

## The Liberals in Hampshire: Martin Kyrle's reminiscences

Martin Kyrle, *The Liberals in Hampshire – a Part(l)y History Part 1: Southampton 1958–65* (Sarsen Press, 2013)

Review by Mark Pack

**T**HERE HAS BEEN a recent and very welcome burst of histories of Liberal (Democrat) activism being published, such as Graham Tope's *A Life in Politics*, recording the contributions of people whose names would otherwise slip by the history books. In doing so, they paint a picture of what grassroots politics is actually like, often rather different from the sort of politics recorded in the memoirs of former ministers or analysed by political scientists. Martin Kyrle, a Liberal activist for over fifty years, is the latest to join this trend with a sixty-nine-page volume of his reminiscences and anecdotes, intended as the first volume in a series.

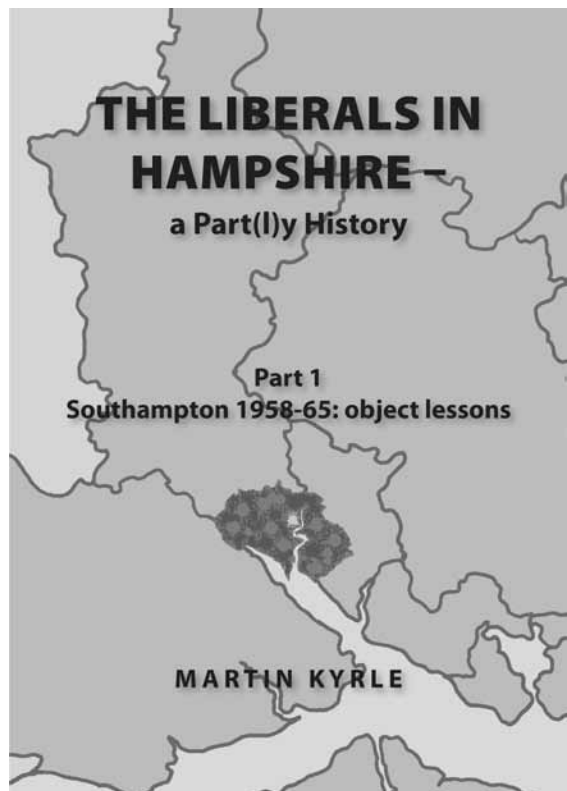
The collection tells the reader much about Martin, but this is not really an autobiography, for the tales jump about from one interesting event to another, giving a sense of what a small, often dysfunctional, political party organisation was like back in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than telling a continuous tale of his life.

He started off in Southampton, where 'attending the Executive Committee was seen [by other members] as an end in itself, not the means to one ... They saw nothing incongruous in spending

an evening once a month debating the finer points of party policy when there was no possibility of any of their ideas being implemented, and saw no reason to complement their debates by undertaking practical activity which might make implementation possible, e.g. by standing for election'. Many of the obstacles to political activity that Martin Kyrle encountered are all too familiar even now, such as an Executive meeting getting completely hung up on ticket pricing for a fundraising event, to the extent that the meeting descended into a shouting match. Though it is not only in politics that meetings have a tendency to spend huge amounts of time generating large volumes of heat over minor details.

One part of the historic record that the book preserves is the contribution to Liberal Party campaigning techniques of John Wallbridge and his THOR organisation system. (Alas, even Martin cannot recall the origin of the name THOR itself.) The book also reproduces several election leaflets from the time, showing how not everything has changed – education, hospitals and being local featured just as strongly then.

At times the semi-professional nature of the publication shows



through, but these are only small blemishes in what is a light, quick and enjoyable read.

*The Liberals in Hampshire – a Part(l)y History Part 1: Southampton 1958–65* by Martin Kyrle is priced at £5 plus two first class stamps. Orders should be emailed to [martinkyrle@fsmail.net](mailto:martinkyrle@fsmail.net).

*Dr Mark Pack worked at Liberal Democrat HQ from 2000 to 2009, and prior to that was frequently a volunteer member of the Parliamentary By-Election team. He is co-author of 101 Ways To Win An Election and of the party's General Election Agents Manual.*

# LETTERS

## Party colours

I was fascinated by Graham Lippatt's article on the history of party colours (*Journal of Liberal History* 84, autumn 2014). The suggestion that a movement from extremely diverse local choices of party colour to the present uniformity is

connected to the rise of colour television, on to which to project a national party identity, seems likely to be correct.

