

Glasgow Hillhead. John Campbell says that 'On a personal level Jenkins' victory at Hillhead was perhaps the high point of his political life.' He was now to be seen as prime minister designate and he pencilled-in a putative Alliance Cabinet including David Steel as home secretary and leader of the house, Shirley Williams as foreign secretary and me, to my pleasure, as chancellor. This was the second peak of Jenkins' career – but all too soon followed his second trough.

He was elected leader of the SDP but with a much smaller margin over David Owen than had been expected. He found difficulty in adjusting to the Commons because for many years he had spoken with gravitas and authority to a respectable House. But now it was a less disciplined place, with Labour and Tory MPs determined to make his life as hard as possible. In addition, as Campbell puts it, on television Jenkins 'looked and sounded old, flabby and long-winded': nor was he good at 'the quick-fire exchange of pithy soundbites' in which David Owen and David Steel excelled. In the middle of the 1983 election, the Liberal hierarchy tried, although unsuccessfully, to replace Jenkins with Steel as the Alliance leader.

In perspective, the 1983 election result was far from a disaster for the SDP–Liberal Alliance. Its share of the vote was 25.4 per cent (against the previous Liberal high-water-mark of 19.3 per cent in 1974), only 2.2 per cent short of Labour at 27.6 per cent. Nearly 8 million votes had been cast for either of the two Alliance parties and it could be seen as a remarkable achievement. But that is not how it felt. With David Owen pressing for his immediate resignation, Jenkins accepted the verdict, remaining in the House of Commons until he was defeated at Hillhead in 1987.

A few weeks earlier, Jenkins had been elected Chancellor of Oxford University. When he was installed in June, he wrote that 'Nothing in my life has been given me greater pleasure.' It was, says John Campbell, the perfect retirement for him. But far from retirement, Jenkins continued to enjoy his well-rounded life for another fifteen years. In some ways, Jenkins' political career had been a parallel to R. A. Butler's, as Butler had been chancellor of the

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exchequer, a liberal home secretary and, briefly, foreign secretary. In retirement, Butler became Master of Trinity College, Cambridge and wrote an elegant personal memoir. But this was nothing compared with Jenkins' busy social life and writing nine books, and a tenth – about Franklin Delano Roosevelt – published after his death, making twenty-two in all. His books on Gladstone and then on Churchill were outstanding, building on his experience in writing *Asquith* (1964), the royalties of which had enabled him to buy his modest but comfortable country house in East Hendred, Oxfordshire, which he made his principal home.

In writing *Asquith* and drawing on Asquith's love letters to Venetia Stanley, he came up against the formidable Violet Bonham Carter who did not approve the publication of these matters. Very differently, Jennifer Jenkins, his wife – also formidable – has allowed John Campbell to write freely about her husband's adolescent sexual relationship with Tony Crosland and his affairs with his adult girlfriends. All of this can be found in the impressive, comprehensive

index at the end of the 818 pages of Campbell's book.

I first met Roy Jenkins in July 1951 when he interviewed me for an appointment. So 'Jenkins' became 'Roy' for more than fifty years. I was very fond of Roy and I thought of him as my elder brother in politics. Sometimes we shared our holidays in Tuscany and in later years we talked regularly on the telephone on Sunday morning. On the last occasion we met, shortly before Christmas 2002, my wife and I enjoyed lunch with Roy and Jennifer at one of his favourite country pubs. Clearly he was unwell and due to enter hospital after the holiday season but I was dismayed when his son Charles telephoned me on the morning of Sunday 5 January 2003 to say that Roy had died. After a gap of ten years, John Campbell has written a fine book fully reflecting both on Roy Jenkins' distinguished public career and his intimate personal style and life.

Bill Rodgers (Lord Rodgers of Quarry Bank) was a member of the 'Gang of Four' who founded the Social Democratic Party in 1981. He led the Liberal Democrat peers from 1997 to 2001.

Minded to slay national ignorance

James Dixon, *Out of Birmingham: George Dixon (1820–98), 'Father of Free Education'* (Brewin Books, 2013)

