

Was such ‘pre-membering’ public adoration, politics or ego? While Bounous conceded that there may have been an element of personal vanity, for example in the corner stone of the Council House, the timing of the monuments was much more suggestive of politically motivated public demonstration. The clock tower in the Jewellery Quarter was timed in relation to his resignation from government and renewed his links to small businessmen. ‘Old Joe’, the tower at the university of which Chamberlain was a principal sponsor, served to distract from the Boer War but also reminded the community of his commitment to promoting education. There are more – and more prominent – monuments to Chamberlain than to John Bright or Tory hero Colonel Burnaby, each popular in his time.

The second day also included a short film covering Chamberlain’s career and an introduction to some of the library’s Chamberlain archives, including correspondence, photographs, posters and the local architect’s original plans for Highbury. It ended with a tour of Birmingham’s magnificent Council House led by some of the leading members of the current administration who showed some of the relics and artwork associated with Chamberlain and the council chamber in which he established his reputation.

In his book of essays, *Great Contemporaries*, Winston Churchill portrayed Joseph Chamberlain as a political weather maker, a man who created the agenda with which allies and foes were forced to comply – and this was the verdict most frequently repeated during the conference. Where delegates profited was in a greater understanding of the entrepreneurial spirit he employed to achieve his ends and the political culture of Victorian Birmingham which both shaped and sustained his endeavours.

Tony Little is the Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

¹ Peter Marsh’s speech is available at <http://www.newman.ac.uk/files/w3/media-centre/pdf/Peter%20Marsh.pdf?q=95>

² Available at <http://www.newman.ac.uk/media-centre/3596/conference-joseph-chamberlain-imperial-standard-bearer-national-leader-lo>

Liberal Thinkers

Conference fringe meeting, 5 October 2014, with Alan Beith, John Pugh, Liz Barker and Mark Pack; chair: Malcolm Bruce

Report by Douglas Oliver

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRAT History Group met on the Sunday night of the October Federal Conference to discuss ‘Liberal Thinkers’ in an event scheduled to tie in with the pamphlet of the same name released for the first time in Glasgow.

Musing upon his long involvement with the party, the discussion’s chair Malcolm Bruce – the outgoing MP for Gordon, appearing at his last autumn conference as a Westminster representative before his scheduled 2015 retirement – remarked that he was both an aficionado of liberal history as well as a living example of it. The fact that the Great Welsh Wizard, David Lloyd George, had lived for a few months after he was born was a useful reminder to himself that the present and past ultimately always fade in to one.

The Liberal Democrat History Group is always proud to laud the august partisan history of the Whig and Liberal Party, but also seeks, more widely, to highlight the breadth of thought and ideas represented by political thinkers of a liberal or liberal-minded disposition throughout time. With this in mind, *Liberal Thinkers* was conceived as a pamphlet intended to provide an accessible introduction to writers including John Locke, Adam Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, Richard Cobden, John Stuart Mill, L. T. Hobhouse, John Maynard Keynes, William Beveridge, and many more.

The four speakers introduced by Bruce were asked not only to discuss the works of the thinkers from the pamphlet that they found most impressive, but also to highlight the enduring legacy of the chosen writers’ work and to delineate their relevance to liberalism and the domestic and international political struggle of today.

Inspired by his own long service as MP for Berwick Upon Tweed, the opening speaker, Alan Beith, noted two other illustrious Liberals who had represented the constituency at Westminster within the

twentieth century: Foreign Secretary Edward Grey and the man often credited with designing the modern welfare state, Sir William Beveridge. Beith recalled that when he arrived in the area in the early 1970s, Beveridge’s ‘first-principles’ approach and reflective poise was still widely remembered by locals in their mutual corner of north-east England. Beveridge was known in the area for his sometimes philosophical village hall discursives; and whilst he did occasionally contribute to canvassing and leafletting efforts locally, he was unenthusiastic about the micro-level of politics, which likely contributed to his electoral defeat to the Conservatives in May 1945. Given his deeply academic and cerebral outlook, Beveridge was best suited to looking at the big issues of politics: Beith’s agent in the 1970s, Mrs Gregson, reported that Beveridge had confided in her, ‘If they want to know what I think, they should read my books.’

His most famous publication, *Social Insurance and Allied Services*, better known as 1942’s ‘Beveridge Report’, is often considered the blueprint for the welfare state, an assessment that Beith resiled from because of its simplicity. Whilst Beveridge’s ideas had been appropriated by social democrats and socialists, the man himself was definitively a liberal, being a pragmatist with an aversion to a top-down command structures. The Beveridge version of welfare, Beith felt, included a flavour of the mixed economy, as well as provision for input from the voluntary sector and friendly societies. The late twentieth-century welfare system that the Labour government designed was less diverse in approach, and was consequently more prone to bureaucracy and sclerosis.

