

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

THERE 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.

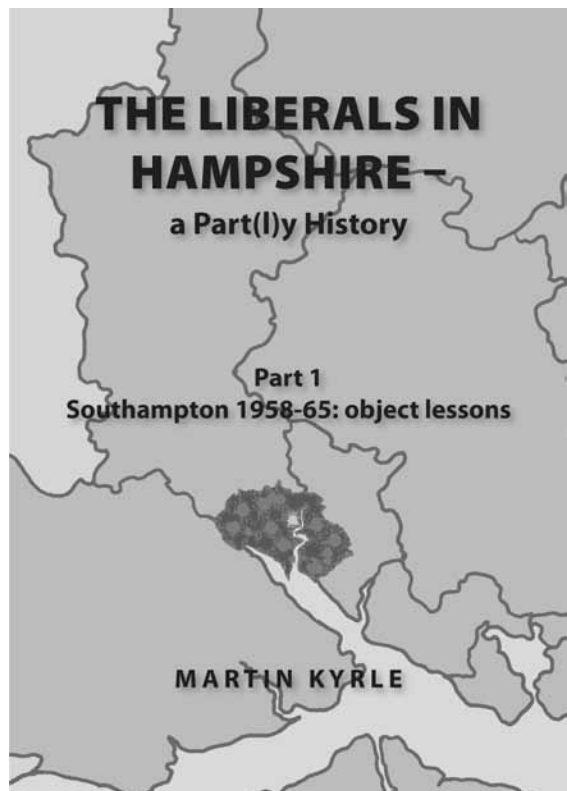
The collection tells the reader much about Martin, but this is not really an autobiography, for the tales jump about from one interesting event to another, giving a sense of what a small, often dysfunctional, political party organisation was like back in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than telling a continuous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

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 Lippiatt'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