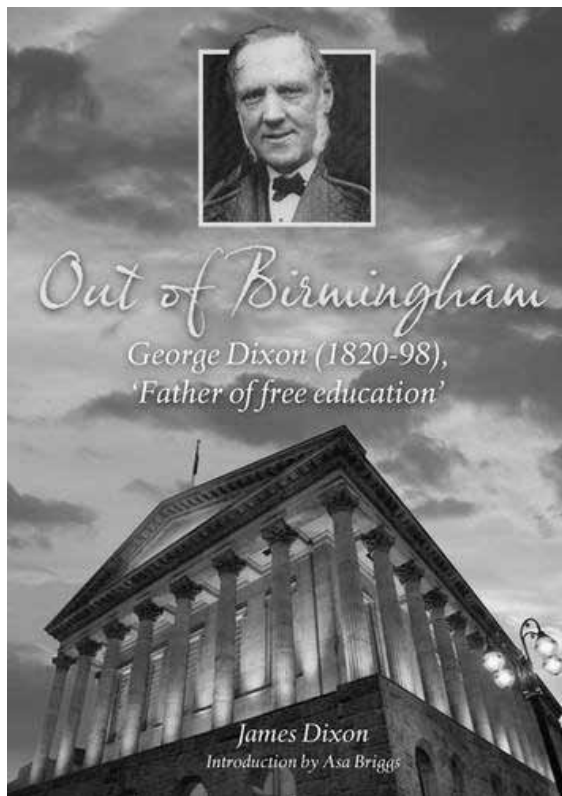
Reviewed by **Tony Little**

WHEN TONY BLAIR chose 'education, education, education' as the mantra for his government's priorities, he unintentionally echoed George Dixon's 'educate, educate, educate', while also demonstrating the enduring importance of state schooling within political debate more than 140 years after the passage of the Gladstone administration's 1870 Education Act. That act enabled the provision of government elementary schooling, a field that till then had been largely a matter for private enterprise, charities and the churches.

The 1870 Act is usually, and rightly, credited to W. E. Forster who introduced the bill to the House as the appropriate junior

minister. But Forster was not acting in a vacuum. Vigorous campaigning had created the environment in which the government felt compelled to take action and campaigning had also fashioned the choices and compromises by which the government modified its proposals; compromises which dictate that we still have church schools and that education has largely been a responsibility of local authorities despite the depredations of Blair, Gove and Laws.

George Dixon was pre-eminent among those crusading for education to be provided by the nation for all children whatever their family income. Dixon is now largely forgotten, or at least largely forgotten outside Birmingham, the



town where he made his life and reputation. This is in part because the archival material is limited, in part because of his personality and, perhaps in the largest part, because other prominent Birmingham figures have hogged most of the limelight.

The Victorian Liberal Party was built on Whig families who supplied a bedrock of administrative capabilities, buttressed by Peelite endeavour and earnestness, and Radical campaigning enthusiasm. Dixon was a typical product of this milieu. Of the middling sort, he received a (Leeds) grammar school education before making his fortune in (overseas) trade through a partnership in Rabone Bros. of Birmingham. In his youth he was a friend of the Brontës. Business brought him into contact with prominent commercial, Liberal families such as the Rathbones of Liverpool and marriage connected him with James Stansfeld. Dixon's growing commercial success took him to Canada and the Antipodes, journeys which imbued him with a lifelong enthusiasm for colonial emigration as an answer to British poverty. Success also brought him the chairmanship of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce.

As with so many of his contemporaries, success also brought a determination to benefit his local

community. Dixon lived in one of the nicer parts of Birmingham but his daily walk to work took him through rougher districts and regularly confronted him with the poverty of large numbers of his fellow citizens and with the groups of ill-dressed and uneducated children spending their days hanging round the streets for want of better opportunities. Generous with his money, Dixon was also generous with his time. A prominent member of Birmingham Liberal Association, probably the best organised, Radical, electoral campaigning organisation of its time, he became a local councillor in 1863, mayor in 1866 and a local MP in 1867.

But it was those ragged children to whom his life was devoted. Following a series of meetings organised by Dixon, a Birmingham Education Society was formed whose members contributed to provide schools and pay pupil fees. But Dixon and his colleagues were ambitious, arguing for state-funded compulsory primary schooling and established a National Education League to promote the campaign with Dixon as the chairman. In Victorian Britain, this proved highly controversial for two reasons. Firstly, it cut across the work of the Anglican Church who provided the bulk of such primary schooling as existed but lacked the resources to build schools for all. Secondly, little in Victorian politics escaped contagion from religious differences and the solution advocated by the NEL was for state secular education with religious teaching provided separately and privately. Dixon was himself an Anglican but many of his activists were Nonconformists who had the strongest possible objections to the education provided by Anglican schools and to the use of their taxes to fund such a denominational education.

James Dixon paints a picture of his ancestor George as that greatly undervalued politician, a reasonable man ready to recognise limiting practicalities and willing to compromise for the sake of progress; a man who could chair and manage committees. Without such persons government becomes impossible, but political fame favours a different type. Unfortunately for Dixon, Victorian Birmingham also nurtured one of the best examples of that charismatic alternative – the

man who could set out demands, unlimited by practicalities, and could provide the inspirational oratory to make followers believe the vision. That man, Joe Chamberlain, rather than George Dixon is the man who is remembered as embodying Victorian Birmingham. Chamberlain made Dixon's leadership of the National Education League almost insufferable and also forced Dixon to give up his parliamentary seat to provide Joe with a safe berth. The continuation of the Nonconformist campaign even after the passing of Forster's act was a significant contributory factor in Gladstone's defeat of 1874.