However, the article only concerned Liberals in Britain. In a European context the Liberal

colour scheme is more mixed. The official colours of the ALDE party are blue and yellow. In my experience, the media tend to use the yellow more often (such as in graphics showing seats held in the European Parliament) – although, on the

Colours used by Liberal parties in Europe		
Colour scheme	Number of member parties which use it	States in which those parties campaign
Blue	6	Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Luxembourg
Green	4	Netherlands, Croatia, Estonia, Sweden
Orange	3	Croatia, Lithuania, France
Yellow	2	Sweden, UK
Blue and yellow	2	Estonia, Germany
Blue and orange	2	Netherlands, Sweden
Blue and white	2	Lithuania, Catalonia
Magenta	2	Austria, Denmark
Blue and green	2	Slovakia, Slovenia
Yellow, red and green	1	Cyprus

ALDE website, at ALDE Congress and in other promotional materials blue is usually predominant.

Looking at parties that have seats in the ALDE Group in the 2014–19 European Parliament, the party colours are varied. In the following table, it should be remembered that many member states have more than one liberal party which may compete or collaborate at a domestic level, and may have the same or different colours, while working together in Brussels. I have included two French parties which sit as part of the ALDE group in Parliament but are not part of the wider ALDE Party.

The choice of official Liberal colour, reflecting state-level traditions and political history, thus varies across Europe, as Graham Lippiatt records that it once did across the UK. Blue is clearly the favourite and red almost entirely excluded. No doubt the wide variation will continue for some time yet.

*Antony Hook (MEP Candidate, Liberal Democrat, South East England, 2014)*

### Orkney & Shetland; 1872 Ballot Act (1)

Michael Steed was, of course, correct in writing that Orkney and Shetland was won by a Conservative in 1935 and 1945 (*Letters, Journal of Liberal History* 84, autumn 2014). However, the constituency also departed from its post-Reform Whig/Radical/Liberal tradition when it was won by a Tory in 1835 who served until 1837. Further, in 1900, Orkney & Shetland was won by John Cathcart Wason (Liberal

Unionist) who then defeated the incumbent Liberal MP. Wason, having departed from the Liberal Unionists, then successfully sought re-election, with Liberal and Liberal Unionist opposition, as an Independent Liberal at a by-election in 1902. Having then taken the Liberal Whip, he was re-elected as a Liberal in 1906 and in January and December 1910 and as a Coalition Liberal in 1918. After Wason's death in 1921, the constituency was represented, as from an uncontested by-election, by another Coalition Liberal who, as a National Liberal, was defeated by Sir Robert William Hamilton (Liberal) in 1922.

An interesting coincidence is that one of the pre-Reform MPs for Orkney & Shetland was Robert Baikie of Tankerness in Orkney, who was elected in 1780 but unseated on petition in 1781. When Jim Wallace, Liberal/Liberal Democrat MP for the constituency in 1983–2001 and Liberal Democrat MSP for Orkney in 1999–2007, was created a life peer in 2007, he took the title of Lord Wallace of Tankerness.

I would also comment on one of Michael Meadowcroft's queries about election counts in the same issue of the *Journal*.

At every count I have ever been at, from the Paisley by-election in April 1961 onwards, the papers from all the ballot boxes have been mixed before being sorted and counted by candidate. However, I recall that, after the Dumfries by-election in December 1963, it was reported at the next Scottish Liberal Party Council meeting by David Steel that in Dumfries the papers in each ballot box had been

sorted and counted by candidate – hence the votes by candidate in each burgh and rural polling district were known. The implication was that the returning officer was inexperienced.

I also recall John Bannerman saying that at the general election count in Inverness in 1955, he thought he had won until the postal votes were counted – so the postal papers must have been counted separately,

Incidentally, as from the recent Scottish Independence Referendum, there is an ongoing investigation as to how it was possible to get some idea of total YES and NO votes from batches of postal votes while they were being verified.

Prior to the 1872 Ballot Act, with open voting, things were very different. Thus, for example, I have a note of the votes – for Ramsay and for Campbell (the future Sir Henry CB) – in each of the five burghs in Stirling Burghs at both the by-election in April 1868 and, on an extended franchise, at the general election in November 1868. I also have a note of the votes as between different categories of graduates in the two Scottish University constituencies at the 1868 general election.

*Dr Sandy S. Waugh*

### 1872 Ballot Act (2)

Michael Meadowcroft (in *Letters, Journal of Liberal History* 84, autumn 2014) asks why, after the 1872 Ballot Act, it could be 'officially known' how individual votes had been cast, and wonders whether this was something peculiar to Wales. I think the answer to both questions may be: it wasn't, no.

In researching the Westmorland election of 1880 ('Ice in the centre of a glowing fire', *Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society*, 2008, pp. 219–40), I encountered local bigwig activists who claimed to have the exact figures for the distribution of votes at their particular polling station. These claims were, I think, based on intensive canvassing and telling, coupled with someone's desire to appear omniscient and important, rather than on illicit scrutiny of ballot papers.

*Andy Connell*