ Lawrence’s work suggests the importance of understanding the interactions between the national and the local dimensions of electoral politics, a process in which the agents played a key part as intermediaries between the central party organisations and the constituencies.

As noted above, this period saw the agents of each party coalesce into a professional group by means of their national and regional organisations. The agents’ professional network was an invaluable conduit for the exchange of information between party organisers. There were several areas in which this contributed to a greater uniformity of practice across the constituencies. Comparing notes in 1892, the Conservative agents realised that in some constituencies postmasters were charging a penny postage for polling cards, while elsewhere only a halfpenny was charged. A deputation from the National Society of Conservative Agents saw the Postmaster-General, who ruled that the lower rate applied.⁴⁷ While this might seem trivial, it represented a significant and welcome saving, especially in view of the strict limits on election spending imposed by the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act. On other practical questions, such as the format of inquiry cards on ‘outvoters’ – those who lived in one constituency but had a vote in another, an issue on which agents had to cooperate – both Liberal and Conservative agents realised the benefits of uniformity. Indeed they sometimes seemed more willing to encourage it than did the central party organisers. In 1895 when the Council of the National Society of Conservative Agents asked the chief agent, Richard Middleton, to issue central party guidelines on outvoter inquiries, he responded that he

would ‘hesitate, to do more than “suggest”’ to local agents how they should act. In the absence of action by Conservative Central Office, the agents’ organisation issued its own guidelines, which Middleton three years later incorporated into headquarters advice.⁴⁸

As well as exchanging ideas at meetings and through their professional journals, the agents could spread more uniform methods of working when they moved between constituencies. Whereas solicitor agents had tended to stay in one locality, the new professional agents showed a surprising degree of mobility: a study of almost 200 Liberal and Conservative agents reveals that more than 70 per cent of agents from non-legal backgrounds appear to have moved between constituencies at some point during this period. Nor were these moves confined to a particular area: more than half of those who moved transferred to a completely different region.⁴⁹ James Bottomley, the Conservative agent for Lancaster mentioned above, had previously been agent for Doncaster, but was offered a higher salary to persuade him to move.⁵⁰ Fred Nash, one of the leading Liberal agents, first became an agent for the Handsworth constituency in 1882, moved to Ipswich in 1884, Norwich in 1886, and finally held the Liberal agency at Colchester from 1893 until his death in 1906.⁵¹ In addition to transferring their professional knowledge when they moved between constituencies, agents brought their expertise to bear elsewhere on other occasions, notably when they went to assist at by-elections, where professional organisers were increasingly being deployed.⁵²

While this mobility between constituencies and the desire for uniformity in the practical methods of political work might suggest that an increasingly nationalised political and electoral culture was developing, the agents’ experiences also demonstrated that local forces continued to carry significant weight. As noted above, it was local party associations which exercised the greatest influence over whether a professional agent would be appointed, so while they were an increasingly mobile group, the professional agents should not be regarded as party functionaries

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sent to impose on the localities. It is clear that agents put down strong local roots in their constituencies, engaging with voters through a variety of social, religious, educational, sporting and philanthropic activities. William Beardsley, who became Liberal agent for Wallisall in 1892, was involved with the town's adult school movement and also served as a Wesleyan local preacher.⁵³

Their involvement in such activities helped agents to gain a greater understanding of the appeals which would resonate with their constituency's voters at elections. Platform speeches, reported at length in the national, regional and local press, remained a central part of the election campaign, and agents spent much time and effort organising election meetings. However, the most costly component of electioneering was the printing and distribution of election literature: at the 1906 general election, 45 per cent of total expenditure by candidates in England and Wales came under this heading.⁵⁴ Candidates and their agents were offered an increasingly wide choice of material from central party headquarters. At the 1906 election, the Liberal Publication Department (LPD) supplied 26,000,000 leaflets and pamphlets, 700,000 coloured posters and 2,600,000 cartoons, many of them from the pen of the noted political cartoonist, Francis Carruthers Gould. Even more was provided by the National Union of Conservative and Constitutional Associations (NUCCA), which issued 34,000,000 leaflets and pamphlets, 250,000 posters and 150,000 cartoons in 1906.⁵⁵ This material was extensively used and appreciated by the professional agents: following the Liberals' decisive victory in 1906, Liberal agents in Yorkshire passed a resolution thanking the LPD for its 'invaluable aid', especially 'the liberal grant of effective posters, which so materially influenced the result of the elections'.⁵⁶

However, the LPD and the NUCCA were not the only central bodies to provide election literature. On the Liberal side, the Home Rule Union, the National Reform Union, the Cobden Club, the Liberation Society, the Free Trade Union and the Budget League were just some of the plethora of organisations which produced

election leaflets, pamphlets and posters during this period. The dominance of particular election issues such as home rule in 1886 or free trade versus tariff reform in 1906 arguably contributed towards giving elections a more uniform national focus. Frank Trentmann has asserted that in the Edwardian period 'Free Trade was political life. It was ubiquitous. Even tourists and day-trippers at seaside resorts became engulfed by Free Trade ideas, demonstrations, and entertainment'.⁵⁷

Yet despite the increasing central output of election literature, whether from party headquarters or auxiliary bodies such as the Free Trade Union, local input remained paramount.⁵⁸ Where centrally produced material was used, it was often given a local spin. Sometimes this was done in a fairly superficial way, over-printing a poster with the local candidate's name, or adding his portrait to the cover of a headquarters pamphlet. However, despite its attractions – not least that it was supplied to constituencies at cost price and offered material such as Gould's cartoons which could not be matched locally – the agents did not solely rely on headquarters provision. A wide and inventive range of election material was produced at local level, enabling national issues to be viewed through a local prism. To take just one example, on the morning of the poll at Sheffield Brightside in 1906, the Liberals distributed handbills at the factory gates of the Cammell engineering works, a major employer in the constituency. These reproduced the views of Cammell Laird's chairman in support of free trade, urging that 'Cammell's chairman says No Protection. Follow his lead'.⁵⁹ Likewise, Trentmann has shown how the free trade campaign's 'attempts to centralize and streamline political activities' could be ignored or adapted by local activists.⁶⁰ The central party headquarters themselves realised the need to target particular local industries or interest groups in their literature. In 1910, for example, the NUCCA offered several extremely specific leaflets on the benefits of Tariff Reform, among them one aimed at piano-makers and another addressed to Londoners who spent their holiday time picking hops in

the fields of Kent.⁶¹ Thus even the growing central provision of election literature did not preclude continued diversity in the appeals made locally to electors.

The persistent lack of uniformity in party colours across the country was a particularly striking indicator of this local variety in electioneering, with the colours in use by the Conservatives in 1894 including blue in Manchester, red in Liverpool, dark blue and primrose in East Dorset and pink in Lincolnshire. Meanwhile an article in the *Liberal Agent* in 1898 bemoaned the fact that the Liberals across the country used 'every colour of the rainbow, in various shades and mixtures'.⁶² It is evident that there was not a straightforward transition from a locally focused to a nationally based electoral culture. Instead, countervailing local and national influences continued to shape electioneering and political organisation in this period.

The expansion within the constituencies of a network of professional agents had significant ramifications for British political culture. It cannot simply be assumed that the professionalisation of party organisation, which was in itself an ongoing and uneven process, was synonymous with the modernisation and nationalisation of electoral politics. Even had the need for professional party machinery been universally accepted, financial pressures made it unfeasible to employ full-time professional agents in every constituency. Nonetheless, the growing importance of the professional agents' network as a vital conduit for communication between the central parties and the localities, and between candidates and electors, should not be underestimated. Through their mobility and their interactions with each other via their professional bodies, the agents helped to encourage greater uniformity in the practical work of registration, electioneering and party organisation across the constituencies. At the same time, their day-to-day contact with ordinary voters gave them a greater awareness of some of the challenges facing the political parties as they sought to adapt to the demands of mass politics, notably the need to appeal beyond the party faithful to a wider section of the electorate,

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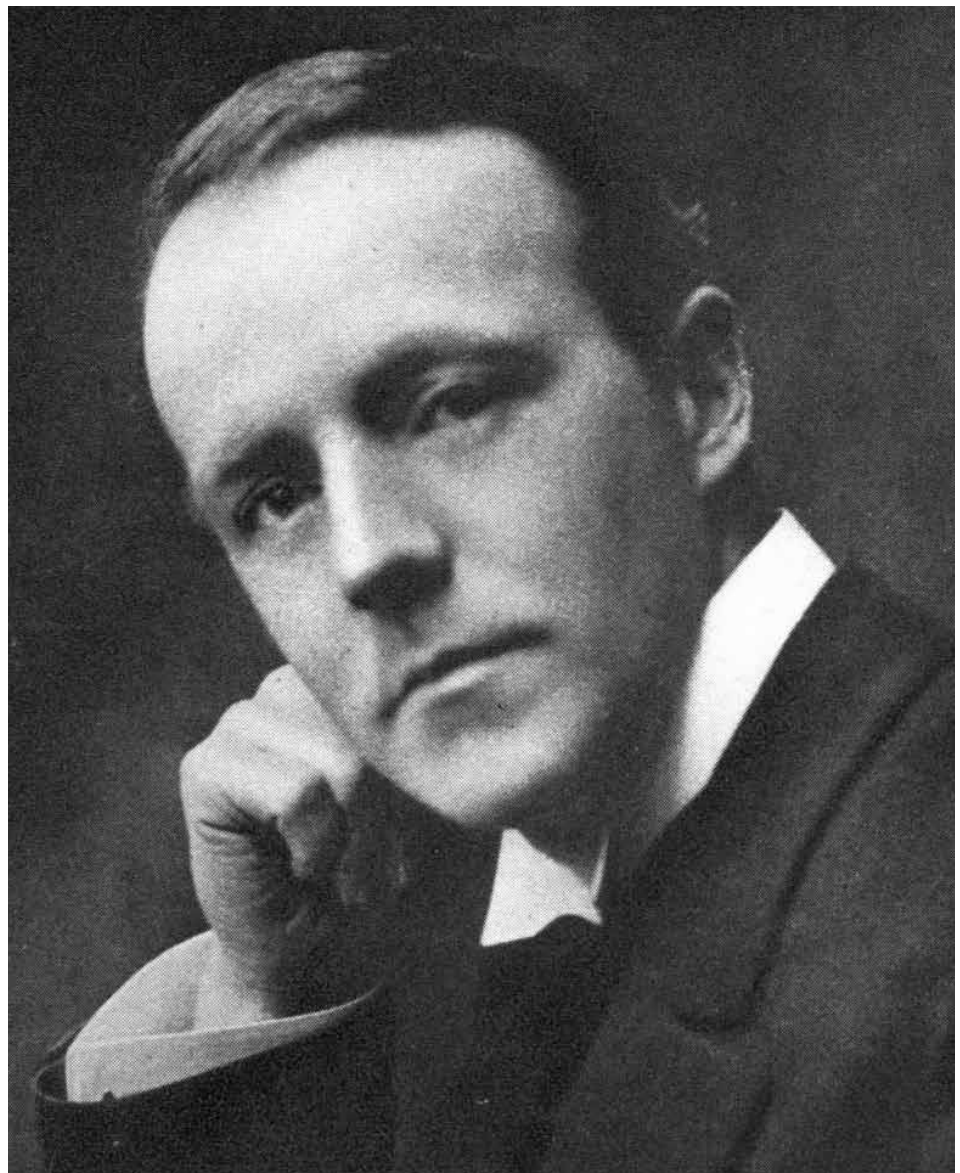
and the need to give national political issues resonance in their constituencies by filtering them through a local lens. The experiences of the professional agents, both Liberal and Conservative, highlight the intriguing complexities of British elections in the decades after the Third Reform Act.

Dr Kathryn Rix is Assistant Editor of the House of Commons, 1832–1945 project at the History of Parliament (see www.historyofparliamentonline.org and www.victoriancommons.wordpress.com). Her book on Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England, 1880–1910 is currently in preparation.

- 1 *The Tory*, 23 (Dec. 1894), p. 671 [microfilm pagination].
- 2 National Liberal Federation, *Annual reports and conference proceedings* (1901), pp. 124–5.
- 3 The themes discussed in this article are explored more fully in my book, 'Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England, 1880–1910', currently in preparation.
- 4 *The Tory*, 17 (June 1894), p. 407.
- 5 For a more detailed account of the development of the Liberal agents' professional bodies, see Kathryn Rix, 'Hidden workers of the party. The professional Liberal agents, 1885–1910', *Journal of Liberal History*, 52 (Autumn 2006), pp. 9–10.
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- 9 Kathryn Rix, "'Go out into the highways and the hedges': the diary of Michael Sykes, Conservative political lecturer, 1895 and 1907–8", *Parliamentary History*, 20:2 (2001), pp. 209–31.
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WALTER RUNCH DECLINE OF THE

Historians remain divided about the contribution that biography can make to their craft. Those who believe that the study of individuals is important because the decisions of those individuals affect the course of events and that the replacement of one key player in the historical mosaic can significantly change the way in which history evolves are matched by others who argue that biography inevitably exaggerates the role and significance of the individual and distorts the reality of the historical narrative. By **David Dutton.**¹



WALTER RUNCIMAN AND THE LIBERAL PARTY

BETWEEN SOMEONE LIKE Thomas Carlyle, who wrote that ‘history is the essence of innumerable biographies’, and the committed Marxist who views the individual as a helpless cork bobbing up and down on the remorseless tides of economic determinism, there can be no meeting of minds.² But somewhere between these competing views there may perhaps be an acceptance that the career of an individual can offer a revealing prism through which to study important historical themes and problems.

The political biography of Walter Runciman, first Viscount Runciman of Doxford, offers such an opportunity. Runciman’s career was certainly a long one. First elected to the House of Commons in 1899 as Britain became involved in the Boer War, he finally retired from his last Cabinet post at the outbreak of the Second World War 40 years later. But political longevity does not in itself confer significance, and it has to be conceded that Runciman was never a politician of the absolutely first rank. ‘Who were the first married couple to sit together in the House of Commons?’ may be a good pub quiz question, but the answer – Walter and Hilda Runciman – does not necessarily endow those concerned with overwhelming historical importance, even if Walter can also claim the unusual distinction of having sat in

parliament alongside his own father and even of having preceded him there. A governmental colleague offered a very fair assessment of him in 1912. ‘Runciman,’ he wrote, ‘is able, honest, hard-working, courageous, but while a good speaker, just lacks that touch of genius which Churchill has got, and that charm which Lloyd George abounds in. He will enjoy and deserve high office, but never I think the highest.’³ So it turned out. Runciman never held one of the great offices of state; his most senior appointment was as President of the Board of Trade, where he played an important role in shifting British policy away from free trade in the early 1930s. History best remembers him for a job he performed when not holding government office, travelling to Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1938 in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to broker a peaceful settlement of the crisis between the Czechoslovak government and the Sudeten Germans, before Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain took the problem into his own hands in direct negotiations with Adolf Hitler. Briefly, at least in the opinion of Chamberlain’s Minister of Health, Walter Elliot, Runciman became the second most powerful man in the world. Unfortunately, Elliot had to add that the *most* powerful was Adolf Hitler.⁴

Runciman’s background helped determine his politics. His was a

seafaring family. Two of his great-grandfathers fought as midshipmen at Trafalgar, while his father, also called Walter, rose from humble beginnings to own a major shipping company in the north-east. The traditional Liberal commitment to free trade was part of the young Walter’s thinking as a prosperous businessman. So too was his support for temperance as a lifelong Wesleyan Methodist. Throughout his political career, contemporaries pointed to the continuing importance of Runciman’s background in the world of business and commerce. A Cabinet colleague during the First World War found him ‘lucid, concise and courageous ... ambitious and a little cocksure. A hardworking, very capable man of business...’⁵ Many years later, the journalist Colin Coote wrote approvingly of a ‘shrewdly practical business man ... whose politics were more pragmatic than dogmatic’.⁶ Even Neville Chamberlain, in announcing to the House of Commons Runciman’s appointment as ‘independent mediator’ in the Czechoslovakian crisis of 1938, suggested he would be playing the part ‘of a man who goes down to assist in settling a strike’.⁷ But this practical man of business struck many as stiff and cold in personality. The Tory MP, Cuthbert Headlam, always found him ‘friendly and pleasant’ but never ‘a popular character – clever, etc., but

Walter Runciman, 1st Viscount Runciman of Doxford (1870–1949)

lacking the human touch'. He had heard that Herbert Asquith, who enjoyed inventing pseudonyms for his political colleagues, preferred 'the old Pirate' [Runciman's father] to the 'Alabaster Statesman'.⁸ Similarly, Lloyd George is said to have remarked that Runciman 'would make a thermometer drop, even at a distance'.⁹ This sense of separation from his fellow men was underlined by Runciman's somewhat dated style of dress. Like Chamberlain, he favoured the winged collar long after it had gone out of fashion.

