

## 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 George<sup>46</sup> 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.

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- 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](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7259197.stm)
- 6 See Registration of Political Parties Act, 1988 and Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act, 2000.
- 7 John Barnes, 'Party Colours', *Journal of Conservative History*, Summer 2004.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Information to the author from Sir David Steel (Baron Steel of Aikwood), 10 Dec. 2013
- 10 Geraint Howells, 1925–2004: Liberal MP for Cardigan 1974–83, Ceredigion and Pembroke North 1983–1992.
- 11 Martin Thomas, Lord Thomas of Gresford b.1937: Liberal candidate for Flintshire West 1964–1970.
- 12 Information to the author, 5 Mar. 2012
- 13 Interview with Lady Shirley Hooson, 16 Feb. 2014
- 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).
- 15 Raymond Campbell Paterson, *A Land Afflicted: Scotland and the Covenanter Wars 1638–1690* (John Donald, 1998), p. 26.
- 16 Frederick North, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.
  - 18 Ibid., p. 13.
  - 19 Mark Raymond Bonham Carter (Baron Bonham-Carter), 1922–1994, grandson of Liberal prime minister H. H. Asquith.
  - 20 Mark Pottle (ed.), *Daring to Hope: The Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter, 1946–69* (Weidenfield and Nicolson, 2000), pp. 199–200.
  - 21 Paul Tyler (Baron Tyler), b. 1941: Liberal MP for Bodmin, 1974 and North Cornwall, 1992–2005.
  - 22 F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1885–1918* (Macmillan Press, 1974), p. 238.
  - 23 Information to the author from Paul Tyler, 5 Mar. 2012.
  - 24 Information to the author from Michael Steed, 5 Mar. 2012
  - 25 Information to the author from William Wallace, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, 4 Mar. 2012
  - 26 Barnes, *Journal of Conservative History*.
  - 27 William Wallace (Baron Wallace of Saltaire), b. 1941.
  - 28 Information to the author from William Wallace, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, 4 Mar. 2012
  - 29 F. W. S. Craig, *British Parliamentary Election Results 1950–1970* (Political Reference Publications, 1971), p. 442.
  - 30 Sir Cyril Smith MBE, 1928–2010: Liberal MP for Rochdale 1972–1992.
  - 31 Information to the author from Michael Steed, 5 Mar. 2012.
  - 32 Michael Meadowcroft, b. 1942: Liberal MP for Leeds West 1983–87.
  - 33 <http://www.bramley.demon.co.uk/liberal.html>
  - 34 Information to the author from Michael Meadowcroft, 23 Mar. 2012.
  - 35 *The Times*, 13 Oct. 1964, p. 17.
  - 36 Information to the author from Michael Meadowcroft, 6 Mar. 2012.
  - 37 Information to the author from Michael Steed, 6 Mar. 2012.
  - 38 Block, *Source Book*, p. 78.
  - 39 Lady Violet Bonham Carter, Baroness Asquith of Yarnbury DBE, 1887–1969: daughter of prime minister H. H. Asquith.
  - 40 Mark Pottle (ed.), *Champion Redoubtable: The Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter, 1914–45* (Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1998), p. 113.
  - 41 Information to the author from Dr Sandy Waugh, author of *A Scottish Liberal Perspective: A Centenary Commemoration for Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, 1836–1908*, 26 Dec. 2013.
  - 42 Ivor Crewe and Anthony King, *SDP: The Birth, Life and Death of the Social Democratic Society* (OUP, 1995), p. 217.
  - 43 Charles Kennedy, b 1959: Leader of the Liberal Democrats, 1999–2006.
  - 44 Information to the author from Dr Sandy Waugh.
  - 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

**T**HE 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

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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.

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