The key hallmark of Beveridge’s method was, according to Beith, careful study and empirical analysis. If Beveridge had reflected today on such issues as the controversial ‘Bedroom Tax’, he would have

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felt it necessary to study its costs and benefits before deciding on an approach, as opposed to being tied to dogma. In his own time, for instance, Beveridge was willing to accept private relationship of GPs to the NHS, because it seemed like an effective way to deliver results, rather than because of any rigid position. Beith remarked, in a response to the audience, that it is likely that Beveridge would feel today that the twenty-first-century NHS – afflicted by all the constraints of an ageing population – should, in turn, evolve to survive.

Whilst Beveridge sought to consider issues on a case-by-case basis, he was adamant about the need to defend liberal principles when they were clearly under threat. Though he was a close friend and associate of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, and saw some common cause with a centrist Fabian approach to public policy, he was appalled by their dalliance with the Soviet Union and Stalin in the latter part of the 1930s. He felt the threat of Communism to individual freedom to be clear and visceral: ‘it represents savagery ... it means the devil’.

Meanwhile, whilst he identified ‘Want’ as one of society’s great domestic social ills – along with disease, ignorance and squalor – he specified idleness as the greatest evil: ‘idleness alone will suffer want’. It was this belief that drove him to focus on the importance of tackling unemployment: though he favoured countercyclical or ‘Keynesian’ economic policy, he regarded it as a tool for encouraging people to make the most of their capabilities, rather than out of a more doctrinaire conception of the state’s leadership in the economy.

Despite the tumultuous times of his own political career, Beveridge’s politics are undoubtedly contemporary and relevant. Beith made clear that he was a passionate internationalist, and would have been exercised by the dangerous eccentricity of the modern Tory attitude to Europe. Domestically, he was also a great believer in housing construction as a means of supporting people’s living standards and opportunities: in the 1930s he moved to the north-east, to live in a housing project he had helped bring forward, as he felt it was important to show that it was good enough to be lived in. He was also a great supporter of education

and, in this light, it was no coincidence that he spent so much of his life as an advocate for it in his role as director of the LSE. Meanwhile, although he was an instinctive civil libertarian, Beveridge was nuanced enough to appreciate the potent threat that crime could inflict on personal freedom.

Beveridge remarked on his deathbed in 1963 that he had ‘still so much to do’ and would doubtless have been fascinated as well as tortured by the problems of the modern day. With that in mind, Beith believed the lessons of Beveridge’s life and thought – that an actively developed state can play a useful role in preserving and enhancing individual freedom, though only when public policy is rationally conceived and dextrously implemented – were useful for the party in coalition and beyond.

Liberal Democrat MP for Southport, John Pugh, followed Beith with a discussion of Thomas Hill Green, who had been important figure in his own political development. A Balliol academic, Green was a leading radical reformer and proponent of the temperance movement in the mid-Victorian period (he lived between 1836 and 1882). A leading figure in the ‘British Idealist’ movement and influenced by continental thinkers such as Hegel, Green has grown in recognition in very recent years, and is sometimes seen as a precursor of the ‘social liberal’ strand of thought within the Liberal Democrats.

Pugh outlined the seeming irony of the contrast between Green’s apparently established English life and academic background, and the thinkers that had influenced him most in terms of his broader philosophical approach. In the mid-nineteenth century, Green was a leading disciple of enlightenment thinkers Hegel and Kant. In Pugh’s mind, this gave Green the necessary latitude to critique not just David Hume but even the man voted by the Liberal Democrat History Group in 2007 to be the greatest Liberal in history, John Stuart Mill.

According to Pugh, Green took issue with Mill’s philosophy of government outlined in *On Liberty*. In this, as Pugh put it, the latter conceived of ‘government as a thing which occurs as ringmaster; as long as people don’t hurt each other, that is fine’ – falling in line with the

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famous ‘harm principle’. According to Green though, and Pugh, government cannot view human activity with complete detachment. Occasionally, though not necessarily often, it must act and Green felt that consequently certain points made by Mill about human conduct were left unresolved.

Nonetheless, Green was often ambivalent in his approach to the state and so, in Pugh’s mind, should be considered ‘liberal’ in his flexibility. Green felt the state should be circumspect about exerting any influence which might upset the rights of individuals; he felt government power should only be deployed when clear threats to human liberty were apparent.

Pugh explained that, for much of the twentieth century, Green was an unpopular figure and that this was due to the central European flavour of his work. Though Green was famous during his lifetime and even to the end of the Victorian era, his recognition faded as the First World War made the central-European tenor of his work unfashionable. In the 1920s, Hobhouse criticised Green and explicitly referred to his work as being unpatriotic. Nonetheless, in the era of coalition, when the strains of government have encouraged certain wings of the party to express themselves more than in former times of placidity, Pugh felt that Green was an increasingly important symbol of the social liberal roots within the party, albeit one that provided a sympathetic juxtaposition to the great J. S. Mill.

