

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**.

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.