

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-sectarian 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



campaigns for the Conservative candidate, spending between them far more than the 1883 Act's limits allowed the candidate to spend. It is a problem that is still with us, as the controversy over the Coalition government's attempt to legislate on the issue has shown.

Unsurprisingly, given the two editors' previous work, questions of patriotism and foreign policy feature strongly, rightly so as the role of such issues in elections has been neglected by previous historians. Geoffrey Hicks looks at by-elections during Disraeli's 1874–80 administration. He concludes that the swing against the government began before Gladstone started his great campaign against the Bulgarian atrocities, suggesting that this was not decisive in shifting public opinion against the Conservatives.

T. G. Otte considers the role of foreign policy in by-elections between 1865 and 1914. He highlights how Conservatives sought to exploit the perceived weakness of Liberal foreign and defence policy under Gladstone. This was often a successful tactic, although it depended on there being a clear current issue on which the Conservatives could play the patriotic card. For example, during Gladstone's first administration, the Conservatives won a series of by-election victories after campaigning on Britain's alleged lack of military preparedness at the time of the Franco-Prussian war. Occasionally the boot was on the other foot: in by-elections between 1897 and 1899 the Liberals gained some advantage by portraying the foreign policy of Lord Salisbury's government in the Far East as weak. Surprisingly, Otte skips over the most clear-cut case of a patriotic issue decisively affecting the course of by-election results, namely the outbreak of war in South Africa in October 1899, which reversed the trend of swings to the Liberals, and saw voters rally to the Unionist government, which won a landslide victory in the 1900 'khaki' general election. (To be fair this is discussed briefly by Paul Readman and Luke Blaxhill elsewhere in the volume.)

In opposition after 1905, the Unionists attacked the Liberals with some success over naval defence, although they found it harder to attack the diplomacy of the foreign secretary Sir Edward

Grey, who consciously pursued 'continuity' of foreign policy between the two major parties. I am inclined to disagree with Otte's judgement that 'it was impossible ... for the Liberals to convert Sir Edward Grey's high standing in Europe in 1912–14 into hard domestic currency'. While the Liberals could not outflank the Unionists in terms of defence spending and assertive diplomacy, Grey's image of putting country before party shielded the Liberals from accusations of lack of patriotism.

The essay by Readman and Blaxill on 'Edwardian by-elections' covers the period from the late 1890s to 1914, and concludes by addressing the perennial question of the Liberal party's electoral prospects at the outbreak of the First World War. From a Liberal Party perspective they paint a less positive picture than recent historians have done, seeing the electoral position in 1914 as being one of underlying Conservative strength and Liberal weakness. They project a Unionist parliamentary majority of sixty-two at a possible 1915 general election. An increased number of Labour candidates might have converted this into a Conservative landslide.

While I agree that the notion of Conservatism in 1914 being in permanent crisis has been overstated, there are problems with the analysis presented here. Readman and Blaxill put forward their projection based on by-elections of 1913–14, while pointing out the strong correlation between previous general election results and by-elections during the twelve months that preceded them. But in the normal scheme of things,

the final year before the general election would have been those before not after August 1914 – a general election was not due until late 1915. So there was much still to play for. If Sir Edward Grey had achieved 'peace with honour' from the Balkan crisis, if a compromise solution had been found for Irish home rule, if Lloyd George's land campaign had proved popular, and if the benefits of the 1911 National Insurance Act had begun to be appreciated, the Liberals might have expected a significant boost in their fortunes. On the other hand, if the government had refused to enter the war and stood aside while Germany overran Belgium and much of France, the Liberals might indeed have suffered a catastrophic defeat in the face of Unionist attacks on their weakness against German aggression.

