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 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.

Malcolm Bruce finished the meeting with a reflection that 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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Douglas Oliver is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

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

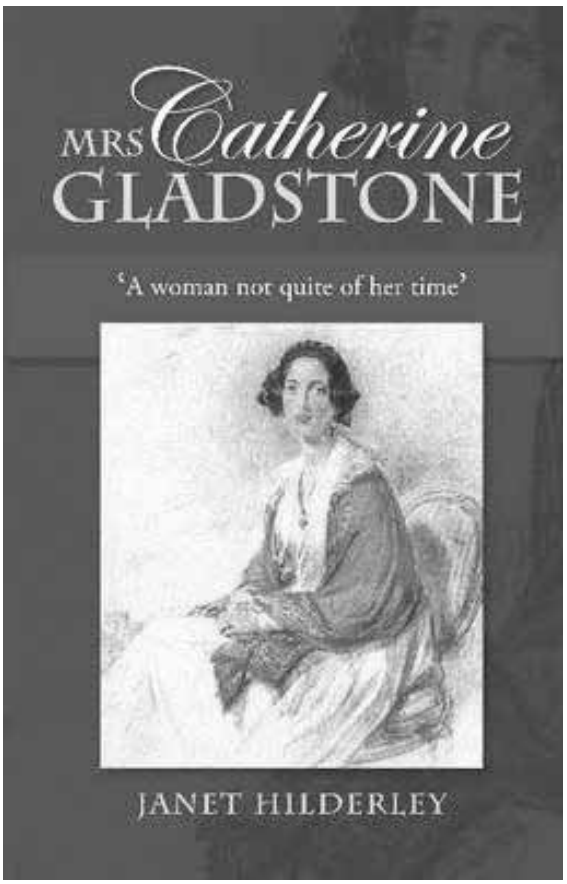
the basis alone that 'behind every great man …', Catherine deserves the attention of biographers. But that would be to short-change the reader. Catherine's life offers so much more.

In the style of Victorians, the Gladstones were a prolific family producing a mass of diaries, letters and memos and, more importantly, conserving them. Catherine and William were almost archetypal but still unconventional elite Victorians. He was the son of a self-made capitalist, who was educated at Eton and Oxford before being guided by his domineering father to a career in politics. She was the daughter of a baronet who married into the aristocracy. He dominated the Commons and from the platform, inspiring hate and fear in his opponents, but encouraged his children to challenge or contradict him during dining table arguments and was happy to romp with them on the floor of his study. Not formally educated, Catherine never contemplated employment; she was graceful and charming but essentially a 'Grande Dame'[2] whose 'first consideration was her husband'[3]. Yet her daughters were independent-minded women, one of whom became a pioneer of women's university education and another worked in the male environment of Downing Street as one of her father's patronage secretaries. Beautiful in her youth, Catherine remained handsome into old age but rarely fussed about her appearance. Accustomed to wealth, she lived in a remarkably Spartan fashion though occasionally chafing at Gladstonian penny-pinching. As a well-documented Victorian materfamilias, there is much in her life to confound our unthinking memory of the archetypal Victorian.

Janet Hilderley's biography is anecdotal rather than an analytical. It is at its strongest in its description of the courtship, marriage and development of family life. With a personality as significant as William Gladstone's, there is a danger that any biography of Catherine will be overwhelmed by the doings of her husband. This risk is avoided. Despite her previous experience as a biographer of Disraeli's wife, Hilderley treats the politics as background to the marriage rather than at its centre. She raises but does not pursue in depth the complexities of the marriage that arise from Gladstone's frequent absences and the risky friendships that developed out of his mission for rescuing fallen women. Neither does she penetrate very deeply into the relationships with the Gladstone children, particularly the girls, whose interests were subordinated to their parents' needs well into adulthood.

But women deserve to be seen as more than 'wife of' and 'mother of' and Catherine Gladstone, particularly, deserves attention in her own right. She was the first president of the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF). William Gladstone was such a dominant figure in Victorian politics that we can build our image of the political era around him but he was extremely untypical. He accepted leadership both as attribute to his capacity and as a God-given responsibility, but he did not seek to build a following in the manner typical of the leading aristocratic families. Consequently, Mrs Gladstone did not entertain in the aristocratic style of a Lady Palmerston or a Lady Waldegrave and indeed was sufficiently wayward to be considered almost a liability in that respect. It was with reluctance that she accepted the role at the WLF and abandoned it when her hostility to women's suffrage was challenged. But that does not mean that she had no political influence. It was her resolve which kept her husband in politics until an advanced old age, her support on his speaking tours which made them a practical possibility and her image which helped solidify his place in the affections of the widening electorate.

One aspect of Mrs Gladstone's waywardness comprises perhaps her most important claim to a good biography. It is alleged that she never missed the chance to importune her husband's important visitors for a donation to her latest charity. This was not the token 'do-gooding' of the lady of the manor, though Catherine never neglected her poorer neighbours, but fundraising on a substantial scale. She is reputed to have returned a cheque for £500, substantially more than the cost of a suburban semi, to a donor on the basis that she had asked for £1000. The higher amount was produced.