For all that, Runciman's career does offer an excellent opportunity to investigate one of the most contentious historical controversies of the first half of the twentieth century, the decline of the British Liberal Party. Ever since 1936, when the Cambridge historian George Dangerfield published his celebrated, seductive, persuasive, but sadly very wrong study, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, this issue has fascinated students of British politics. Runciman's political life encapsulated the Liberal Party's disastrous evolution. At the time of his first appointment to government office, as Parliamentary Secretary to the Local Government Board in December 1905, the Liberal Party which Runciman represented stood on the verge of the greatest triumph of its entire history. The following month the party secured a landslide general election victory. The Liberals won 400 seats in the new House of Commons. Their major opponents, the Conservative/Unionist Party, secured just 157. As the two minor parties, Labour and the Irish Nationalists, were unlikely to support the Unionists on any significant vote, the Liberal government enjoyed an effective parliamentary majority of 356. Yet, by the time of Runciman's death in 1949, the Liberal Party seemed to be on a remorseless road to political extinction. Two years later, in the disastrous general election of 1951, it was reduced to just six MPs, an apparently irrelevant appendage to the political system.

This article will consider a number of issues that have been key to the debate on Liberal decline, through the prism of Runciman's career. The first is the health of the Edwardian Liberal Party. Characteristically, the debate has been polarised. At one end of the scale there is Dangerfield, in one of his

more plausible propositions, claiming that at the very moment of the Liberal Party's greatest electoral success, its overwhelming victory of 1906, the die was already cast. 'The Liberal Party which came back to Westminster with an overwhelming majority was', he claimed, 'already doomed. It was like an army protected at all points except for one vital position on its flank. With the election of fifty-three Labour representatives, the death of Liberalism was pronounced; it was no longer the Left.'¹⁰ In other words, in an electoral structure in which the logical state of affairs was a struggle between a party of the right and a party of the left, the Liberals were about to forfeit their claim to be that of the left. The beginnings of the Labour Party with its claim to be *the* party of the British working class was bound in time to lead to the eclipse of Liberalism. Similarly, Henry Pelling has written of the growth of a sort of undogmatic 'Labourism' in the period before 1914, a feeling that 'the Labour Party and not the Liberal, was the party for working men to belong to'.¹¹ Another way of looking at the problem is to suggest that Liberals would struggle to survive in a situation where voting was going to be increasingly determined by the question of class.

But against this pessimistic view later historians saw in Edwardian Britain a very much brighter political outlook for the Liberals. Their most distinguished spokesman is probably Peter Clarke. Basing his analysis on a detailed study of the politics of Lancashire, Clarke argued that voting behaviour had indeed come to be largely determined by the question of class by 1914. He believes, however, that the Liberal Party had adapted perfectly well to this development. Indeed, by taking on board the ideas of the so-called 'New Liberalism' – that government would have to intervene far more actively in the society and economy of the twentieth century than had been the norm in the Victorian era – the Liberal Party had entrenched itself as *the* party of social reform and of the British working class. Clarke suggests, in fact, that there was enough common ground between Edwardian Liberalism and the social democratic wing of the newly emerging

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Labour Party for eventual fusion to have taken place – if it hadn't been for the intervention of the First World War. In practical terms, this community of purpose manifested itself in an electoral pact whereby in many constituencies Liberal and Labour candidates gave way to one another in order to avoid splitting the 'progressive' vote. Far from being replaced by Labour, the Liberals were well positioned to contain the Labour threat and ultimately swallow it up.¹²

How then does the career of Walter Runciman throw light on this highly polarised debate? A consensus has grown up among historians in recent years that the picture of Liberal–Labour relations varied enormously in different parts of the country. Dangerfield's blanket gloom is unjustified; but so too is the view of Clarke, derived from the rather atypical circumstances of Lancashire, that all was well in a revitalised and progressive Liberal Party. Certainly, Runciman's experience fits neither of these extreme interpretations. It was not easy for a young MP, even one seen as 'unquestionably the best speaker among young Liberals',¹³ to stand out after 1906 in the array of talent making up what has been described as 'the most able and brilliant [government] in British history'.¹⁴ Nonetheless, Runciman made steady progress. Promoted to the position of Financial Secretary to the Treasury in January 1907, he entered the Cabinet as President of the Board of Education in April 1908, moved to the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries in October 1911 and became President of the Board of Trade at the outbreak of war in August 1914. But it is Runciman's career as a constituency MP which is particularly revealing of the condition of the Edwardian Liberal Party. After losing his seat at Oldham to the Conservative, Winston Churchill, in the general election of 1900, Runciman secured his return to the Commons in a by-election in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, in 1902 and he retained this seat until the general election of 1918. Dewsbury was a predominantly working-class constituency which numbered around 3,000 miners and 6,000 woollen textile workers in its electorate. Runciman fought a total of six contests in Dewsbury. If we take the first five

of these contests fought before the outbreak of the First World War – Runciman's initial victory in 1902, the general election of 1906, the by-election necessitated by his elevation to the Cabinet in 1908, and the two general elections of 1910 – it emerges that only in 1910 did Runciman not face a Labour opponent. Little evidence is thus offered of the two parties coming together in a process of gradual fusion. The local picture was one of conflict rather than cooperation. Local Liberal activists felt so well established that they saw no need to seek an electoral pact or make way for a Labour candidate and had resisted pressure to do so prior to selecting Runciman. Furthermore, faced in 1910 with straight fights against Conservative opponents, Runciman adopted the traditional stance of a nineteenth-century Liberal, attacking his opponents as representatives of the privileged landowning classes and equating the interests of wealthy businessmen such as himself with those of ordinary working-class voters against the landed classes who, in Joseph Chamberlain's famous words, 'toil not, neither do they spin'. Liberal meetings in Dewsbury were dominated by discussion of traditional Liberal issues – free trade, the powers of the House of Lords, licensing and temperance. 'Liberal gatherings', writes Martin Pugh, 'usually had a distinctly old-fashioned ring'.¹⁵ The socio-economic issues which are said to have dominated the politics of the New Liberalism are notable largely for their absence. But the most striking feature must be Runciman's electoral success. In Dewsbury, what was still largely a middle-class party proved remarkably effective in attracting the working-class vote. 'Runciman's victories', concludes Pugh, 'sprang from the unexhausted seam of nineteenth-century Liberalism'.¹⁶

The conclusion that Liberalism was not confronted by an existential crisis in the years before 1914 has propelled many historians to the period of the First World War itself in the quest for explanations of the party's decline. The evidence for such an approach seems compelling. The party which entered the war as the party of government, with nearly nine years of continuous and often distinguished administration behind it, was by the close

of hostilities badly divided, with the mainstream party led by H. H. Asquith reduced to a parliamentary rump of under thirty MPs by the 'coupon' general election of 1918. As Trevor Wilson memorably put it, the war was like a 'rampant omnibus' which, out of control, mounted the pavement and ran over an unsuspecting pedestrian.¹⁷ The pedestrian, of course, was the British Liberal Party. It may have had its problems before 1914, but it did not face mortal danger. But the war was different. It was an unequal contest which the party had no chance of winning. But defining the nature of the challenge posed by the war has proved altogether more difficult. The most seductive definition relates to the realm of ideology. According to Kenneth Morgan, it was the Liberals' principles 'which the very fact of total war with the unbridled collectivism and the "jingo" passions which it unleashed, appeared to undermine'.¹⁸ Modern warfare, it has been argued, destroyed liberalism's faith in man's essential rationality. Its waging demanded a degree of government intervention in and control over the life and liberties of the individual citizen which many Liberals could not contemplate. The party's problems are said to have come to a head over the issue of conscription. Could true Liberals ride roughshod over the fundamental human liberty of leaving it to the individual to decide for himself whether he fought – and quite possibly died – for his country? Conscription thus posed, in Morgan's words, 'a symbolic divide between a whole-hearted commitment to all-out war, whatever the sacrifice, and a respect for the historic cause of individual liberty'.¹⁹

But does this analysis reflect what actually happened to the Liberal Party between 1914 and 1918? That the Liberals were badly – perhaps fatally – divided during the war is beyond question. But whether these divisions took place along clearly defined ideological lines is altogether more problematic. For one thing, the lines of division were markedly inconsistent. Leading individual Liberals found themselves united with one another on one issue, but irrevocably separated on the next. This was certainly the case with Runciman. He has been listed as a

member of an embryonic anti-war group within the Cabinet in the summer of 1914, but any doubts he may have felt were quickly overcome, perhaps as a result of a lunch with his mentor and friend, the Foreign Secretary Edward Grey, on 1 August. For him, the need to maintain the free movement of British ships in the Channel may have been enough to convert him to the necessity of the government's stance. Thereafter Runciman was clear that the war had to be fought, though he was evidently shaken by the mounting casualty lists and was never fully persuaded by the doctrine of 'the knock-out blow' associated with Lloyd George. Runciman did have one consistent ally in the trials and tribulations besetting the wartime party. This was Reginald McKenna, who became Chancellor of the Exchequer in succession to Lloyd George when the latter moved to the newly created Ministry of Munitions in May 1915. Runciman and McKenna, suggests one historian, 'became a pairing referred to historically almost to the point of hyphenation'.²⁰ Even so, it would be wrong to present the two men as the champions of an outdated political creed which had no place in the context of the world's first total war. Indeed, Runciman had already shown his willingness to intervene and employ the powers of the state during his spell at the Ministry of Agriculture. Furthermore, he heaped praise on his colleague's budget of September 1915, even though that budget has often been presented as marking the deathknell of the Liberal Party's once unshakeable commitment to the sacred principle of free trade.²¹

Runciman and McKenna divided from their colleagues, not on ideological grounds, but over the very practical issue of how best to win the war. They became associated with the idea of 'business as usual', not because they opposed greater governmental intervention in the running of the national economy per se, but because they believed that excessive intervention could only damage the prospects of ultimate victory. They argued that Britain had to be able to pay its way through the war, not just because national bankruptcy would undermine any concept of military victory, but because the maintenance

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of the country's industrial strength would enable Britain to supply money and war materials to its continental allies. If everything was thrown into the war effort – including all available manpower, as most Conservatives and an increasing number of Liberals demanded – disaster was almost bound to ensue.²² Runciman's position was easy to vilify. H. A. Gwynne of the *Morning Post* variously described him as one of 'the Pacifist Group of the Cabinet' and, with echoes of the Boer War, as one of the 'pro-Germans in the Cabinet'.²³ Neither indictment was fair. Runciman's ideas might or might not have made military victory more likely. But his thinking was rational and intellectually defensible. Runciman and those who thought like him took their inspiration from the way in which Britain had waged successful wars in earlier centuries. The 'British Way in Warfare' was based on an all-powerful navy and strictly limited intervention in continental land wars. It was an argument Runciman had put forward in 1911 at the time of an earlier war scare. 'What I have been most anxious about,' he then wrote to a Cabinet colleague,

has been that this week which is critical should not pass without the French knowing that whatever support we may have to give her, it cannot be by six divisions, or four, or one on the Continent. The sea is our natural element and the sooner they realise that we are not going to land troops the better will be the chances of preserving Europe's peace.²⁴

From the outbreak of war in August 1914, therefore, Runciman's management of the Board of Trade was designed to ensure that the country's 'wealth production could continue with minimal disruption'.²⁵ When he and McKenna insisted that British merchant ships should continue to be allowed to carry trade between neutral countries rather than be restricted to carrying goods to and from Britain, this represented no abstract defence of the principle of free trade, but rather a desire to maximise the country's foreign currency earnings in order to support the balance of payments.²⁶ Similarly, Runciman's opposition to proposals that the government should seek

to control inflation in food prices by artificially fixing the price of basic foodstuffs was not the response of a laissez-faire zealot, but the reasoned calculation of a minister who understood the problems that would arise for a country as dependent as Britain was on imported food. If suppliers reacted to capped prices by seeking a better return for their goods in other markets around the world, Britain might starve.²⁷

Even the debate over conscription needs to be seen in the same practical terms. Runciman did not base his opposition on any fundamental rejection of the state's right to compel a man to fight for his country. It is true that, after extensive Cabinet debates at the end of 1915, Runciman, McKenna and the Home Secretary, John Simon, reached a decision to resign. The three men went to see Prime Minister Asquith on 28 December and tendered their resignations. It was, Runciman admitted to his wife, 'a most unpleasant interview, ending with not even a handshake'.²⁸ But in an important diary entry, Asquith's daughter-in-law discussed the men's motivation:

McKenna – not on principle, but because as Chancellor he says he cannot possibly undertake to finance it – Runciman for the same motives.²⁹

A well-placed Cabinet colleague confirmed this analysis:

His great argument with [Runciman and McKenna] was that they could not resign for a reason that they could not name, for the real reason of their resignations is not any question of principle or even the fact of compulsion but simply on the number of men who are taken, i.e. the size of the Army.³⁰

Runciman himself offered yet further corroboration in a letter to his wife:

McKenna and I declared that the latest proposals were mixed up with the questions of unlimited recruiting ... and we regarded the avoidance of industrial and financial collapse as so important that we could not consent to giving the military the compulsory powers for which they asked.³¹

Runciman was put under tremendous pressure to reconsider his resignation. Asquith's wife Margot wrote in characteristically silly terms: 'How can you find it in your heart to desert Henry when Puffin has been such a friend of your little boy's!'³² Runciman was never likely to be swayed by being reminded that his son and Asquith's youngest had been childhood playmates. But when it was agreed that discussions could take place as to the size which it was desirable for the army to attain, he and McKenna had little choice but to withdraw their resignations. Their argument was not about the rights and wrongs of forcing men to fight, but about the tipping point after which it would be counter-productive to put more men into uniform if this led to a shortage of labour for the domestic economy and a consequent loss of industrial production. In the event, therefore, only John Simon went ahead and resigned on the point of principle that military compulsion was wrong. Runciman and McKenna stayed at their posts.

Over the following year debate continued to rage inside the government over the best way to fight the war and Lloyd George emerged as the champion of those who were committed to doing everything they could to secure outright victory, at whatever the cost. To the Conservative, Austen Chamberlain, Lloyd George wrote in January 1916:

We must win through even though we win in rags. The notion of keeping up our trade as if there were no war is fatal. The single eye always triumphs in the end. Thus Germany fights – her trade gone and her people rationed on potatoes. I implore you not to give assent to the McKenna–Runciman position. If you desert us on this point ... Britain will be beaten.³³

Lloyd George's position, like Runciman's, was entirely plausible. But it is important not to misrepresent the nature of the division between them.

By the end of 1916 another crisis had arisen. In what approximated to a palace coup, Lloyd George replaced Asquith as prime minister, and Runciman, a committed member of the Asquith camp and advising Asquith to stand firm against

'McKenna and I declared that the latest proposals were mixed up with the questions of unlimited recruiting ... and we regarded the avoidance of industrial and financial collapse as so important that we could not consent to giving the military the compulsory powers for which they asked.'