James Dixon's book sets out the complex story of the campaign for state primary education and of the disputes between the two men. But he goes much further. The Forster act proved the salvation of the church schools but it also provided enterprising local authorities with the opportunity to provide elementary education for all who wished it. And Birmingham was nothing if not enterprising. The rest of the story is of Dixon's achievements as chairman of the Birmingham School Board, a post in which he succeeded Chamberlain and held for most of the rest of his life. Despite Chamberlain's best efforts Dixon continued to try and defuse the denominational controversy. He exploited ambiguities in the legislation to extend education into what would now be considered the secondary sector and promoted higher standards and qualifications for teachers. Through his own generosity and that of his extensive acquaintances a high school education was instigated for Edgbaston girls. Following the 1884 Reform Act, Dixon resumed his parliamentary career and although he opposed Gladstone in the home rule crisis, this neither upset his position on the Birmingham School Board nor stopped him sharing London accommodation with the Gladstonian Stansfeld. He pursued his own line on education issues even when he differed from fellow Liberal Unionists or the Unionist government. To the end he fought for compulsory free education and it is at least debatable whether he rather than Chamberlain left the greater legacy to his city and his nation.

As James Dixon makes clear, any biographer of the 'Father of Free

Education' is handicapped by the destruction of family archives during the Second World War and the personal positions of George Dixon often have to be inferred rather than documented. However, the author has made extensive use of local newspapers and other publications in which the campaigns were much more extensively recorded and debated than could be expected from today's degraded press. Despite the author's best efforts, the casual modern reader familiar with contemporary education may still struggle with the significant difference between secular and non-secular education but he will come

away with a greater admiration for Dixon's persistent, patient, practical campaigning, toleration and dedication. Along the way he will learn much about the organisation and centrality of the Birmingham Liberal Association which provided the foundation for Chamberlain's fame.

Appropriately, royalties from the sale of this well produced and well-illustrated book go to the Prisoner's Education Trust to further George Dixon's work.

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appointment as Home Secretary. While such upsets were relatively rare (Winston Churchill losing his seat at Manchester North-west in 1908 is another celebrated example), Hawkins shows that fear of by-elections frequently constrained prime ministers' room for manoeuvre in making ministerial appointments.

Kathryn Rix's article on by-elections and party organisation between 1867 and 1914 highlights the increasing professionalisation of by-election campaigns during this period. Her description of late-Victorian and Edwardian by-elections will seem very familiar to modern campaigners: extensive drafting in of outside help, the opportunity for agents to share expertise and introduce new campaigning techniques, tension between outsiders and local candidates and activists. There is a further contemporary resonance in the discussion of the role of 'auxiliary organisations' intervening in election campaigns. The 1883 Corrupt Practices Act had excluded third-party campaigning from candidate's election expenses. This created a situation where, for example, at the 1908 Peckham by-election a range of organisations, including the Tariff Reform League, the Coal Consumers Association, the Sporting League and the suffragettes

A history of by-elections

T. G. Otte and Paul Readman (eds.), *By-elections in British politics 1832–1914* (Boydell, 2013)

Reviewed by **Iain Sharpe**

BY-ELECTIONS HAVE AN ICONIC status in modern Liberal history, whether as a harbinger of revival, as at Torrington or Orpington, or a much-needed sign of resilience, as with Liverpool Edge Hill or the recent contest at Eastleigh. They have proved less interesting to academic historians: until now there has been just one full-length volume on the subject, a collection of essays edited by Chris Cook and John Ramsden covering the period between the First World War and the 1970s.¹ So this work fills a significant gap in the study of British politics, tackling the years between the Great Reform Act and the outbreak of the First World War.

Like Cook and Ramsden's volume, this is a collection of essays by a range of authors rather than a single monograph. The editors have adopted neither a strictly chronological nor a thematic approach, but a hybrid of the two, which can be enriching by giving different perspectives on the same period, but can also lead to duplication and omission, in particular a bias towards the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. Nonetheless, individually and collectively these essays make a strong case for the importance of by-elections in the development of British party politics during the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, the more so as they were often the best way of gauging the state of public opinion between general elections.

In the opening contribution, Philip Salmon argues that by-election contests between 1832 and 1860 helped to strengthen voters' party loyalty. With most constituencies at the time electing two MPs and with no secret ballot, many voters split their votes at general elections between candidates of rival parties. By-elections forced them to 'plump' one way or the other. Salmon demonstrates using detailed statistical analysis that having come down off the fence at the by-election voters often retained their newfound allegiance and at the subsequent general election voted for two candidates of one party rather than one of each.

Angus Hawkins discusses what to modern eyes is a strange phenomenon, ministerial by-elections. Until 1919 MPs had to seek re-election when appointed to ministerial office. Often such by-elections were uncontested, but, as Hawkins shows, at times of particular crisis or controversy they could lead to embarrassing defeats for newly appointed ministers. The most famous case was Lord John Russell losing his South Devon seat in 1835 when seeking re-election after his