Her involvement in charity ranged from the organising of soup kitchens for the Lancashire unemployed displaced by the US civil war, to employment opportunities for women rescued from prostitution; from the organisation of schools in Hawarden to the nursing of patients in a cholera epidemic, the provision of a free convalescent home and the housing and education for cholera orphans on her family estate. No detail was too small to escape Catherine, whether it was providing food for a waif watching her and the other 'great and good' attending a banquet or ensuring that the patients of her convalescent home enjoyed morale-raising entertainment.

With her background in the voluntary sector, Janet Hilderley devotes more space to Mrs Gladstone's charitable activity than some previous biographies, but I confess that, again, I had hoped that the approach would have been more comprehensive. An idea of how individual projects worked is given, the nature of Catherine's very hands-on involvement outlined and the range of her activities is illustrated. What is missing is an idea of the full scale of these projects,

how far they overlapped and the degree to which they survived initial enthusiasm. One at least is still in operation today. To what extent was Catherine the prime mover? Did she work with a regular band of helpers or create teams for each project?

Janet Hilderley has written a gossipy, even 'noveletish' introduction to Catherine Gladstone, rather than the more academic analytical biography that Mrs G deserves and still awaits. Ordinarily, that should not be seen as an obstacle to recommending a book, but in this case I hesitate to do so out of concern over the weak editing and fact checking. On the back cover of the book and in the text, Catherine is described as an earl's daughter. But her father was a baronet and her mother the daughter of a baron. Gladstone's father, Sir John, is described as 'used to working among belching fires while children crawled under whirling machines' (p. 19). Sir John was originally a corn merchant who succeeded as a trader with the Americas and became a West Indian plantation (and slave) owner rather than a manufacturer. Catherine is described as making a trip to Dalmeny in 1837 to the 'home of the Jewish Lord and Lady Rosebery' where 'no mention is made of the heir, Archibald Primrose' (p. 10). The Roseberys were a Scottish family but not Jewish, though Archibald married a Rothschild. It is not surprising Archibald was not mentioned as he was not born until 1847: in 1837 Archibald's father was the heir. The well-known City solicitors, Freshfields, are described as bankers (p. 59), and John Bright is described as a 'Chartist politician' (p. 132). It would be unfair but not difficult to continue. This book would best appeal to those new to its subject, but these are the readers who should be most protected from such confidence-sapping errors.

Tony Little is Chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

1 Sir Edward Hamilton, quoted in *Mrs Catherine Gladstone*, p. 237.
2 *The Times* obituary, 15 June 1900.
3 Sir Edward Hamilton, quoted in *Mrs Catherine Gladstone*, p. 237.

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The Grand Old Man and Dizzy re-examined

Dick Leonard, *The Great Rivalry: Gladstone & Disraeli* (I. B. Tauris, 2013)
Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

In academic circles, Dick Leonard is best known as the author of an authoritative trilogy of the lives of British prime ministers from the eighteenth century almost to the present day. Leonard is a leading, widely published authority on politics and elections in the UK and the European Union. His respected volume *Elections in Britain*, first published way back in 1968, is now in its fifth, completely revised edition. He was assistant editor and then Brussels correspondent of *The Economist* after a term as an independent-minded Labour MP himself. He has also worked for the BBC and contributed to many leading newspapers across the globe.

The Great Rivalry, building on the individual biographies in the trilogy, describes the political drama of what was probably the most fascinating personal rivalry in the whole span of British political history, between the magisterial William Ewart Gladstone and the eclectic, mercurial Benjamin Disraeli, an unlikely Victorian as we imagine them today, but unexpectedly a favourite (and flatterer) of Queen Victoria. Although there are already several authoritative biographies of both men and many specialised studies on certain aspects of their careers, the author rightly felt the need 'for a single volume, of moderate length, which would constitute a *comparative* biography of the two men' (pp. ix–x). This book provides the full story of their rivalry and its origins, comparing the upbringing, education and personalities of the two leaders, as well as their political careers. Dick Leonard considers the impact of religion on the two men, their contrasting oratorical skills, their attitudes to political and social reform, foreign affairs and imperialism as well as their relationship over the decades with Queen Victoria.

The author has clearly fully immersed himself in the extensive scholarly literature on both politicians, but has kept clear of manuscript and documentary source materials. He has made full use of the published diaries of W. E. Gladstone edited by Colin Matthew (witness the multitude of references to 'GD' in the endnote references).

The volume is an unfailingly engrossing read from cover to cover – although it contains little that is really new. We read of Disraeli's lack of a formal education (he had attended neither public school nor university), of his first meeting with Gladstone in about 1835, and (reflecting his fondness for more mature women) of his marriage to Mary Anne Lewis, fully twelve years his senior, in August 1839. The love-match was to prove durable until her death nine years before her husband. He apparently succeeded almost completely in concealing the existence of his two illegitimate children. Gladstone, in striking contrast, received a gentleman's education at Eton, where he initiated the life-long practice of keeping an immensely detailed diary, and Christ Church, Oxford, where he achieved a celebrated 'Double First' in classics and mathematics in 1831 (see p. 29).

The main themes of both lives are most competently and vigorously dissected. Gladstone's pursuit, and attempted rescuing, of numerous 'fallen women' was apparently in full swing early in his career and continued unabated at least until his final retirement as prime minister in 1894 (see pp. 72 and 195). The main steps in his political career are clearly explained here, including the preparation and contents of his various budgets, especially the celebrated 1853 budget speech which continued for four hours and 45 minutes. Earlier in his parliamentary career he had been viewed 'as something of a maverick whose