Lloyd George's demand for a radical restructuring of the machinery of wartime government, found himself out of office. In a reshaped Asquith administration he might have been promoted to the Admiralty. As it was, his exclusion would last almost fifteen years. Just as importantly, this episode left many Liberals – Runciman included – with a lasting detestation of Lloyd George for the way he was perceived to have behaved. The reaction of Runciman's father was no doubt shared by the son: 'No coup could be brought about in the way it has without sowing seeds of bitter feeling. It could have been avoided but for the attitude of one man and his co-operators.' Asquith's political demise had been 'brought about mainly by the man he had been a benefactor to'.³⁴

The crisis of 1916 leads to a third theme upon which historians have focused in their quest for explanations of the Liberal Party's decline, where Runciman's experience is again instructive. This relates to individuals, personal animosities, chance, bad luck, miscalculations and misjudgements – in other words contingencies which need not have happened and which do not reflect the sort of deep and longstanding problems said to be contained in the challenge of the Labour Party and the supposed crisis of identity and doctrine occasioned by the First World War. The classic exposition of this approach was perhaps offered by Lloyd George himself. Looking back from the vantage point of the mid-1930s, by which time he was increasingly prone to reminisce about the past, the great Welshman attributed the downfall of the Liberal Party to an oyster. As his secretary and mistress, Frances Stevenson, recorded:

He went on to explain that Percy Illingworth [the party's chief whip] died of typhoid caused by a bad oyster [in 1915]. Had he lived, he would never have allowed the rift between D[avid] & Asquith to take place. He would have brought them together, patched the quarrel up, cursed them and saved the Liberal Party. He would have held up to the light the intrigue of McKenna and Runciman, whom he knew well. After his

death, there was no one who could take his place, and could put the party before persons and personalities. Gulland, the Chief Whip in 1916 did nothing.³⁵

More generally, this approach accepts that the Liberal Party was badly damaged by the war, but argues that the fissures did not have to be either permanent or catastrophic for the party. After all, the Labour Party also split over the conduct of the war, but it came back together again and advanced rapidly within the political system in the immediate post-war years. The Asquith–Lloyd George rupture, by contrast, was not temporary. Two separate Liberal parties existed until 1923 when they nominally came together again in defence of free trade. Even after 1923, though, reunion was paper-thin, deep-rooted animosities remained, and the party's decline continued apace. During those seven years between 1916 and 1923 the Labour Party advanced dramatically, moving from the periphery of the political stage to its very centre, and forming its first government in January 1924. This was no coincidence. Labour willingly filled a void opened up by the Liberal Party. And, once the Liberals had fallen into the third-party trap, they would find it very difficult to escape from it. How, then, does Runciman's career after 1916 illuminate this issue?

His commitment to Asquith was soon shaken. It is clear that Runciman hoped to be part of a more vigorous opposition to the Lloyd George government, which he described as 'a directorate of the French revolution type', than Asquith was prepared to provide.³⁶ Just weeks after the change of government, Runciman was clear about what should now happen:

I am much impressed with the anxiety of the country to have some responsible men acting as their watch-dogs, for, when we went out there was some rejoicing over the prospect of the opposition becoming once more efficient as well as responsible. We must not fail in this duty and we should be failing if we cease to be vigilant, and equally failing if we did not give the country the impression that they can rely on us.³⁷

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But Asquith would not play the part that Asquithians, Runciman included, had mapped out for him. In March 1917, Runciman recorded that McKenna 'says that we *must* go on propping up our distinguished jelly – the late PM to wit! – We must do our best to screw him up to an emphatic speech on Ireland'.³⁸ Asquith was constrained by the belief, probably correct, that overt opposition to the new government would be castigated as a failure to support the war effort. In fact, the celebrated Maurice Debate of 9 May 1918 was the only occasion when Asquith and the Asquithian whips gave their backing to a division against the government. By this time Runciman seems to have become completely disillusioned with both of the potential Liberal leaders. Convinced that Lloyd George would escape from what could have been a damaging parliamentary debate – 'there were so many ways in which inaccurate statements could plausibly be explained' – he nonetheless hoped that Asquith would renounce his own claims to the premiership and promise 'general support to an administration with a Conservative at its head while it waged war effectively'.³⁹ In the event Runciman, who should have wound up the debate for the Opposition, 'looked miserable, and never rose'.⁴⁰

The general election of December 1918, held only a month after the armistice, was a disaster for the independent Liberal Party. It served to intensify Liberal divisions and accentuate personal animosities. Victory was secured by a coalition of Conservatives and Lloyd George Liberals in which the former were by far the dominant element. Only 28 independent Liberals of the party still headed by Asquith were returned to parliament. The key factor was the so-called 'coupon', the letter of endorsement signed by Lloyd George and the Tory leader, Bonar Law, which served almost as a passport back to Westminster, and Lloyd George's ready acceptance of a bargain struck with the Conservatives, whereby only 150 Liberal candidates received it. Most of the leading independent Liberals, including Asquith and Runciman, went down to defeat. Indeed, Runciman came bottom of the poll in Dewsbury, despite the efforts of the Asquithian whip, J. W. Gulland, to

WALTER RUNCIMAN AND THE DECLINE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY

secure the withdrawal of his Labour opponent.⁴¹

Runciman's outlook on politics over the following decade was determined by one factor above all others – a deeply personal detestation of Lloyd George. The two men had been developing a dislike for one another before the outbreak of war, with Runciman declaring that the Welshman 'would snatch at any opportunities of stabbing me if he got the chance'.⁴² Their hatred now knew no limits. Arguably, this sort of personal animosity destroyed any hope of a Liberal recovery in these crucial post-war years. While Liberals such as Runciman should have been focusing their attention on the mortal danger which the Labour Party now posed, they seemed more intent on fighting Lloyd George. When the need was to devise policies to appeal to the newly expanded electorate, they turned in on themselves in order, it seemed, to engage in a mutually destructive civil war to the death. In the words of Jonathan Wallace, Runciman's only biographer, by 1930 'Runciman had become an embittered malcontent who could never be reconciled to Lloyd George, no matter what the latter did'.⁴³

In the wake of the disastrous 1918 general election defeat, *The Times* declared that Runciman was, even out of parliament, 'without doubt, the rising hope of the Radicals'.⁴⁴ Though it is not clear from the context precisely what meaning the newspaper intended to convey by the word 'radical', Runciman had, in practice, forfeited any claims to radicalism in the sense of a progressive, root-and-branch approach to current politics. The image he cultivated now was that of a traditional Gladstonian Liberal of the nineteenth century. His speeches in 1919 concentrated on the need for sound finance and the abolition of government controls. Runciman was far from being the first – or indeed the last – politician to drift to the right as his career progressed. But there was another factor at work. His aim was to project himself as a pillar of orthodoxy and rectitude in contrast to the dangerous ambition and innate corruption of Lloyd George. Many Liberals, particularly among the rank and file at constituency level, recognised the need for reunion if the party was to have any chance of

bouncing back, but Runciman and those who thought like him stood very self-consciously in the way of reconciliation, as long as Lloyd George remained in front-line politics. At the meeting of the National Liberal Federation General Committee in Leamington in 1920, for example, it was noted that leading Asquithians, including Runciman, deliberately avoided giving Lloyd George a hearing.⁴⁵ Yet the Liberals needed Lloyd George, not least because Asquith, as Runciman himself recognised, was no longer an effective leader. Rather than face the inevitable, however, Runciman strove to persuade the former Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, to fill the leadership vacuum, even though the latter was now almost blind and most reluctant to re-enter the political arena. 'He shudders at continuous responsibility', admitted Runciman, 'but we must go on impressing him with what the Methodists describe as the "Call" – which he dare not shrink'.⁴⁶

When Asquith and Lloyd George did put past differences behind them, at least to the extent of combining to oppose the tariff proposals of the new Conservative prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, in 1923, Runciman remained unreconciled and probably irreconcilable. Though he wrote to Lloyd George of his 'great joy ... to become united with you and those Liberals who have stood loyally by you,' it seems unlikely that these words reflected his true sentiments.⁴⁷ If they did, his mood soon changed. Less than a year later, he suggested that 'the personal difficulties are acuter than ever and can never be solved so long as LG insists on pushing himself as leader or deputy leader'.⁴⁸

Like many Liberals of this era, Runciman struggled to secure his own return to parliament. Defeated in Edinburgh South (1920), Berwick-upon-Tweed (1922) and Brighton (1923), he finally returned to the Commons at the general election of 1924 as MP for Swansea West. Asquith had secured his own return for Paisley at a by-election in February 1920, but was defeated again in 1924. He now went to the Lords as the Earl of Oxford and Asquith, while retaining the party leadership. But Runciman tried to resist the election of Lloyd George as sessional chairman in the

Runciman's outlook on politics over the following decade was determined by one factor above all others – a deeply personal detestation of Lloyd George.

Commons. When this move failed, eleven Liberal MPs, with Runciman as their chairman, formed the so-called 'Radical Group', effectively disowning Lloyd George's authority. The group announced that it stood for 'free land, free trade and free people' and that it proposed to 'carry out the policy foreshadowed by Cobden'.⁴⁹ It amounted to a party within the party, but any ties of doctrine seemed less important than personal animosities. Hatred of Lloyd George appeared to be the new group's primary motivation.

Illness finally forced Asquith's resignation in 1926 and the party as a whole turned to Lloyd George as his successor, not least because it was now desperately short of money, something which only Lloyd George could supply via his ill-gained 'Political Fund'. Once again, the malcontents responded by setting up a new organisation. Runciman now emerged as chairman of the 'Liberal Council' and effectively its parliamentary leader. The new body stood for a pure and uncorrupted form of Liberalism. Its aim was to shift the balance within the parliamentary Liberal Party and it hoped to field candidates in opposition to Lloyd George at the next general election. When Lloyd George turned up at the meeting of the National Liberal Federation in June 1926, Runciman, 'there at the beginning, sulked and went away – a foolish exhibition'.⁵⁰

But Lloyd George now gave fresh life to the party, helping to devise a range of new policies designed above all else to counter the mounting scourge of unemployment. The last years of the decade witnessed a mini-Liberal renaissance, with a number of by-election gains. Few could have anticipated that these would be the party's last such gains until the famous Torrington contest of 1958. Still, however, Runciman held aloof – ostentatiously so. Quite simply, if Lloyd George visited a by-election constituency, Runciman stayed away. The latter set out his reasoning:

So far as the methods of these elections are concerned, I thoroughly detest them. Their lavish expenditure, their loudspeakers and the deplorable bad taste and gross inaccuracies of their land,

industrial and mining news disgust me ... The country wants Liberalism, not LG, and I am distressed when I see Liberalism suffer because he is allowed to dominate it.⁵¹

By this stage Runciman had published a short book, which amounted to a personal manifesto, setting out a political creed which was in sharp contrast to the radical interventionism being offered by Lloyd George. In *Liberalism As I See It* Runciman wrote, 'the average non-political citizen wants what is in fact a Gladstonian policy. But at present he does not feel that he can get it from the Liberal Party.'⁵² This made it very difficult to see how he could ever be reconciled to the party while it remained led by Lloyd George. 'No-one is likely to misunderstand my position,' he insisted, 'for they know that I opposed his Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Party and oppose it still; that I decline to go to bye-elections which are dominated by him, and that I have stated plainly that I could not undertake to enter a Cabinet with him as Prime Minister.'⁵³

Such, however, was Lloyd George's momentum that, as the general election of 1929 approached, almost all Liberals saw the need to line up behind him, at least for the sake of public appearance. Even Runciman gave the leader's ambitious plans to reduce unemployment to normal proportions within a single year his public endorsement. Election posters appeared in the press, carrying pictures of the party's united leadership, including Lloyd George, Herbert Samuel, Viscount Grey, Lord Reading, Sir John Simon, Lord Beauchamp and Runciman. But the latter's real intentions were probably contained in a letter sent to him by the like-minded Harcourt Johnstone who wrote: 'Our real business over the next three months is to get ourselves returned to Parliament and specifically to get a majority – or strong minority – returned which will be hostile to LG. To do this we may have to improvise a little our natural inclinations.'⁵⁴

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Runciman's attitude towards Wales's most famous son may have been a factor in his decision to leave Swansea and secure election instead in the St Ives division of Cornwall, a seat conveniently kept warm for him by his wife, Hilda, who had captured it in a by-election in March 1928.

warm for him by his wife, Hilda, who had captured it in a by-election in March 1928. The 1929 general election did see a partial Liberal recovery, enough to leave the party holding the balance in the new parliament. But underlying divisions remained and, over the next two years, the Liberals were reduced to a parliamentary rabble, unable to unite behind Lloyd George and seldom capable of even sending all their MPs into the same division lobby of the House of Commons. The veneer of unity displayed by the party during the election campaign soon disappeared. It was not long before Runciman and his colleagues in the Liberal Council reverted to a policy of independence from the party leadership. 'I can no longer be comfortable in the Liberal Party,' he admitted in November, but it was not immediately clear where else he could turn. If, as seemed likely, the Conservatives moved towards protection, 'a Free Trader like me can see nothing but disaster'⁵⁵ But, while he remained determined not to follow Lloyd George, Runciman soon recognised that there was much to support in the new Labour government, not least the presence at the Exchequer of Philip Snowden, a committed exponent of free trade and sound Gladstonian finance. This dual motivation carried its own complications, for Lloyd George too, if not as consistently as Runciman, understood the need to keep the Labour government in office. The next few months saw Runciman abstain on the government's Coal Bill in December 1929, when the official Liberal stance was one of opposition, and abstain again the following February on a Liberal amendment which tried to delete protection quota arrangements. Negotiations seem to have taken place between Alec Beechman (who eventually succeeded Runciman as MP for St Ives in 1937) and Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald about the possibility of a formal breach with Lloyd George. MacDonald, 'very appreciative of the line ... you [Runciman] and Donald [Maclean] took over the Coal Bill ... would, of course, like us to follow up the break with some pronouncement about supporting him'⁵⁶ The moment, however, passed and Runciman turned his attention increasingly towards

his business interests, becoming a director of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway in December 1929 and Deputy Chairman of the Royal Mail Group the following November. Indeed, in February 1931 he announced his intention to step down from the Commons at the next general election. Archibald Sinclair noted that he was now 'wholly occupied with his business interests and only appears in the House of Commons very occasionally to emphasise by vote or speech some difference with his Liberal colleagues'.⁵⁷

Yet Runciman still had an important role to play in the Liberal Party's fortunes during the 1930s. The collapse of the Labour government, its replacement by an all-party 'National' administration and the prospect that he might yet return to high office caused him to reverse his earlier inclination to retire from political life. This is a period that many historians of the party's decline once neglected, largely out of the belief that there was nothing more to say. They considered that the Liberal Party was doomed by 1930 and that little was to be gained by poring over its death throes. So, for example, Trevor Wilson's classic study, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party*, treated the party's travails after the 1931 general election as little more than a postscript to the main story. More recently, however, it has been argued that there was still a chance of a Liberal revival, perhaps not to the glory days of earlier years, but at least sufficient to restore its credentials as a significant parliamentary force. The Labour Party was badly damaged by the 1931 general election, reduced to just fifty-two MPs. Surely the Liberals could have taken advantage of this situation. To do so, however, they needed one thing above all else – unity. This was conspicuous only by its absence, and Runciman was at the heart of a new and, as it turned out, permanent party division.⁵⁸ Though the entire Liberal Party began by supporting the all-party National Government set up in August 1931 to deal with the country's economic crisis, two Liberal groupings soon emerged – the mainstream party now headed by Herbert Samuel and a group of so-called Liberal Nationals led by John Simon. The key difference between

them was the readiness of the Liberal Nationals to abandon the once sacred principle of free trade in the fight to save the national economy. In practice, this involved becoming electoral and parliamentary allies of the Tories.