Baroness Liz Barker followed as the third speaker on the panel by highlighting the influence of Mill’s spouse, Harriet Taylor Mill. As Barker explained, the early roots of their relationship were controversial and – by the standards of the time – scandalous. Their liaison had begun several years before Harriet’s first marriage had ended, and had been tacitly accepted by her then husband, John Taylor, so long as he and his wife could maintain superficial unity. Mill went on to marry Harriet in 1851, two years after Taylor’s death.

Despite their contravention of Victorian mores, the strength of their marriage and the endurance of their mutual affection were felt by most who knew them – including Thomas Carlyle – to be a reflection,

above all, of their shared sense of intellectual respect. As Barker noted, the two first met at a discussion on the rights of women in society. Whilst the besotted Mill declared Harriet a critical influence on all of his later work, including *On Liberty*, the impact that Harriet had on his work was perhaps most clear with regards to his deeply influential contribution to the fledging feminist movement.

Mill credited Harriet as co-author of his seminal 1869 publication, *The Subjection of Women*, which showed remarkable similarities to and bore the influence of her 1851 work, *The Enfranchisement of Women*. Their work in this area showed that they were particularly exercised by the effect of mid-Victorian marriage arrangements on the curtailment of female liberty; however, their work was of particular importance and inspiration to the incipient suffragist movement. Whilst Mill is most remembered for his work on personal liberty in general, he was a supporter of female suffrage and, as an MP, proposed votes for women in 1867 as an amendment to the Second Reform Act. When women first won the vote in 1918, the first act of Millicent Fawcett and the NUWSS was to convene in celebration at Mill's statue in Temple Gardens.

In response to a question from the audience, Barker did accept

that a precise delineation of Harriet's work within the scope of Mill's broader opus was impossible. Nonetheless, their collective impact was huge, and their relevance and impact endures in a very potent manner and neither's legacy can be understood without the other.

Mill's legacy is often considered in Westminster today, but Barker felt that this influence extends also to his spouse. Barker felt that, were she alive today, Harriet Taylor Mill would have been very proud of the party's stance on gay marriage and its very obvious derivation from Millian liberal first principles. Meanwhile, Barker concluded, Harriet would have been a powerful critic of contemporary global religions and their attitude to marriage and individual rights, as well as also having a view of individual responsibility within such arrangements.

The final member of the panel to draw inspiration from the pamphlet was Liberal Democrat blogger and author, Mark Pack. Whilst cognisant of the paradox of choice, Pack decided to focus on two figures above all other because of their enduring legacy for the Liberal Democrats: Charles James Fox and, like Alan Beith, Sir William Beveridge.

For Pack, similarities can be drawn between Fox and two recent leaders of the Liberal

Democrats: Charles Kennedy and Nick Clegg. Fox's reputation was associated with ardent support for civil liberties in the face of the harsh conservatism represented by those, like his rival Pitt, who would exploit domestic fear of foreign spectres such as Robespierre to reduce individual liberty on the British side of the Channel; the comparison with New Labour's exploitation of the image of Saddam Hussein is clear.

Whilst this, combined with his famous proclivity for alcohol consumption, might encourage comparisons with Kennedy, Pack also highlighted the similarity of his controversial 1783 pact with the Conservative Lord North, with the position and principle of the current leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg. Like Clegg, Fox put aside his own animosity to a Conservative foe in the name of a broader political goal and national good. In the case of Fox, however, his unlikely coalition was aimed at reducing the harm to the political system caused by a volatile king and the attempted restriction of habeas corpus. Whilst Clegg's position might seem *sui generis*, together with the example of Fox it illustrates, in Pack's opinion, the nimbleness of liberal politics to face up to practical circumstances, unconstrained by the straitjacket of the left-right dogma of other parties.

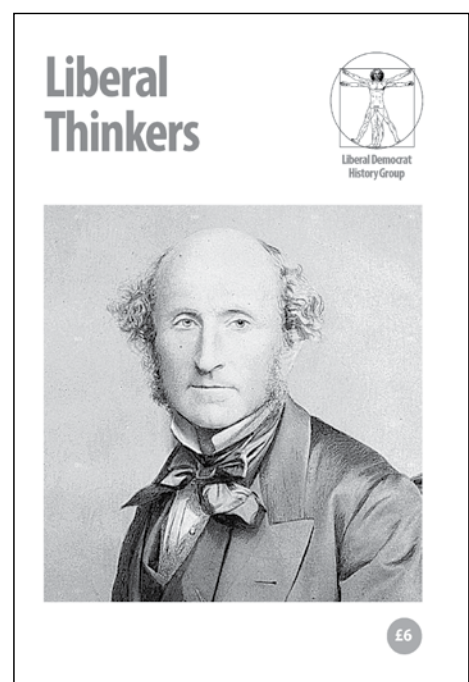
Liberal Thinkers

Liberalism has been built on more than three centuries' work 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.