To begin with, Runciman's position was unclear. Though it was hard to regard him any longer as a loyal member of the mainstream party, he had not been acting in association with Simon. In particular, he had not followed suit when, on 26 June, Simon, Robert Hutchison and Ernest Brown had formally resigned the Liberal whip. A statement issued to the press on 25 October 1931 read: 'Mr Runciman is not to be included in any group. He is a Liberal supporting the National Government.'⁵⁹ This, of course, was a description that fitted almost all Liberal candidates at the election held a few days later. He had not been included in the emergency Cabinet of ten set up in August, in which the Liberal representatives were Samuel and the Marquess of Reading, when this Nonconformist Wesleyan had commented rather unpleasantly, 'So far as I am concerned, it is clear that the Jews had no place in the Cabinet for a Gentile.'⁶⁰ Samuel tried to convince Runciman that he had in fact secured the agreement of MacDonald and Baldwin to the offer of the non-Cabinet post of War Secretary, 'should you be prepared to take it'. But Samuel's suggestion that this plan had been thwarted by difficulty in contacting Runciman did not help matters, especially when the post was finally offered to the almost forgotten figure of Lord Crewe.⁶¹ At the same time, Runciman was wary of finding himself part of a small opposition Liberal grouping which included Lloyd George, telling Samuel, 'my opinion is no less strongly against LG & his machinations than it has ever been'.⁶² When the Cabinet was enlarged to normal proportions after the general election in October, he had the chance to return to government after an absence of fifteen years. The Labour prime minister of the National Government, Ramsay MacDonald, was obliged to accept the Conservative, Neville Chamberlain, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, but he sought to balance the appointment of this committed tariff reformer by giving the

Once in government, Runciman was quickly won over to the argument in favour of tariffs, though he was successful in persuading Chamberlain to accept a more moderate scheme than the latter would ideally have liked – an achievement for which he incurred the lasting animosity of all-out imperial preferentialists such as Leo Amery

Board of Trade to the impeccably free-trade Runciman. But Runciman's thinking on this matter was evolving and he had already told his constituents that he was ready to back any moves necessary to restore the trade balance.⁶³ Once in government, Runciman was quickly won over to the argument in favour of tariffs, though he was successful in persuading Chamberlain to accept a more moderate scheme than the latter would ideally have liked – an achievement for which he incurred the lasting animosity of all-out imperial preferentialists such as Leo Amery.⁶⁴ According to David Wrench, the Runciman–Chamberlain agreement created the essential 'compromise that enabled the National Government to dominate British politics for the rest of the decade'.⁶⁵ Runciman hoped to use British tariffs as a bargaining counter in negotiations with other countries that had also introduced tariffs, in order to move towards all-round reductions and, ultimately, the restoration of a free-trade system. As late as 1937, the Tory backbencher, Brendan Bracken, was still describing him, along with the American Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, as 'the only true begotten Cobdenites left on earth'.⁶⁶

As the mainstream Liberals under Samuel resigned from the government in September 1932 in opposition to the tariff arrangements reached at the Ottawa Imperial Conference, while Runciman remained in office, he had little alternative but to associate himself with the Liberal National group, though anomalously he retained offices within the Samuelite party for some years and was re-elected vice-president of the Liberal Council in June 1934. Indeed, he was one of two Liberal Nationals (the other being Simon) on an informal six-man steering group, which eventually became a General Purposes Committee of the Cabinet, and which confirmed the reality of 'National Government'.⁶⁷ But Runciman was no friend of the Liberal National leader, John Simon, and, by the end of 1934, was telling the prime minister that Simon was the government's 'weakest link'.⁶⁸ Indeed, when Runciman became president of the Liberal National Council in 1937, his wife noted how 'distasteful' it was to be

associated with an organisation of which Simon 'calls himself leader'.⁶⁹ As a Liberal National, Runciman insisted that he remained as true a Liberal as he had ever been. As late as March 1938 he was still calling for 'pure, simple, strong Liberalism in order to save [the] country from disaster'.⁷⁰ But, if Runciman remained more of a 'Liberal' than did most Liberal Nationals, this did not prevent him becoming an object of Liberal hostility in the south-west, where his intervention in the general election of 1935 was widely held responsible for the defeat of Isaac Foot in Bodmin. Over time, the Liberal Nationals as a whole became indistinguishable from Conservatives and they were in the latter's pockets long before they finally amalgamated with them in 1968. Moreover, the Liberal–Liberal National split proved catastrophic for the Liberal Party, destroying any possibility of a Liberal revival for at least a generation. At a stroke, half the Liberal Party's remaining parliamentary strength had been lost and, in most cases, the sitting Liberal MP (now a Liberal National) succeeded in taking his local party organisation with him into the new group. In many constituencies where Liberalism had managed to survive through all the challenges and crises of the second and third decades of the century, it now all but disappeared, while Liberal voters were often left confused as to which side of the divide represented the authentic Liberal creed.

Notwithstanding unrealistic hopes that he might yet be elevated to the Treasury, Runciman retained the office of President of the Board of Trade until the reshuffle occasioned by Neville Chamberlain's accession to the premiership in May 1937. Arguing that he was busily engaged in ongoing matters at the Board of Trade, he angrily rejected the prime minister's offer of the non-departmental post of Lord Privy Seal.⁷¹ Somewhat surprisingly, he was brought back into the government in October 1938 in the wake of the Munich crisis as Lord President of the Council. The outgoing minister, Lord Hailsham, sixty-six years old and in poor health, must have been somewhat surprised to have been asked by Chamberlain to make way for a successor who was sixty-eight and also now ailing.⁷² At all events, the

appointment was not a success. An extended leave of absence to restore his health proved unavailing. Runciman resigned at the outbreak of war in September 1939, admitting that 'my nerves are all to pieces'.⁷³

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What then does the career of Walter Runciman reveal about the destruction of the British Liberal Party? Conclusions based on the experience of one man must necessarily be tentative and qualified. But the evidence of Runciman as a Dewsbury MP does not suggest that Liberalism faced a mortal threat from the rising Labour Party in the years before the First World War. But neither was it transmogrifying into a social democratic progressivism. Traditional nineteenth-century Liberalism was still thriving in this constituency. His experience as a government minister in the first half of the First World War argues against the idea that this conflict posed an insuperable ideological challenge to the party's very existence. On the other hand, both in the ongoing disputes of the 1920s around the personality of David Lloyd George and in the final split between Liberals and Liberal Nationals a decade later, Runciman's career suggests that the Liberal Party indulged in a case of political suicide – a party so engrossed by its own internal quarrels that it failed to focus on the bigger question of its very survival. Liberalism as a political philosophy is all about the rights of the individual. But there perhaps existed a fundamental conflict between this and the need for a political party to seek out those common beliefs that bind individuals together, submerging points of difference in the interests of the wider organisation. The evidence suggests that Runciman was no team player. He had no confidence in Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the first party leader he nominally served on entering parliament in 1899.⁷⁴ He supported the Boer War, which Campbell-Bannerman opposed, and, only a year after entering the Commons, was describing his leader as 'insufferable'.⁷⁵ Campbell-Bannerman's own description of Runciman, written in 1901, was prophetic. He was, he suggested, 'a pugnacious, sectional partisan who will be, as in the past,

a mutineer whenever mutiny is possible'.⁷⁶ Runciman emerged as a committed Asquithian, especially during the internecine struggles of the First World War, but became disillusioned with Asquith several years before the latter's retirement. He clearly despised Lloyd George and did everything he could to destroy him, and he ended his political career in a new party headed by John Simon, whom he also disliked and sought to undermine. No one, of course, could argue that Walter Runciman caused the decline of the Liberal Party. But internal divisions and disputes surely did play an important part; and to this problem Runciman made a significant contribution.

After thirty-five years teaching in Liverpool, David Dutton punctuates his retirement in South-West Scotland with submissions to the Journal of Liberal History.

- 1 Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Elshieshields Tower, home of the Revd Dr Ann Shukman, grand-daughter of Walter Runciman, and at Manchester Metropolitan University.
- 2 A. Partington (ed.), *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford, 1996), p. 180.
- 3 E. David (ed.), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet* (London, 1977), p. 122.
- 4 N. Rose (ed.), *Baffy: The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale 1936–1947* (London, 1973), p. 93.
- 5 David (ed.), *Asquith's Cabinet*, p. 230.
- 6 C. Coote, *Editorial* (London, 1965), p. 159.
- 7 House of Commons Debates, 5th Series, vol. 338, cols. 2956–8.
- 8 S. Ball (ed.), *Parliament and Politics in the Age of Churchill and Attlee: The Headlam Diaries 1935–1951* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 607–8. See also M. and E. Brock (eds.), *H. H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley* (pb. edn, Oxford, 1985), p. 409.
- 9 H. Noguères, *Munich: The Phoney Peace* (London, 1965), p. 77.
- 10 G. Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London, 1936), p. 10. It needs to be noted that Dangerfield can only reach the figure of fifty-three by including the batch of so-called Lib-Lab MPs who continued to take the Liberal whip. LRC (soon to be Labour Party) strength is usually recorded as thirty MPs.
- 11 H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London, 1968), p. 118.

Campbell-Bannerman's own description of Runciman, written in 1901, was prophetic. He was, he suggested, 'a pugnacious, sectional partisan who will be, as in the past, a mutineer whenever mutiny is possible'.

- 12 P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1971), passim. For an important recent contribution to this debate, see I. Packer, 'Contested Ground: Trends in British By-Elections, 1911–1914', *Contemporary British History*, 25, 1 (2011), pp. 157–73.
- 13 *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Nov. 1949.
- 14 A. Salter, *Personality in Politics* (London, 1948), p. 113.
- 15 M. Pugh, 'Yorkshire and the New Liberalism', *Journal of Modern History*, 50, 3 (1978), p. D1153. This section draws heavily from Professor Pugh's important article.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. D1155.
- 17 T. Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914–1935* (London, 1966), p. 18.
- 18 K. O. Morgan, *The Age of Lloyd George: The Liberal Party and British Politics, 1890–1929* (London, 1978), p. 58.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 M. Farr, *Reginald McKenna: Financier Among Statesmen, 1863–1916* (Abingdon, 2008), p. 76.
- 21 Runciman to McKenna, c. 23 Sept. 1915, cited D. French, *British Strategy and War Aims 1914–1916* (London, 1986), p. 124.
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- 25 J. Wallace, 'The Political Career of Walter Runciman', Ph.D. thesis (University of Newcastle, 1995), p. 184.
- 26 French, *British Economic Planning*, p. 104.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 99.
- 28 University of Newcastle, Runciman MSS 303, Runciman to H. Runciman 28 Dec. 1915. Extracts from the papers of Walter Runciman are cited by kind permission of the Viscount Runciman of Doxford.
- 29 Lady Cynthia Asquith, *Diaries 1915–1918* (London, 1968), p. 117.
- 30 J. J. Norwich (ed.), *The Duff Cooper Diaries 1915–1951* (London, 2005), p. 23, reporting the opinion of Edwin Montagu.
- 31 Runciman to H. Runciman, 28 Dec. 1915, cited Wallace, 'Runciman', p. 229.
- 32 C. Asquith, *Diaries*, p. 123. Anthony Asquith, son of H. H. Asquith by his second wife Margot, was invariably called 'Puffin' because of the shape of his nose.
- 33 Parliamentary Archives, Lloyd George MSS, D/16/7/4, Lloyd George to Chamberlain, 8 Jan. 1916.
- 34 Elshieshields Tower, papers of Walter

Runciman, sr, Sir W. Runciman to wife, 9 Dec. 1916. Extracts from the papers of Walter Runciman, sr, are cited by kind permission of the Revd Dr Ann Shukman.

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- 36 Runciman to Emmott, 3 Jan. 1917, cited J. Turner, *British Politics and the Great War* (New Haven, CT, 1992), p. 186.
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LIBERAL PARTY COLOURS

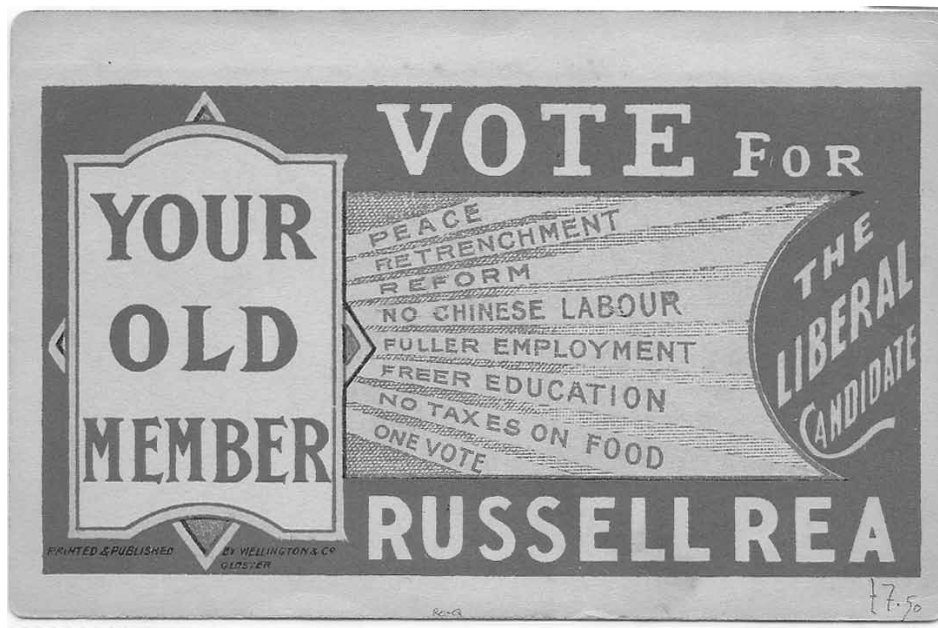
ELECTIONS OF SORTS have been held in the United Kingdom since the days of the knights of the shires and burgesses of the boroughs.¹ These elections were taking place before universal literacy (in England; Scotland always had much higher literacy rates), even among the limited electorates before the Great Reform Acts of 1832² and during the advances towards the mass democratic state of the twentieth century. So it was important to ensure that rival candidates were properly identified, particularly in the days before the secret ballot and the printed ballot paper. Giving candidates and, later, parties a distinguishing-colour rosette or favour assisted in the early democratic process and, perhaps in the tradition of battlefield colours identifying the combatants, it also helped to add some drama and 'colour' to the election contests. As a result the term 'political colour(s)' has itself entered the language as a metaphor for political allegiance or opinion with references back at least as far as the early nineteenth century.³

In modern political life, branding⁴ (the symbolic value of a product) is becoming increasingly important. At UK general elections you will see a uniformity of political themes, messaging, images, logos and party colours across the country with authorised variations for national, regional and local approaches. Being 'on message' has sometimes been seen as more important for politicians

than the intrinsic usefulness of the message itself.⁵ Some of this has been driven by election legislation such as the use of party logos on ballot papers⁶ but it has come about principally as society, communication technology and politics have changed and the nature of political communication and organisation has changed with them. The Conservative Party tree, the Labour rose or the Liberal Democrat freebird will be the ubiquitous symbols of each organisation and candidates and literature will be adorned in the same blue, red or yellow colours.


It was not always like this, especially with party rosettes. As recently as the 1970s, perhaps more recently still, there was much more diversity and it was not the case that a candidate would automatically fight an election wearing their 'national' party colour. John Barnes, the historian and Conservative parliamentary candidate for Walsall North in the 1960s, described how when first out canvassing in a blue Tory rosette he was met by an enthusiastic female elector who kissed him and said she had been waiting thirty years for a Liberal candidate to reappear in Walsall. At that time in this area, he recounted, the party colours were Tory red, Liberal blue and Labour yellow (or yellow and red).⁷ It is clear that those on the progressive side of British politics continued to wear blue in many areas, contrary to our anachronistic association of that colour with Conservatism.

This was the case in Liverpool and Cumbria and across many parts of south-east England. The Liberal colours in Greenwich (then a two-member parliamentary borough in Kent), which Gladstone represented from 1868 to 1880, were blue. When Gladstone fought Greenwich in 1874 he fought in blue and his two Conservative opponents used crimson, while his Radical running mate, in honour of his support for Irish home rule, adopted green.⁸ More recently, Liberal colours were traditionally blue in Berwick on Tweed until changed by Alan Beith, its Liberal MP from 1973.⁹ The author of this article was puzzled during the general election of February 1974, while waiting nervously for the anticipated Liberal win in Ceredigion, to see to see the victorious candidate sporting a huge dark blue rosette but was then quickly relieved to recognise the mighty frame of Liberal candidate Geraint Howells.¹⁰ Martin Thomas¹¹ recalled that in many parts of Wales, by tradition, the Conservatives wore red and were colloquially known by Liberals as 'cythreuliaid coch' – the red devils.¹² This was not the case however in the largely Liberal stronghold of Montgomeryshire. Lady Shirley Hooson recalled that her husband Emlyn fought his victorious 1962 by-election in red and yellow colours and that these were the colours inherited from former party leader Clement Davies who had represented the seat since 1929.¹³



traditional associations with local ruling families, often reflecting the racing colours of the original Whig and Tory aristocrats who dominated elections two centuries ago. At the Torrington by-election of 1958, the first Liberal gain at a by-election since 1929, won for the party by Mark Bonham Carter¹⁹ the colours in use were purple and orange as against the National Liberal (Conservative) rosettes of red, white and blue.²⁰ Paul Tyler²¹ recalled the background to this as relating to the old Bodmin constituency where the Liberal colours were those of the Robartes family, seventeenth-century Parliamentarians in the Civil War (when most of Cornwall was Royalist), Whigs in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and Liberals thereafter. Thomas Agar Robartes won the 1906 general election for the Liberals²² but was unseated by the Tories because his mother had inadvertently treated a substantial number of electors with the annual tenants' tea! When Tyler was adopted as Liberal parliamentary candidate in Bodmin in 1968, Robartes' sister, Miss Eva Agar Robartes, attended, and Tyler was ceremonially invited to lunch at the family estate, Lanhydrock, now a National Trust property. Purple and yellow were the racing colours of the Robartes family, and hence for local Liberals too, but by the time of the February 1974 general election Miss Agar Robartes was no longer racing as she was in her late eighties, and Liberals were encouraged to adopt dayglo orange to achieve coordinated national recognition.²³ Meanwhile John Pardoe had apparently shaken up a lot of traditional supporters in North Cornwall by switching to orange and black when he won the seat in 1966²⁴ while in North Devon Jeremy Thorpe stuck to the customary yellow and purple.²⁵

Paul Tyler suggests that the advent of colour television in 1967 was a principal driver towards national uniformity of party political colours for Liberals. The Conservative use of blue however was as a result of growing trend over the course of the twentieth century and was reinforced by a decision made by Conservative Central Council in 1949.²⁶ Michael Steed, the noted Liberal psephologist,

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|  <p>STEED Liberal</p> <p><small>Printed by Ideal Printers, Ashley Road, Uxbridge, Middx. Published by A. C. Bunyan, 73 High Street, Brierley Hill.</small></p> | <p><u>ELECTION COMMUNICATION</u></p> <p>BRIERLEY HILL BY-ELECTION 27th April, 1967</p> <p>With Compliments from</p> <p><i>Michael Steed.</i></p> <p>Michael Steed, M.A.(Cantab.), your Liberal Candidate is a 27-year-old university lecturer in the Department of Government at Manchester University.</p> |
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One author has dated the use of the political colours red and blue to the Exclusion Crisis of 1679–1681, when red was the colour of those supporting the Crown, the Tories, while blue was the colour of the Whigs who sought to exclude the Roman Catholic James, Duke of York and Albany and Earl of Ulster who later became King James II (James VII of Scotland), from inheriting the throne on the death of his brother, Charles II.¹⁴ Another has traced these colours even further back. During the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, the Scottish supporters of Charles I wore red and the opposing Covenanters (proto-Whigs) adopted blue.¹⁵ The Whigs, who originated earlier in

Scotland than in England, later added buff as an identifying colour. According to one historian, the Whigs adopted the buff and blue of the uniforms of American Revolutionary soldiers. In these colours they paraded around London dressed as American rebels to the discomfort and irritation of Lord North¹⁶ and King George III.¹⁷ The buff and blue were retained as Whig colours at least until the time of the 1832 Reform Acts.¹⁸

But these colours were never universal and, as we know, have been subject to change over the years. In some parts of the country, political colours were taken from the coats of arms or other

agrees and has written that for Liberals there was no national party colour until the late 1960s, instead there being many regional variations. When Steed joined the Liberal Party in East Kent in 1958 the local colour was green and that applied to most of, if not all, of the Home Counties and Greater London. Green was the colour used by Eric Lubbock in his famous by-election win at Orpington in March 1962. William Wallace²⁷ recalled that green was also the Liberal colour in Leicestershire in the 1950s and early 1960s²⁸ when his father-in-law, Edward Rushworth, fought local elections and when he was a parliamentary candidate in the Harborough constituency.²⁹ During his days in Cambridge and Oxford, Michael Steed also came across yellow in some of the Eastern Counties and when he moved to Manchester in 1965, he discovered that red was firmly entrenched as the Liberal regional colour (so Labour was obliged to use yellow and red). Cyril Smith,³⁰ for instance, insisted on retaining the north-west red during his famous Rochdale by-election win in 1972 and stuck to it for some elections thereafter. But across the Pennines in Yorkshire, Liberals sported yellow. By this time however, the adoption by the Liberal Publication Department of dayglo orange for its own publications was beginning to impinge on more newly established local constituency parties and began to be used in by-elections. Orange was the colour adopted in the Brierley Hill by-election of 1967, where Steed was the candidate.³¹

Michael Meadowcroft³² worked at Liberal Party HQ from 1962 to 1967 and served as the party's Local Government Officer.³³ He recalled that at this time the party tried to get everyone to use orange, on the grounds that it was acknowledged in professional advertising circles to be the colour that stood out most, particular when used in dayglo format on posters. This idea was introduced on the recommendation of a member of the Liberal Party in Lewisham named David Marchant who was a senior figure in a public relations agency. He offered the advice anonymously because of his professional position and used to refer to himself as 'William Ewart' when working for the party.³⁴ This push towards uniformity

Top: postcard from the 1906 general election in Gloucester at which Richard Rea was re-elected; the dominant colour is red, with 'The Liberal candidate' in yellow; the writing in the middle is green on yellow.

Bottom: election card from Michael Steed's Brierley Hill by-election in 1967, which is faced in orange (under the photo).

proved however to be the most intractable of issues with local associations, passionate about their time-honoured party colour which, they believed, immediately identified them to the electors. Meadowcroft remembers one Cheshire constituency, probably Macclesfield, where, following boundary changes, it proved impossible to persuade both parts of the new constituency to use the same colour. Consequently party workers had to have two rosettes and to switch them when they crossed from one part of the constituency to the other. In 1964, *The Times* reported that Mr Harold Webb, a Manchester supplier of political rosettes and favours, was doing good business with the Liberals and although they had tried to standardise on orange the mark of their failure to do so nationally meant that he stocked eight colours or colour combinations to meet Liberal demands up and down the country.³⁵ Slowly but surely, however, as national literature continued to be produced in orange, and as the benefits of dayglo were perceived, it did eventually come adopted everywhere, particularly as a new generation of younger Liberals, who were not tied to past traditions, came to the fore.³⁶

It remains doubtful that there was ever a centralised decision by the Liberal Party to adopt orange as a national party colour during this period. Michael Steed was a member of the party's national executive committee representing the Union of Liberal Students in 1962–3. At that time, the Liberal Publication Department (which was using orange) was emphasising very firmly that this was not a national party colour, and that its decision had no implications for the right of local parties to use their own local colours. It seems that Liberal Party officials were urging local parties to go orange because this was the way the wind was blowing rather than because the party had officially agreed.³⁷ Orange spread first to most constituencies in the southeast, where the currently used green was not associated with strong local traditions, and anyway the party was organisationally very weak in many constituencies. Resistance was strong in the north of England,

and stronger still in Scotland, Wales and the far south-west, where traditional Liberal strength was greatest.

In Scotland the old Liberal colours were usually red and yellow – the colours of the Lion Rampant flag. Whereas the Tory colours were blue and white – the colours of the Saltire flag.³⁸ When Asquith fought and won the Paisley by-election of 1920, his daughter, Lady Violet Bonham Carter,³⁹ recorded in her diaries that the Liberals had got the women's vote and that on polling day by a large majority the children had been decked out in red ('our colours', she noted). That day, wrote Lady Violet, Paisley was covered with red carnations and rosettes.⁴⁰ However, there were many variations in individual constituencies in the Borders for example, and green was favoured in the Kincardine and Western Aberdeenshire constituency of 1918–1950 with a shade of magenta in West Aberdeenshire as late as 1974, although this was used only once to avoid a clash with another candidate.⁴¹ When Councillor Robert Brown first stood as a local government candidate in Rutherglen (Glasgow–South Lanarkshire) in the 1970s, his posters were accidentally printed in a greenish yellow. As he won, that colour was kept for the next couple of local elections. And even in the days of the fledgling Social Democratic Party, a party unencumbered by obligations to any pre-existing grassroots organisations or local bodies with their own traditions to protect,⁴² the young Charles Kennedy⁴³ adopted the Liberal Red and Yellow to adorn his election address during his campaign in Ross, Cromarty and Skye at the 1983 general election. In some parts, it was a custom for the candidate to wear a white heather lapel spray with red and gold ribbons on polling day. After the introduction of seat belts, the spray had to be worn on the right lapel rather than the left.⁴⁴ The Ulster Liberal Party of 1956–1985 used yellow and black, which have also been the colours of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland since its formation in 1970.⁴⁵

It is perhaps the case though, that everyone's favourite story about Liberal colours dates from

LIBERAL PARTY COLOURS

the early 1950s when the party Executive was discussing the matter. The rivalry and antipathy between the left-wing Lady Megan Lloyd George⁴⁶ and the more traditional Lady Violet Bonham Carter was well known. After going through a number of options Lady Megan thundered that she didn't care what colour the party fought in – as long as it wasn't violet.

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

- 1 In Scotland, Commissioners of the Shires and Burghesses of the (Royal) Burghs.
- 2 There were three Reform Acts in 1832 – one for England and Wales, one for Scotland and one for Ireland.
- 3 *The Times*, 10 Sept. 1833, p. 4.
- 4 Manuel Adolphsen, 'Branding in Election Campaigns: Just a Buzzword or a New Quality of Political Communication?' MSc dissertation (LSE, 2008).
- 5 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7259197.stm
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- 9 Information to the author from Sir David Steel (Baron Steel of Aikwood), 10 Dec. 2013
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- 11 Martin Thomas, Lord Thomas of Gresford b.1937: Liberal candidate for Flintshire West 1964–1970.
- 12 Information to the author, 5 Mar. 2012
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- 14 Geoffrey D. M. Block OBE, former Assistant Director (Information) at the Conservative Research Department, author of *A Source Book of Conservatism* (Conservative Political Centre, 1964) and *The Tory Tradition* (Conservative Political Centre, 1957).
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- 16 Frederick North, 2nd Earl of Guilford, 1732–1792: prime minister 1770–82, he resigned to avoid losing a vote of

Lady Megan thundered that she didn't care what colour the party fought in – as long as it wasn't violet.

- no confidence brought following the decisive British defeat of the Revolutionary War at the battle of Yorktown.
- 17 Leslie Mitchell, *The Whig World: 1760–1837* (Hambledon Continuum, 2005), p. 4.
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 - 19 Mark Raymond Bonham Carter (Baron Bonham-Carter), 1922–1994, grandson of Liberal prime minister H. H. Asquith.
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 - 23 Information to the author from Paul Tyler, 5 Mar. 2012.
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 - 25 Information to the author from William Wallace, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, 4 Mar. 2012
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 - 32 Michael Meadowcroft, b. 1942: Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983–87.
 - 33 <http://www.bramley.demon.co.uk/liberal.html>
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 - 35 *The Times*, 13 Oct. 1964, p. 17.
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 - 43 Charles Kennedy, b 1959: Leader of the Liberal Democrats, 1999–2006.
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 - 45 Information to the authors from Berkeley Farr, former Chairman of the Ulster Liberal Party and candidate for South Down in 1973.
 - 46 Lady Megan Lloyd George, 1902–1966: daughter of David Lloyd George, Liberal MP for Anglesey 1929–1951, Labour MP for Carmarthen 1957–66.

REPORTS

Social reformers and liberals: the Rowntrees and their legacy

Conference fringe meeting, 7 March 2014, with Ian Packer, Lord Shutt and Tina Walker; chair: Lord Kirkwood
Report by David Cloke

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT History Group's meeting at the 2014 Spring Conference was an intriguing, somewhat

discursive, but ultimately enlightening and thought-provoking review of the life, work and legacy of Joseph and Seebohm Rowntree

– successful businessmen, pioneers of social investigation and committed Liberals. As Ian Packer, of Lincoln University, noted at the start of his talk, the Rowntree name is known for two things: as a brand name for chocolates and sweets, and as the supporters of serious investigations into social conditions. This renown is due to the activities of Joseph Rowntree and his son Seebohm.

As Packer rightly said, it all began with the company. Joseph Rowntree was born in 1836, the second son of a Quaker family that owned a wholesale grocery business. In 1869 he joined his younger brother Henry in a small chocolate and cocoa business that Henry had founded seven years earlier – and by small Packer meant a company consisting of twelve workers and a donkey that undertook deliveries!

In Packer's view Joseph was the effective founder of the company. He was its driving force (Henry died in 1883) and was especially skilled as an accountant. A key decision on the road to success was to begin the manufacture of fruit pastilles in 1881. In 1890 Rowntree established a new factory in New Earswick and by 1902 employed 2,000 people. Although Joseph did not retire until 1923, when he was eighty-seven, he shared the running of the company with his four sons, three nephews and two sons-in-law (it was very much a family concern). Nonetheless, it was clear that his heir apparent was his second son, Seebohm, who was managing director from 1923 to 1936.

Packer made it clear that the experience of running a business informed by their Quaker faith influenced their moral and political thought, and that in turn influenced how they ran the business. The Rowntrees developed an early form of corporate welfare, with an eight-hour working day, a pension scheme, works councils and profit sharing. What they did not do was hand over the company to the employees along the lines of the John Lewis Partnership. This was argued in the fringe meeting to have been a more radical and forward-looking option, and one which might have protected the company from takeover. David Shutt did note, however, that the trusts established by Joseph Rowntree had owned the majority stake in



the firm, and in that sense there had been an element of social ownership.

The Rowntrees did not keep their views on management to themselves and Seebohm was a theorist and publisher on management and labour relations. His first book, *The Human Factory Business* (1921), was a key text in the development of management theory. He argued consistently that good wages and conditions were important for efficiency as well as for labour relations and that a well-paid, engaged workforce was good for British industry. He developed a more scientific approach to management, highlighting cost accounting, proper research and the use of psychology and the company became the first business to employ a psychologist.

Packer reported that Joseph and Seebohm had a range of interests. Joseph was obsessed with collecting statistics and Packer noted later that it was this quasi-scientific approach that made the arguments of the Rowntrees so persuasive in the early years of the twentieth century. Joseph's great crusade had initially been against alcohol. During the 1870s he came to see it as the key cause of the poverty and misery around him in York. As Packer noted, this was not an uncommon view among the Nonconformists of the time. It also appealed to his character, which was rather puritanical with little time for relaxation. Seebohm was also quite austere, campaigning against gambling, cinema and the dance hall, seeing them as distractions from the serious business of life. A member

From left: Ian Packer, Archy Kirkwood, David Shutt, Tina Walker

of the audience asked why both the Rowntrees and another Quaker family, the Cadburys, had gone into the chocolate business. Packer argued that it stemmed in part from their temperance activities and that they saw cocoa as providing a good-quality drink for the working classes.

Joseph wrote or co-wrote five books on the subject of alcohol in the seven years between 1899 and 1906. Packer argued that three main points emerge from these writings. Firstly, he saw drinking as a result of the deprivations of urban life, which needed to be tackled. Second, the public needed to be made aware of how poor conditions were in many of England's cities. Third, working-class families did not have sufficient income to feed the whole family and a great number had no margin for alcohol.

These findings fed into the investigations undertaken by Seebohm, the most famous of which was the first, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, published in 1901. This was a study of his home city, York, and tabulated the income of working-class households and their expenditure. Packer argued that, despite that seemingly dry, statistical approach, it was surprisingly accessible. Seebohm calculated that 10 per cent of the population was in first-degree poverty: that is, they did not have sufficient income to feed and clothe themselves and pay rent. A further 17–18 per cent were in second-degree poverty: they had just enough income to do these things but chose instead to spend their income on other things such

as drink. It was noted later from the floor that current statistics might reveal similar levels of poverty, also compounded by expenditure on cigarettes, gambling and alcohol.

These books made the Rowntree name synonymous with the great controversies of the day regarding poverty and alcohol. So much so that one Rowntree described himself as the brother of poverty and the son of drink! Helped by the scientific aspect of their studies, they were able to change the attitude to poverty from one focused on individual failings to one that recognised that it was structural and required government action. Their work influenced Churchill, Lloyd George (who, Packer noted rather drily, claimed to have read the book) and the Liberal period of social reform up to 1914 more generally.

Despite this influence, Packer reported that their activities gave them little time for a formal political career. Both were committed Liberals, seeing it as part of the movement for Nonconformity, temperance and social reform. The family was very influential in York, with Joseph being president of the York Liberal Federation and his nephew Arnold being MP for the city from 1910 to 1918 and, later, president of the York Liberal Association, and the family ran the Association and the Liberal group on the council. At a national level, the Rowntrees worked in the background. Packer noted that, unlike other businessmen, they did not give the party any money, as they were not interested in peerages (though it was reported later in the meeting that Joseph was on the list of possible peers to be created in the event of the failure of the Parliament Bill).

In a sense the political, moral and social reforming beliefs of the Rowntrees came together in the three trusts that Joseph Rowntree established 'with the cordial assent of my wife and children' at the end of 1904. The entire endowment was initially in shares in Rowntree and Company with a dividend banked twice a year. Until the merger with Mackintosh's in 1969, the three trusts together owned 53 per cent of Rowntree and Company. With the merger, the holding reduced to 38 per cent and, thereafter, disputes with the board led the trustees to divest the trusts of their shares in the

company. Unfortunately too soon, as David Shutt (former Director and Chair of the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust) noted, to make the most of the Nestlé takeover in 1988.