This booklet is an accessible guide to the key thinkers associated with British Liberalism –including John Locke, Adam Smith, Mary Wollstonecraft, Richard Cobden, John Stuart Mill, L. T. Hobhouse, John Maynard Keynes, William Beveridge and many more.

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Pack pointed out that, despite only brief stints in government, Fox was notable not only as the person who created the role of leader of the Opposition, but also as the first ever Foreign Secretary. Meanwhile, from a position outside of government, his strong personality and eloquence helped crystallise liberalism and Whiggery in British politics. Whilst, before, liberalism had only been nebulously associated with opposition to such forces as the monarchy, under his leadership, they gained a wider appeal linked to a clear delineation of principle, which proved enduring.

Nonetheless, upon summation, Pack emphasised that Fox's career should be judged a failure in a political sense, because he spent such a tiny proportion of it in a position to exert direct influence over people's lives in government. In this context, Pack compared Fox to William Beveridge. Echoing many of the initial points made by Alan Beith, Pack emphasised Beveridge's heterodox and flexible approach, which could only be understood within the liberal tradition and was not recognisable in the way socialists and the modern Labour Party built the welfare state. However, Beveridge was not a political victor and this affected his ability to disseminate his principle further.

Whilst Fox was a great personality, rhetorician and bon vivant of his age, Beveridge was a considered thinker who left a great legacy of thought. Fox was not original but he was a good adaptor of other people's thoughts and this was a very important political skill. Nonetheless in Pack's view, the lack of political success that both experienced was a reminder that, without campaigning nous and consequent political success, it is difficult for Liberals to improve people's lives – although this is ultimately the purpose of the creed.

The discussion concluded with a question from an audience member asking whether it was possible for an active political personality in the modern age to devote the necessary intellectual effort to bring forward advances in philosophical or political thought.

Barker felt that the rise of social enterprise organisations like Nesta was exciting and provided a more likely avenue for emerging thought

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than the circumstances of serving MPs, bogged down with constituency casework and the demands of an active media. Nonetheless, Barker felt there was a potential for synthesis between data and innovative political thought which had as yet remained unexploited and which would be an emerging challenge and area of interest.

Pack said that he was encouraged by the work of thinkers like the occupational psychologist John Seddon, who had come to prominence through ideas such as the notion of 'failure demand'. However, Pack felt that he also sometimes lacks the necessary communicative power to disseminate his ideas more widely into broader political life.

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liberalism was one of the nation's most potent and valuable gifts to wider humanity – with British liberal principles recited frequently from North America, to South Africa to Hong Kong. Nonetheless, at home as well as abroad, liberalism is still worth defending as a partisan as well as a philosophical concept: the other two parties have not absorbed it simply because they cannot. For this reason, Bruce concluded with the hope that there will not too many people in the party with time left for political philosophy in the autumn of 2015, because they will instead be actively legislating for it within Westminster.

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REVIEWS

'Unquestionably a remarkable woman'¹

Janet Hilderley, *Mrs Catherine Gladstone* (The Alpha Press, 2013)

Review by **Tony Little**

THE SUFFRAGETTES – and the Pankhursts, in particular – have much to answer for. Not only have they helped establish the myth that their early-twentieth-century campaign with its petty violence was responsible for women gaining the vote, but also that until that event in 1918 women were not involved in politics. Not only have they eclipsed the role of the constitutional suffragists but by contrast have reinforced the view that Victorian women were submissive, confined to home management and therefore without involvement in public affairs.

In reality, Victorian women were involved in politics at all levels: from working-class participation in Chartist demonstrations to elite participation in the formation of Cabinets and the details of foreign policy; from the canvassing of

voters to campaigning for property rights or against state regulation of prostitution.

Consequently, it is important to be reminded that behind the stereotypes were real people with their own personalities and idiosyncrasies, with their own achievements and errors. Liberals in particular need to rescue the positive role played by women associated with the party, since some of the men in the Edwardian Liberal Party, such as Asquith, have been established as the chief obstacle to female progress.

Catherine Gladstone was the wife of William Ewart Gladstone. Their marriage lasted well beyond its golden anniversary and for virtually the whole of that time Gladstone was a frontbench spokesman, party leader, Prime Minister or Chancellor of the Exchequer. On