The three trusts were the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Joseph Rowntree Social Services Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Village Trust. The roles of the trusts were outlined in a Founders Memorandum drafted on 29 December 1904 and which Shutt argued still provided great inspiration to those working for the trusts today. He explained that the distinction between the work of the Charitable Trust and the Social Services Trust was merely the legal distinction between what could and could not be regarded as charitable, although the focus of their work was essentially the same. So, for example, Rowntree noted that the soup kitchen in York had no trouble in obtaining financial aid but that an inquiry into the extent and causes of poverty would get little support. The first two trusts were also supposed to conclude their work by 1939 and hand over their resources to the Village Trust, which was to be permanent as it owned property. However, Rowntree had provided that the trusts could continue after 1939, and so they did.

Shutt highlighted that at the start all six trustees of all three trusts were the same six people, were all Rowntrees and, at the prompting of Tina Walker, noted that they were all men. The first non-Rowntree was John Bowles Morrell, appointed a director of the Social Services Trust in 1906, followed by another non-Rowntree in 1913. Nonetheless, for the first fifteen to twenty years the trustees were largely the same six Rowntrees.

Packer reported that a key role of the Social Services Trust in its early years was supporting the Liberal press. Rowntree had been determined to respond to the Tory gutter press, particularly after the Boer War, and bought a number of regional newspapers and briefly owned a national newspaper, the *Morning Leader*, and a London evening paper, *The Star*. The latter, however, largely paid its way by publishing gambling tips on its back page, and after failed attempts to get rid of the tips, Rowntree sold up after three years. The newspapers began to lose money quite seriously

These books made the Rowntree name synonymous with the great controversies of the day regarding poverty and alcohol. So much so that one Rowntree described himself as the brother of poverty and the son of drink!

after the First World War, and they were acquired by the Westminster Press, which was owned by another Liberal businessman, Lord Cowdray. In the 1930s Seeböhm withdrew from the newspaper business altogether and made more direct donations. Joseph Rowntree had always wanted the trust to focus on employing people to do things rather than on building meeting houses and investing in property. It also had the aim of maintaining the 'purity of elections in York'. Whilst he had said that it would be 'inexpedient' to use the trust for ordinary subscriptions to political parties, Rowntree had acknowledged that there may be occasional crises when it could be called upon. Shutt noted that they had been living in crisis for the last hundred years!

The Social Services Trust had changed its name to the Reform Trust some twenty years ago, partly to avoid confusion with local authority social services committees, and also to reflect better its activities. Shutt argued that the Reform Trust had had three distinct phases in its history. During the period up to 1939, in part reported on by Packer, 15 per cent of the expenditure went on temperance work. The Liberal Party had to wait until 1935 for its first grant, and by 1939 under 1 per cent of the trust's expenditure had gone to the Liberal Party. The years from 1939 to 1969 represented the quietest period of the trust, though it did increase the funds it made available to the Liberal Party: £20,000 in the ten years to 1950 and £50,000 in the years up to 1960. In 1969, differences between Jeremy Thorpe and Pratap Chitnis at Liberal Party Organisation led to Chitnis being put forward to the Rowntrees by Jo Grimond and Richard Wainwright as someone who could run the trust. Up to that point it had been a part-time occupation.

The Chitnis era, and beyond, saw a significant increase in the activity supported by the trust. It bought a building in Poland Street in London and let it out to a wide range of organisations to use as their headquarters. These included the Low Pay Unit, Gingerbread, Child Poverty Action Group, Friends of the Earth and the Tory Reform Group. Kirkwood noted that it was a splendid place for networking, with great energy and

synergy, and launched the careers of many excellent people. The trust also set up a think tank, the Outer Circle Policy Unit, established the Birchfield Centre in Hebden Bridge as a 'Poland Street of the North', and funded many parliamentary assistants, fondly known as chocolate soldiers. Overall, from 1972 the trust supported the Liberal Democrats and its predecessor parties to the tune of £10 million. The Charitable Trust, meanwhile, focused its work on peace, race, Ireland, power and responsibility and Quakerism, though the latter accounted for less than 10 per cent of its activities.

The third organisation established was the Joseph Rowntree Village Trust. It was provided with a plot of land near the factory on which was built an experimental housing estate. Packer reported that by the 1950s there were 600 houses, though not many were owned by working-class people. He also noted that it was the Village Trust that started Rowntree's association with land reform. He claimed that Joseph disliked landowners, especially for their failure to make land available for housing, which he believed lay behind the proliferation of slums. Seebohm began investigating land reform in response, using Belgium as an example, as it did not have any large landowners. Working with Lloyd George, it was intended that the issue should provide the major Liberal campaign for the 1915 general election, with Seebohm as its driving force. Although the 1915 general election never took place, Seebohm continued to work closely with Lloyd George into the 1930s, providing elements of the Yellow Book.

The Village Trust subsequently became the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which in turn established a separate trust to look after housing. The Foundation, the wealthiest of the three with assets worth £300 million, spent its money on 'poverty, place and ageing'. Kirkwood noted that the Foundation produced 'blue chip research' in these areas and had helped to develop minimum income theory in collaboration with academics at York University and elsewhere. The quality and quantity of the work of the Foundation had necessarily limited the role of the Reform Trust and focused it on giving people a voice.

Tina Walker, Secretary of the Reform Trust, outlined what this

meant in 2014 and, in doing so, perhaps indicated the early years of a fourth period of the Reform Trust's history and one that seemed to me less directly connected with the current priorities of the Liberal Democrats but no less liberal for all that. Or perhaps it indicated that the party is now less closely connected with what might be termed the wider liberal movement than it had been when the trusts were established. Walker also noted that the purposes of the trust had changed over the last 110 years, quoting Rowntree herself in her defence: 'time makes ancient good uncouth'.

Walker reported that the trust had thought a great deal about its role within English and British politics within the last few years and in light of liberal and Quaker values. The trust was also small, with £44 million in assets providing income for £1.2 million in grants each year; whereas Shutt had earlier noted that the Charitable Trust had assets of £160 million. The Reform Trust had, therefore, agreed to focus on a specific set of interrelated themes: correcting imbalances of power; supporting the voice of the individual and the weak; strengthening the hand of those striving for reform; speaking truth to power; challenging systems that hinder freedom and justice; and supporting creative campaigns for political change and reform that support a healthy democracy.

These priorities had manifested themselves in support for a number of different activities, such as Med Confidential and its campaigns on care.data, Open Rights campaigning against the Communications Data Bill, and supporting the Don't Spy on Us Coalition. The trust had also supported campaigns for individual human rights by funding Protection Against Stalking, Women Against Rape, and campaigns against domestic violence. Black Mental Health UK had been giving funds to campaign against the retention of the DNA of those arrested for minor offences, which had been applied in a discriminatory fashion, and to highlight the deaths in custody and in psychiatric settings of black mental health service users. The trust also supported groups in the 'Fourth Wave' of feminism including UK Feminista, which provided infrastructure support and training; Object,

campaigning against the objectification of women; and Pro-Choice campaigners, especially in Northern Ireland.

As its financial weight was tiny compared with governments, corporations and the charitable sector, the trust had decided to target funding at issues with immediate political salience. So, for example, it had not focused recently on Lords reform or PR because they did not currently have political traction. Nonetheless, whilst there had been limited opportunities for political reform since 2010, the trust had supported campaigns on party funding and Spin Watch's work against corporate lobbying. The trust's connection with the newspaper industry had been continued through support for the Media Standards Trust and Hacked Off and for their support for the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry. Walker also argued that the trust continued to demonstrate Rowntree's care for working people though its support for the campaign by the High Pay Centre to moderate high wages and the Intern Aware campaign to ensure all potential applicants got a fair deal and equal access to opportunities.

In response to a question on the extent to which Joseph Rowntree's own views dictated priorities, Shutt noted that, whilst trustees regularly referred back to the foundation document, Rowntree himself had said that it did not bind trustees to anything. However, trustees were chosen because the existing trustees thought that they were the right sort of people. In that way, perhaps, the trusts developed, as, indeed, had the Rowntrees themselves. They had encompassed the Gladstonian Liberalism of the high Victorian period, as well as the New Liberalism of the early twentieth century, and had both reflected and made possible the changes in Liberal thought and policy during their lifetimes. Both Shutt and Walker gave confidence that this legacy was in safe hands, and the range of activities supported should continue to inspire Liberal thinkers and activists. What had changed, however, as Packer noted, was that it no longer seemed possible to be both an industrialist and a social investigator.

David Cloke is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group's committee.

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Liberalism, peace and the First World War

Liberal Democrat History Group meeting, 30 June 2014,
National Liberal Club, with Louise Arimatsu and Robert
Falkner; chair: Martin Horwood
Report by Douglas Oliver

THREE DAYS AND a full century after Gavrilo Princip's Sarajevo 'shot that was heard around the world', the Liberal Democrat History Group and Liberal International met at the National Liberal Club to discuss the enduring legacy of the First World War on liberalism and the Liberal Party, and the broader implications that the catastrophic conflict had on liberal notions of international law, financial progress and peace. The panel also discussed the growing liberal international movement, which had its roots in the immediate years preceding the war and was left shaped by its outcome.

Appropriately, the discussion was held in the club's Lloyd George Room, and the panel and audience reflected actively on the role the Welsh prime minister and other Liberals played in the years of war and in the controversial peace that followed. As the war dragged on, the conflict put the party under enormous existential strain, and the internal and external political pressures inflicted on it may well have contributed to its eventual eclipse by the Labour Party.

Liberal Democrat MP for Cheltenham, Martin Horwood, chaired the event and discussed the influence that Lloyd George biographer and disciple Ken Morgan had had on the development of his own political philosophy as an Oxford undergraduate. Horwood today chairs the party's International Affairs Committee at Westminster and stated that the enduring spectre of despotism and human rights abuse gave liberals a lot of work, just as it had to the likes of Asquith, Grey, Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson, in the early twentieth century.

In his opening remarks, Horwood mused on the sometimes apparently stochastic nature of history, evinced by the seemingly eccentric circumstances of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand's demise. The heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne might have survived his visit to Bosnia

in June 1914 had his chauffeur not made an unpropitious detour into a Sarajevo cul-de-sac, where his armed Serbian assassin happened by chance to be standing. As it was, the bloody act which killed both the archduke and his wife, with only two bullets, set off a deadly domino chain of diplomatic escalation, which led to world war.

With the benefit of hindsight, the narrative of inevitable passage to war – including the re-arming of the British and Germans and the strains in the aging Austrian and Ottoman Empires – might perhaps seem easily persuasive. However, as Professor Falkner and Louise Arimatsu of Chatham House both pointed out, war might well have been avoided. Indeed, to many liberal political economists of the time, up to and including 1914, conflict seemed philosophically unthinkable.

As the panel explained, the previous ninety-nine years since Waterloo saw a period of relative European peace not seen on the European continent for many centuries – along with widespread improvement in economic circumstances for the vast bulk of its citizens. Macauley's works set the tenor for an optimistic trend in Liberal philosophical outlook, but this trend ought not to be seen in isolation. As the world economy became ever more integrated in a way foreseen by the likes of Smith, it seemed that war was sufficiently beyond the pale of individual as well as mutual self-interest that its occurrence in Europe would be avoided. As Falkner pointed out, the language of the great Liberals Locke and Cobden was often coloured by metaphors of peace, not just material security, and this remained a touchstone for the party throughout the period.

However, war followed swiftly in summer 1914, with the two groups of countries bound inflexibly by international treaty. Meanwhile, Liberal Internationalist attempts to stop or even merely blunt its excesses had apparently

limited results. In the context of the end of the Belle Époque, the unfashionable prophesy of Edward Grey, from 1914, that 'the lights had gone out in Europe' was rendered all the more tragic upon the panel's reflection. That said, both Arimatsu and Faulkner spoke optimistically about the legacy of Liberal Internationalism, a movement whose potency now owes much to the traumatic milieu in which it was originally conceived.

Falkner spoke of the vestigial effects of the conflict on his native Germany and how its shadow subtly coloured his own childhood in Bavaria, many decades later. In his boyhood, he had been partially looked after by a local woman whose husband had been badly injured in the war, and was hence unable to have children. He spoke of her conspicuous tendency to preserve rations and material goods in a way that was indicative of a deep habit developed in a time of scarcity and uncertainty, a habit that he had inherited to this day. The mark of memory was stubborn, as well as painful, for much of the European continent.

Falkner defined liberal internationalists as being those who value individual rights wherever they may be, even outside their own countries. As such, Liberals had a cosmopolitan outlook, and believed that the individual should be allowed to flourish anywhere in the globe. Liberal internationalists did not believe that *realpolitik* was all that should be employed in international objectives and that peace, justice, the betterment of individual rights around the world were critical. Whilst they were pragmatic about the value of the nation state, they were ultimately 'activist' in outlook and restless to improve individual opportunity and human rights where possible. Liberal internationalists were part of a progressive creed, and didn't just believe in more of the same in terms of war.

Falkner juxtaposed liberal internationalism with what he termed social internationalism. The latter wished to 'remake the world' on a socialist basis and with utopian goals, and was linked to international political networks. Liberal internationalists were more committed to protecting human rights from abuses such as torture, whilst emphasising a practical attitude to

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realpolitik. He also differentiated it from the closely related concept of liberal pacifism, which had opposed all forms of war, including the First World War, from the outset. Liberal internationalism was also associated with but distinct from the late-Victorian Liberal imperialist movement of Joseph Chamberlain, which offered a more statist domestic policy in reaction to the classical economic policy of Gladstone.

Perhaps not uniquely in the field of liberal scholarship, Falkner stated that the practical application of liberal internationalism was ambiguous. With a keenness to empathise with the individual need, Falkner argued that liberal internationalists could be argued to be proponents for and against intervention. Falkner argued that its philosophical descendants in the early twenty-first century in Britain probably included both Charles Kennedy and Tony Blair, who took markedly differing stances on the Iraq invasion, but based both their arguments upon an explicit humanitarian basis.

Liberal internationalists would also potentially give different answers to a number of questions. Should all war be avoided at all costs? Cobden said yes, others no. Where the democratic will of the people was for war, even on a non-liberal basis such as nationalism, would it be liberal to oppose it? Should so-called 'civilised' nineteenth-century nations seek 'liberal reform' in less democratic countries, or seek to preserve peaceful co-existence? Whilst William Gladstone spoke of foreign intervention, such as the attack on Alexandria in Egypt in the 1880s, as the 'Duty of England', there was no settled opinion, by the start of the First World War, of what liberal internationalism was.

Falkner therefore termed liberal internationalism a 'broad church', with varied goals that were at times ill defined: 'there was no simple blueprint'. Nor could the movement that characterised it be classified as belonging to an easily discernible faction: in the British context, it straddled both the Liberals and the emerging Labour Party. Proponents during the period of the First World War included Norman Angell and Edmund Morel, who became important figures in the Labour Party in the interwar

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period, after leaving the Liberal Party in part because of the war. Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia, and the influential economist John A. Hobson had also already migrated to the Independent Labour Party before hostilities commenced. Each had been significant players in the Union of Democratic Control, which, whilst not exclusively pacifist, harshly criticised what it perceived as the military dominance of governments at the outset of war, and became increasingly critical of both sides, as the conflict became more bloody and protracted. However current liberal internationalism is, in Falkner's opinion, articulated with most zest by politicians in the right-hand corner of British politics, including those Conservative MPs who were influenced by the American neo-conservative movement to intervene in Iraq.

Three concepts underlined liberal international thought in the pre-war period according to Falkner. First was what he called 'harmony of interest' – or 'common interest' as outlined by Adam Smith – and is the notion that people do not naturally seek out war and conflict. Further, Falkner stated, this tendency was reinforced by the view that the natural progression from an agrarian to an industrial society had increased the potential opportunity cost that could accrue from conflict. Second was the notion that individual rights led to greater collective rights and success – an idea influenced by Kant's notion that democracies were unlikely to engage in war. Similarly, Thomas Paine had stated his belief that wars were typically rooted in monarchical self-interest; modern republics were less likely to go to war. Finally, liberal internationalists were committed to the rule of law, which was felt to be important as a form of defence of the individual from the state. This view had been expressed by liberal thinkers ranging from Jeremy Bentham to Woodrow Wilson, and was seen as a key tool for taming the state.

Falkner emphasised that, although liberal internationalists were unenthusiastic about the war from its very outset, they did accept it. Many liberal internationalists felt that the allied cause was necessary to preserve international law and the integrity of Belgium; there were no liberals arguing on behalf

of the German side. However, this began to change as the war went on. H. G. Wells coined the phrase 'war to end all wars' in 1914, but by 1916 he spoke of it as 'not being clearly of light against darkness, but wholesome instincts in a nightmare; the world is not really awake', and his ambivalence was indicative of a growing mind set: as the war went on, the memory of its initial purpose was diluted by the apparently senseless nature of the continuing slaughter. Wells' point was not that war should be opposed without equivocation, but indicated, instead, a desperate urge to reduce its evil when it was impossible to avoid.

Falkner concluded with three points about the conflict's legacy upon liberalism. The first was that the idea that trade could be used to guarantee peace was greatly challenged and consequently the notion of free trade was diminished in the post-war period. Duncan Brack of this journal contested this, pointing out that the importance of free trade remained underscored by a range of factors, including the Liberal contribution to the Bretton Wood talks on free trade, the Liberal Party's commitment to the common market and EU, and the party's enduring interest and celebration of Richard Cobden and John Bright. Whilst Falkner accepted this, he felt that the optimistic narrative of the Victorian period was never re-established and that when free trade was talked about after 1945, it was no longer framed as squarely within the context of peace. Second, Falkner stated that he felt the old notion that democratic states were inherently more inclined toward peace was challenged, and that as a result they opted for a more interventionist approach in later years. The growth in state planning in the 1920s was also seen to weaken this view. Finally, though international law became more salient and more deeply reified during the interwar period, the effectiveness of the League of Nations was clearly a disappointment. That said, the United Nations' success after 1945 gave strong reasons for optimism and perhaps offered a sweeter form of irony, as the liberal project came in to fruition.

Whilst Gladstone's views were clearly coloured by his own theistic

inclinations, they were perhaps also influenced by the growing dissemination of news media in the Victorian period – a factor that has increased to an ever greater degree to the present day – with the result that the domestic audience has come to feel an ever more potent sense of human empathy for individual suffering, wherever it might occur in the world. Whilst Gladstone's Midlothian words about the universal 'sanctity of life' in the mud huts of Afghanistan were richly evocative, they were ahead of their time, as shown by the enduring public concern today about Human Rights around the world.

Louise Arimatsu opened her discussion by highlighting the Serbian response to Austria's ultimatum of July 1914. Whilst it gave Serbia little option to avoid war, the Serbs themselves responded by referring the standoff to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. Offering her own counterfactual, had the international framework been stronger, or had the Austrians been slightly more willing, maybe the period 1914–18 could have been remembered in the context of international law as being one of constant deliberation by the PCA.

Nonetheless, Arimatsu argued that, despite the tragedy of the war and the damage inflicted on liberal dreams of indefinite peace, the period ultimately laid the groundwork for the system of international law – including the UN Charter system – that greatly shapes today's conflicts and our response to them. Indeed, despite the perceived futility of the pre-war Hague treaties, the war damaged the case for the existing order and the pre-war classical model of might as right.

Arimatsu delineated the challenge faced by Liberal International in the form of the constant dilemma that, in order to solve war, liberals must be willing to threaten violence as a deterrent for violence; in other words, to use a cure potentially as damaging as the disease itself. This had led, Arimatsu felt, to a necessary confusion about whether effective means to solve human rights crises in an international context can ever properly be considered 'liberal'. In terms of finding a solution to this ambiguity, Arimatsu felt that a 'liberal' solution to an issue of international law

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always had to be one that championed 'pluralism' at the expense of 'anti-pluralism'.

Arimatsu spoke of the importance of the post-1648 classical model of international relations. The Peace of Westphalia had been an important stepping stone in the transition from the city state toward the modern European nation state; by the late nineteenth century, relations were largely decided based on relative power, or as Geoffrey Best remarked, it was 'War governed by power'.

However, two trends emerged during the period to change such thinking. The rapid growth of European economies in the nineteenth century led to ever-greater economic interdependence as countries developed their industrial base and sought to exploit gains from trade with one another. Financial connections led to legal and political linkages and it was felt that these could make war less likely. The second separate strand were the overlapping liberal movements throughout the century, including campaigns against the slave trade, for women's suffrage and other peace movements. With both factors moulding a zeitgeist, it was no surprise that Czar Nicholas II of Russia sought to call a halt to the arms race. The 1899 and 1907 Conferences in The Hague sought to reduce the chance of war, but the impetus was nonetheless pragmatic and was also based on the idea of softening the impact of war when it inevitably did occur. Arimatsu highlighted the legacy of the 1899 and 1907 Hague Peace Conferences and the concept of 'codification'. The first aimed to reduce armaments such as poisoned gas, soft bullets, naval mines and the use of balloons to drop bombs. The latter focused on conventions for war on land and sea and for the settlement of disputes arising from war. The Permanent Court of Arbitration that arose was the first of its kind, and exists to this day.

The interwar period saw the advent of Wilson's League of Nations. Whilst it was not ultimately successful, it was a radical departure from the previous, ad hoc approach to international law, and was influential upon the UN Charter system. Meanwhile, more formal attempts to codify POW status, to properly discriminate

combatants from non-combatants, and to delineate war claims, maritime neutrality, asylum and extradition, were being explicated for the first time. Each of these principles has become pervasive and influential, if not universal, today.

Arimatsu argued that, given the bloodshed of the First and Second World War, it was easy with hindsight to dismiss the achievements of liberal internationalism in the period. However, she pointed out that it is the nature of any law that breaches occur and that the real test of a law is how such breaches are dealt with, rather than whether they are universally upheld from the outset. In the early twenty-first century, we now expect offenders, such as those accused of war crimes in the Western Balkans, to be punished for breaching international law.

Although the Third Hague Peace Conference was cancelled as world war began, the war led to ever-greater demands for a more humane and pluralistic approach, cultivated from roots in the pre-war Liberal International movement. The enduring legacy of the movement today, Arimatsu said, proves that it was not a failure a century ago.

As the meeting moved on to questions, there was a greater focus on the post-war period. It was asked whether the Versailles Treaty, with its punitive peace and heavy burden of reparations, much criticised and often cited as a cause of the Second World War, was a failure of 'liberal thought'. Falkner accepted that it was, and that despite the presence of liberal-minded leaders like Lloyd George and Wilson, the punishing agenda of French Premier Clemenceau did indeed result in a damaging settlement. That said, Falkner felt it was clear that the lesson had been learned by 1945 and that the generous attitude of the allies to the rebuilding of Europe indicated a belated triumph of liberal thinking.

Jonathan Fryer asked whether discussion of the war had fallen into a Eurocentric trap of excessive focus on the events on the Western Front, at the expense of what was occurring in the Middle East. As the Ottoman Empire fractured, were the Balfour Declaration and the much-criticised Sykes-Picot agreement perhaps the most significant legacy to international affairs, given

that both had received much coverage in the summer of 2014? Whilst Falkner accepted that the Middle East had experienced a difficult century, he felt it was necessary for us to live with historical mistakes and to make the best of them and that it would be a mistake to think we could go back to previous borders. Citing a recent Michael Ignatieff article in the *Financial Times* which spoke of his aversion to secession, Falkner felt it was worth recognising that 'every new nation creates a new minority group'.

Challenging Arimatsu's sanguine tone about the Liberal International legacy, Simon Drage asked if the apparently widespread use of drones by the Obama administration was proof that international law and oversight remained weak today. Arimatsu argued that, despite initial uncertainty about Pakistan, in the case of operations both there and in Yemen, it was clear that both countries had invited the Americans to intervene; in the case of the latter, the encouragement was forthright. Whilst liberals might query the approach of those individual governments, at the internationalist level, a structure was in place that respected national sovereignty and process of law.

Arimatsu concluded by saying that liberal internationalism was perhaps best understood as a state of mind. Whilst Blair might have asserted a commitment to personal

freedom in 2003, his anti-pluralistic actions were indicative of an outlook counter to the idea of liberal internationalism. That said, the international landscape was shaped profoundly today by the activities of those people inside and outside the UK Liberal Party in the internationalist movement who wished to foster a stronger peace, or at least a better war.

Falkner's conclusion was most optimistic about the future. For all its manifest contradictions, and the difficulties inherent in the so-called 'Right to Protect', international liberalism had changed the discourse of international affairs for the better. He concluded that 'we are all liberal internationalists now'.

As the ninety minute meeting drew to a close, Martin Horwood remarked on the myriad of issues the discussion had not even touched upon, as evidence of the complexity of what had been discussed: the Bolshevik revolution was not even mentioned, nor the effects of the conflict on Africa and Asia. Horwood said the fact that the topic was still relevant and emotive a century later, proved that the apparently ancient liberal battle to foster individual creativity and heterogeneity – against the foes of absolutism and despotism across the world – still had a long way to go.

Douglas Oliver is the Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

Democrats' handling of sexual harassment allegations. In fact, it comes from p. 36 of Dr Elizabeth Evans' book, *Gender and the Liberal Democrats – Representing Women?*, which is based largely on doctoral research undertaken between 2005 and 2009.

Despite the differing context of their report and doctoral research respectively, Helena Morrissey and Elizabeth Evans share a fundamental conclusion: that there is a woman-unfriendly culture in the Liberal Democrats. Morrissey (p. 57) notes that 'the Party (and politics generally) is struggling to genuinely develop an encouraging environment for women', while Evans argues that 'despite the equal opportunity rhetoric, the party is an institution embedded in a masculine ethos and ideology' in which there is a 'persistent privileging of male norms and values' (p. 146).

For both, the most glaring – but by no means only – manifestation of this cultural problem has been the continuing failure to elect more women Liberal Democrat MPs. It is this failure which leads Evans to ask whether Liberal Democrats are 'representing women'.

In answering the question she poses herself, Evans structures her empirical evidence – quantitative and qualitative data, including interviews with parliamentarians, candidates and senior staff – around three key criteria:

- descriptive representation (numbers of women in specified senior roles);
- substantive representation (the extent to which the party's policies may be described as 'feminist'); and
- symbolic representation (whether women are presented as 'tokens').

Evans finds the party most wanting in relation to the first and third of these criteria. She notes that, despite comprising approximately half the membership, women are largely absent from senior voluntary and staff roles. A senior party official is quoted remarking that 'Women do the work but aren't represented at decision-making level' (p. 32). Even at the grassroots, Evans finds 'an inherent gender bias within local parties which seek to reinforce the traditional sexual division of labour' (p. 148). Women are more likely to be baking cakes

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Women and the Liberal Democrats

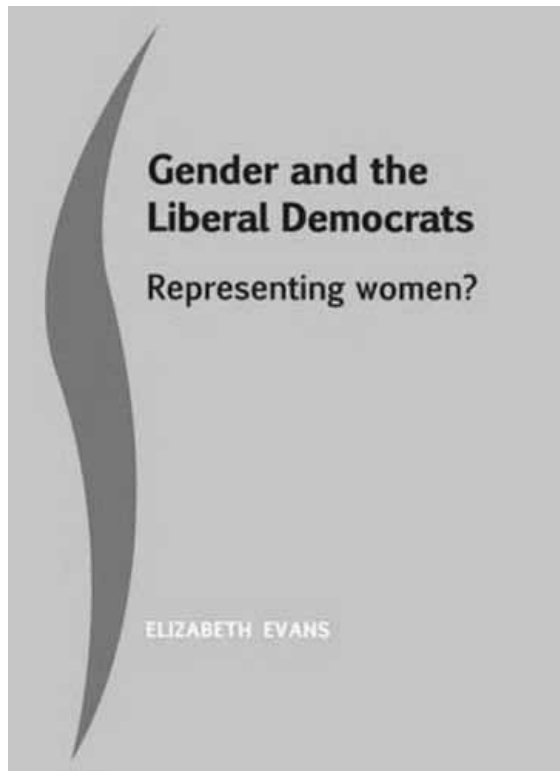
Dr Elizabeth Evans, *Gender and the Liberal Democrats – Representing Women?* (Manchester University Press, 2011)

Review by **Dinti Batstone**

I just worry that the way the party behaves as an employer does not reflect our policies, I seethe about it. It's a wider cultural thing and a couple of senior people at the top don't think there's a problem but there is. There is a major problem.

That's obvious to anyone who sees Cowley Street close up.

BUT FOR THE reference to Cowley Street, this quote could have come straight out of Helena Morrissey's report last year into the Liberal



and running raffles than voting as delegates to party conference.

The handful of women who have successfully made it into senior positions are too often deployed in a tokenistic way. Evans observes that photographs chosen for the last three general election manifestos reinforce 'the gendered identification of MPs as male, whilst voters and members of the public are codified as female' (p. 138) and argues convincingly that the party could better deploy its women parliamentarians to convey the message that women can be successful Liberal Democrat politicians. Her overarching conclusion is that pro-women policies are not sufficient for the party to be able to claim that it represents women: 'the party's policies, however feminist, are ultimately undermined by a lack of women MPs' (p. 126).

The book also considers in detail the controversial question of whether under-representation at a parliamentary level is driven primarily by supply-side (women not coming forward) or demand-side (women not being selected) factors. This is where her argument is at its weakest. Whilst acknowledging that 'there is reciprocity between supply-side and demand-side factors' (p. 75), and noting that labour-intensive campaigning techniques mean 'that time affects both the supply and demand of women

candidates' (p. 81), Evans nevertheless glosses over these complexities to conclude unequivocally that 'the party is suffering from demand-side rather than supply-side problems vis-à-vis women candidates'. This un-nuanced view seems largely to be based on a flawed assumption that the mere fact of being on the 'approved list' of candidates is indicative of a genuine and pressing desire to stand for parliament. In fact, many women (and men) go through the approval process without any serious intention of standing in the next election, let alone subsequent elections. For them, going through the 'approval' process is merely dipping a toe in the water.

More worryingly, Evans' unstinting attachment to the demand-side worldview means that she fails to engage with the very serious issue of candidate attrition. Many 'approved' women decide after one or two elections that they will not stand again. While this is understandable given the enormous personal sacrifices entailed in making a serious run for parliament, it deprives the party of a key talent pool of women with the experience to win tough contests (a problem more acute for Liberal Democrats than for parties with 'safe' seats). Evans' use of raw numbers of 'approved' women as evidence for her assertion that the Liberal Democrats do not have a supply-side problem fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the 'approved list': it may feed the candidate pool, but it is certainly not a proxy for it. Moreover, her claim that the party's Campaign for Gender Balance 'places emphasis on increasing the number of women on the approved list, rather than encouraging those women already on the list to apply for seats' is simply factually incorrect.

Also missing from Evans' analysis is an exploration of the role that women party members may play on the demand side. Evans notes that 'some (female candidates with children) felt they were in a Catch-22 situation: either they went for it and got criticised for being a 'neglectful' or 'bad' parent, or they accepted that they wouldn't be able to stand until their children were older' (p. 96). However, she does not probe the extent to which these feelings may be

reinforced or diminished by interactions with female party members. While quoting Liberal Democrat peer Paul Tyler's observation that 'women candidates are asked questions that would not be asked of a man in a comparable position' (p. 74), Evans fails to consider who is asking those questions and why. Anecdotal evidence from candidates mentored by Campaign for Gender Balance suggests these questions most often come from older women, reflecting a patriarchal view of family life deeply rooted in wider society. Evans initially dismisses societal factors as having 'little impact upon the election of women MPs' (p. 102), yet later argues that 'an increase (in the prominence of Liberal Democrat women as role models) would undoubtedly symbolise that it is possible for women to overcome the various societal and institutional barriers to election' (p. 144).

Evans asserts that 'there are insufficient critical actors working to feminise the party' (p. 151). While acknowledging the efforts of a few individuals, she criticises a lack of joined-up thinking, strategic direction and leadership from the top. She highlights the relatively low status, funding and membership of the party's two women's organisations (CGB and WLD, merged into Liberal Democrat Women last year) and sees this as an area in which the influence of SDP feminists was diluted following the 1988 merger with the Liberal Party. The evidence she cites for this is credible, but her characterisation of Liberalism at times descends into caricature: 'Liberal ideology remains based upon the writings of a group of male writers whose political philosophies, whilst dealing with equality and liberty, are not, on the whole, concerned with women and achieving equality for women'. The chapter on ideology opens with a paragraph from the *Orange Book*, quotes at length from the works of Conrad Russell, and yet makes only a passing mention of Mill's *The Subjection of Women*. On this narrowly precarious base, Evans constructs an argument that comes very close to stating outright that feminism and liberalism are fundamentally irreconcilable.

This is a shame as it occasionally leaves the reader feeling that there

may be an element of confirmation bias in some of the data presentation and interpretation. This tendency is most evident in Evans' framing of the issue of female representation almost exclusively through the prism of All-Women Shortlists (AWS). Data that does not fit with her worldview that Liberal Democrats have a demand-side problem is heavily caveated: 'Liberal Democrats selected the largest percentage of women in their vacant (2010) seats; however it is important to note that this is on much smaller numbers, and following the election, the party has the lowest percentage of women MPs' (p. 9). In the last electoral cycle, without AWS, Liberal Democrats selected women in 37 per cent of the party's most winnable seats and four out of seven retiring incumbent seats. The fact that these women were not elected in the constituencies where they stood can hardly be attributed to a demand-side problem within the Liberal Democrats.

A more nuanced approach to the intersection between feminism and liberalism might have explored why women in winnable seats did not get elected and considered what mechanisms other than AWS Liberal Democrats could use to attract, retain and elect more women candidates. It might also have made more

of areas of success (until recently the European Parliament, where for several years there were more female than male Liberal Democrat MEPs) as well as exploring why successive party leaders have failed to use a mechanism wholly within their gift to appoint more women to the House of Lords.

Despite some shortcomings, Elizabeth Evans' book is to be strongly welcomed as the first serious scholarly analysis of female under-representation in the Liberal Democrats. For long-standing party activists it paints in forensic detail an all too familiar picture of intra-generational tensions, presentism, grinding low-level discrimination and egalitarian rhetoric unmatched by tangible outcomes. I hope Dr Evans will revisit the issue after the next election and find that the party's culture has improved. Meanwhile, implementing Helena Morrissey's recommendations would be a good start.

Dinti Batstone is a member of the Liberal Democrat Federal Policy Committee and former Vice-Chair of Campaign for Gender Balance. A former councillor and parliamentary candidate, she has mentored and trained many women candidates, and led a review of candidate retention for the party's Federal Executive.



of Liberal Democrat leadership to define himself as 'centre-left', established so little rapport with those in the party who defined themselves in the same way.

He was, as Torrance's account reminds us, politically ruthless, and that was not necessarily a fault when used to secure real political advances. But detachment was a fatal flaw when, for example, it came to negotiating the merger with the SDP. The SDP leadership went into the negotiations determined to promote an SDP position; David Steel failed to back his own team when they presented a Liberal case. That was how the problems arose with the famous 'dead parrot' policy document. The book quotes a suggestion that I was trying to set a trap for Steel. In fact I had assumed that we would, with difficulty, eventually arrive at an acceptable compromise by negotiation, but that if his own side told him it was not achievable he would back us. I should have realised that concluding the negotiations mattered much more to him than the content of a document that he had probably barely read. Incidentally, even if there was no other reason for buying this book – although there are several – it is worth it for another sight of the priceless photo

It's Boy David

David Torrance, *David Steel: Rising Hope to Elder Statesman* (Biteback Publishing, 2012)

Review by Alan Beith

THERE IS NOT a lot of scope for adding to the picture most Liberal Democrats have of David Steel, despite David Torrance's diligent examination of correspondence and papers, his interviews with politicians and his ability to put together a clear and thorough narrative. Indeed, the uncomplicated clarity of David Steel's personality makes new insights difficult to find. His political progression from Borders by-election star to presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament is detailed in the book, and it underlines the political courage of

his early campaigns on apartheid, on immigration and on abortion law reform, as well as the extent to which his considerable political skills benefitted the Liberal Party and the Liberal Democrats. His shortcomings are equally well known to readers of political biography: his impatience with policy and detail, his failure to turn his Liberal instincts into a more thoroughly Liberal analysis of political issues, and his detachment from the grassroots workers of the party he led. It was ironic that someone who was much more ready than the current generation

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which followed these negotiations, with several of us lined up behind Steel and MacLennan while they explained that the document would be ditched. As Paddy Ashdown put it – and the line up was his barmy idea – we looked like hostages about to be tortured. The facial expressions of Paddy, Malcolm Bruce, Alex Carlile, Charles Kennedy and Russell Johnston are the funniest thing since Monty Python.

A few things need correcting or qualifying for the record. The Ettrick Bridge meeting during the 1983 general election did indeed fail to secure agreement to drop the pretentious 'Prime Minister designate' status which had proved a liability in Roy Jenkin's uncharacteristically lacklustre election campaign; but the ensuing press coverage gave every impression that Steel had in practice taken over the role of campaign leader. Torrance claims that under Paddy Ashdown's leadership Steel was 'regularly deployed as an intermediary to prevent potential rows between Ashdown and his MPs': I have no such recollection. Steel was much more preoccupied with international politics and his plans for life after the Commons, including promoting the Scottish Parliament.

There is an interesting sidelight on Steel and the House of Lords. There was a proposal that peers

should be disqualified from sitting in the Scottish Parliament; Steel wrote opposing this restriction, seeing merit in an overlap 'pending reform of the Lords'. He has subsequently done his best to make sure that democratic Lords reform remains permanently in the pending tray, where it has been since 1911. Torrance describes his support for an appointed House as 'cautious' and 'realistic'. Others see it as wholly inconsistent not only with the platform on which he led the party but also with the reforming zeal on which his key earlier achievements were based.

David Steel helped to ensure Liberal survival in some very difficult times, and challenged the party to remember that its purpose is to achieve change, not merely to debate change. This book recounts the steps on the way, admits the flaws and the failings (including his problems with the cost of the Scottish Parliament building) and demonstrates that its subject is a good and able man, an extremely skilled communicator and a shrewd tactician who has given much to the party.

Sir Alan Beith has been the MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed since 1973. He was Liberal Chief Whip 1977–85, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party 1985–88 and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats 1992–2003.

individual human character and of social development. Ethology, the science of human character, was, says Rosen, at the centre of Mill's attempt 'to become a self-directing agent rather than a brute merely responding to internal or external stimuli' (p. 3). If this was the centre of Mill's intellectual concerns, it was because it also lay at the core of his personal ones. The internal brute instincts that Mill thought should be kept down were one's sexual urges. Self-direction required control of them as much as resistance to control by others. Mill's battle here was firstly against his father, who raised him to be the next generation's flag bearer for the Utilitarian creed; and then against Thomas Carlyle and Auguste Comte, both of whom sought to co-opt Mill to their respective campaigns. Mill managed to fight free against three opinionated and dominating men; against one attractive woman he did not. After one difference of opinion with his wife, he declared: 'As your feeling is directly contrary, mine is wrong and I give it up entirely'.¹

The basic point of Mill's ethology was that the individual could be improved and so society itself could advance. This led him to discuss the laws by which society

Reassessing John Stuart Mill

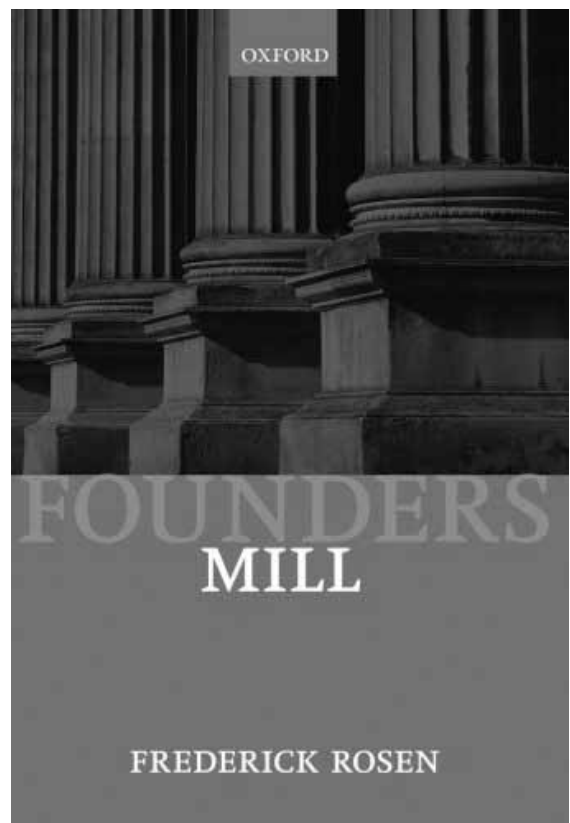
Frederick Rosen, *Mill* (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Review by **Michael Levin**

JOHN STUART MILL'S *Collected Works* comprise thirty-three volumes, many of which are around 500 pages long. It is a massive collection. However three writings in particular are best known to students of Mill. Foremost is *On Liberty*, 1859, with its influential argument for freedom of speech. The other two writings appeared in 1861: *Utilitarianism*, Mill's attempt to modify the creed that he had been brought up with; and *Considerations on Representative Government*, with its advocacy of

proportional representation. Frederick Rosen's argument is that these famous works 'do not fit neatly together' (p. 1) and in any case misrepresent much of what Mill was really about. He suggests that putting matters right requires attention to two earlier works through which Mill originally attained fame: his *System of Logic* of 1843 and *Principles of Political Economy* of 1848.

Rosen believes that Mill was more concerned to be a scientist than a moralist. In the *Logic* Mill attempted a science of both



moved forward and to praise the eccentric French intellectual Auguste Comte as the only person to have previously attempted such a task. He described Comte as 'one of the great intellects of our time, whom I regard with the most esteem and admiration' (p. 100). Comte had argued that societies moved forward through theological and metaphysical stages before reaching the ultimate positivist one. He believed in phrenology, a once popular pseudo-science that now seems risible, and also practised what he called 'cerebral hygiene', that is not reading anyone else's writings so as to keep his own mind clear. Ultimately Mill came to reject Comte's vision of a society where the rulers declare they know best and so can do the thinking for everyone else, whilst Comte's assumption of female inferiority ran directly counter to Mill's ethology. Rosen reminds us that Mill's falling out with Comte has left a much stronger impression than his earlier significant deference.

In the concluding section Rosen outlines the thinkers who, in his opinion, provided Mill's intellectual roots. They are overwhelmingly Greek and British. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, James Mill, Bentham and

Adam Smith are among those mentioned. This categorisation is unusual in downplaying the French thinkers Mill admired. He once wrote that in 'political philosophy the initiative belongs to France at this moment' because of 'the far more elevated terrain on which the discussion is engaged'.² Rosen's elevation of Comte is accompanied by the implicit downgrading of other Frenchmen whose writings were also significantly influential: in Henri de Saint-Simon, Mill found the division of history into critical and organic periods; in François Guizot, a sense of the development of civilisation and its causes; and in Alexis de Tocqueville, an account of how modern democracy gives rise to a dangerous mass society.

One of the pleasures of the political economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is that it covered much broader ground than much of the academic economics that succeeded it. So Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* is economics within a general social science context. Rosen makes the case that the foundations of *On Liberty* are here clearly apparent, most significantly in the belief that a majority could be despotic. Where, then, does this leave *On Liberty*? It seems

to be undermined on all sides: its arguments were elaborated earlier and its principles are best understood by their later application in Mill's *The Subjection of Women*, 1869. As for its contents, Rosen rejects the interpretation of Mill as someone who believed that 'freedom of expression alone would lead to truth' (p. 9) and also repudiates the notion that the designation of a category of self-regarding actions can serve to defend individual liberty. This book, then, stands out among recent scholarship for its downgrading of the work that others have seen as Mill's most durable contribution.

Rosen wants Mill regarded 'more as a profound "contemporary" thinker than as an obscure Victorian moralist' (p. 259) and is bold enough to suggest where he can be placed in terms of today's political issues. We are told that Mill would have rejected the idea that regime change in Iraq could lead to democracy and would also have denied the view that greater economic growth would increase happiness. What about multiculturalism? Rosen thinks that Mill would have been against it in that multiculturalists are illiberal in accepting despotism within the family. We here touch upon one

of the most difficult and fascinating issues in liberal theory, still not sufficiently addressed in recent writings – that of the extent to which liberals should tolerate other's illiberal practices.

Rosen does not claim originality but makes it clear that he picks up on the long-neglected judgments of Alexander Bain, Mill's close friend and first biographer. Following Bain, Rosen thinks Mill's *Logic* was his 'greatest work' (p. 101) yet ends on rather a downbeat assessment of its value: 'Even where he is open to criticism, Mill provides an excellent guide to logic and methodology, though his conclusions or their applications to numerous topics seem in retrospect to be mistaken' (p. 259). This book is significantly different from recent commentaries on Mill and as such is likely to be the focus of much attention.

Michael Levin is Emeritus Reader in Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London, and author of J. S. Mill on Civilization and Barbarism (Routledge, 2004).

- 1 Quoted in P. Rose, *Parallel Lives* (London, 1994), p. 139.
- 2 *John Stuart Mill Collected Works*, vol. xxxiii (Toronto, 1986), p. 446.

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Ben Spoor MP (*The Times*, 27 December 1928), whose chronic alcoholism had led to heart and liver problems and to his being found dead in his hotel room, quotes the Coroner as saying that he 'had actually been certified insane ... and confined in homes.' How is it that this had not led to the forfeiture of his seat? Spoor was the Labour Government's Chief Whip during its first government in 1924 and his state of health was disastrous for the day-to-day organisation of the difficult parliamentary arithmetic needed to maintain the government.

Michael Meadowcroft

Elections of the 1920s

The report by Graham Lippitt (*Journal of Liberal History* 82, spring 2014) on the meeting on 10 February 2014 on the general elections of 1922, 1923 and 1924 prompts me to have a closer look at the Liberal and Labour statistics for 1923.

Taking account of the Liberal and Labour MPs elected unopposed and assuming that the votes for such candidates would otherwise have been at least as much as for such candidates in other constituencies, I would reconstruct the 'crude' statistics as follows:

1923 General Election –

Labour 4,439,780 + 41,414
(adjustment for unopposed returns) = 4,481,194
Liberal 4,301,481 + 106,090
(adjustment for unopposed returns) = 4,407,571
Accordingly, the gap between Labour and Liberal was, in reality, much less than the 'crude' 138,299, although allowance would have to be made for some other facts.

Labour did not contest 176 constituencies and Liberals did not contest 146 constituencies in Great Britain. G.M.L. Davies (Christian Party, University of Wales) and O.E. Mosley (Independent, Harrow) took

the Labour Whip and Rhys Hopkin Morris (Independent Liberal, Cardiganshire) took the Liberal Whip in the new Parliament.

I take the view that Asquith might have, at least, addressed the possibility of forming a minority Liberal administration in early 1924.

Dr Sandy S. Waugh

A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

GREAT LIBERAL THINKERS: LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

Liberalism has been built on more than three centuries' work of a wide range of political thinkers and writers, and the aspirations of countless human beings who have fought for freedom, democracy, the rule of law and open and tolerant societies. What can we learn from these thinkers and their ideas for the future direction of the Liberal Democrats? **Baroness Liz Barker, Alan Beith MP, Mark Pack and John Pugh MP** nominate their favourite thinkers, and draw lessons for the future. Chair: **Malcolm Bruce MP**. Twitter: #LDHGFrige.

The meeting marks the launch of a new History Group booklet, *Liberal Thinkers*, containing concise summaries of the lives and thoughts of the greatest Liberal thinkers, from John Milton to John Rawls, including John Stuart Mill, Tom Paine, L. T. Hobhouse and many more.

7.45pm, Sunday 5 October 2014

Picasso 2 room, Campanile Hotel, 10 Tunnel Street, Glasgow G3 8HL

(a few minutes' walk from the conference centre, and outside the secure area – no passes necessary)

Liberal Democrat History Group at Lib Dem conference

Visit the History Group's stand in the exhibition in the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre, Glasgow – stand D9. There you can:

- Take part in our annual Liberal history quiz. Exciting prizes to be won!
- Chat to stand-holders about your interests in Liberal history.
- Buy a copy of our latest booklet, *Liberal Thinkers*: £5 to *Journal* subscribers, £6 to everyone else.
- Buy any of our other short booklets: *Mothers of Liberty: Women who built British Liberalism*; *Liberal History: A concise history of the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats*; *Liberal Leaders of the 19th Century* and *Liberal Leaders since 1900*. Discounts for *Journal* subscribers.
- Buy any of our books: *Peace, Reform and Liberation: A History of Liberal Politics in Britain 1679–2011*; the *Dictionary of Liberal Quotations*, the *Dictionary of Liberal Thought*; and *Great Liberal Speeches*. Substantial discounts for *Journal* subscribers.
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