I was surprised that the authors do not discuss Ian Packer's 2011 article on by-elections between 1911 and 1914, the more so as Dr Packer is both a contributor to this volume and explicitly thanked by the authors for commenting on this chapter. He concluded that 'it is probably only safe to say that the 1915 election result was still in the balance in August 1914, and that it would have been a closely fought contest'.² Precisely because we cannot know what the course of British politics would have been had the country not entered a European war in August 1914, I am inclined to share this more tentative conclusion.

This illustrates, however, that anyone reading this volume will be left with much to think about, arguments to agree and disagree with, and their understanding of

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Victorian and Edwardian politics enriched. In their introduction, the editors refer to Charles Dickens' portrayal of a parliamentary by-election in *The Pickwick Papers* at the fictional town of 'Eatanswill', and conclude with the comment 'A visit to Eatanswill always repays'. On the evidence of this volume that is very true.

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- 1 Chris Cook and John Ramsden, *By-elections in British politics* (Macmillan, 1973).
- 2 Ian Packer, 'Contested Ground: Trends in British By-elections, 1911–1914', *Contemporary British History*, 25(1), 2011, pp. 157–73.

Servant of the party

Sir Hugh Jones, *Campaigning Face to Face* (Book Guild Ltd, 2007)

Reviewed by **David Shutt**

THIS IS A splendid book, a reminder for many of us not just of the Hugh Jones era in which he served as Secretary General of the Liberal Party but of those final years of the party, including the time of the Alliance and ultimate merger with the SDP. An earlier volume (*Diplomacy to Politics: By Way of the Jungle*, Memoir Club, 2002) deals with his time in the Diplomatic Service; this book starts with his time from 1973 to 1977 as director of the English Speaking Union in England and Wales. He had his struggles dealing with so many volunteers, but I am sure that put him in good stead for dealing with the perhaps rather different volunteers he found in the Liberal Party!

Hugh-Jones had been born into Liberalism, 'nourished by Lloyd George and the *News Chronicle*'. He had had an opportunity to take on the Head of LPO role ten years earlier, but it was in March 1977 (as a 53 year old) that he took up the post. Rather sensibly he spent several months prior to his commencement going round the country getting to know the party. He started whilst 'Thorpe Affair' matters were still troubling us, but in the early days of David Steel's leadership. He was straight in to the party side of coping with the Lib-Lab pact. The speed with which that pact was settled reminds me of the speed with which arrangements were made in our coalition agreement in 2010, so unlike the coalition

building elsewhere in Europe. He was forever troubled by the lack of resources available to the party in the run up to the expected election in October 1978 and the eventual election of May 1979.

For me the most interesting part of the book was Hugh-Jones's assessment of the difficulties he had with dealing with the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust Limited (now the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd) as the Liberal Party's major donor. Hugh was frustrated that all his dealings had to be via the leader, who had a direct line to Pratap Chitnis, the trust's chief executive. Hugh was told not to approach the trust direct. During all this time, I was on the other side of the fence as a JRSST director. Hugh-Jones's problem was that, apart from two Rowntree family members, those of us who had recently been recruited to serve as directors were mainly Liberal Party members and candidates who had our own ideas as to the useful ways money could be spent. We had two MPs on the board, Jo Grimond and Richard Wainwright, as well as Pratap, who had himself had Hugh-Jones's job eleven years earlier than him. Hugh-Jones may well have felt he had little influence, we in turn often felt we were offered what seemed to be a Chitnis-Steel deal.

Reading the book reawakened memories – especially of the huge contribution made by people like Joyce Rose, Gruff Evans and Geoff

Tordoff. Indeed the book covers a panoply of people and places. I only spotted one error and that was Hugh-Jones's reference to the Huddersfield and Bolton pacts (before Hugh's time – 1950 to 1959) being with Labour rather than with the Tories as was the case.

Following the 1979 election, the next party issue was the arrival of the SDP and ultimately the seats negotiations (splitting the seats between the Liberal Party and the SDP for the 1983 election). This was a tortuous and time-consuming business, and the book offers a blow-by-blow account of those often unhappy events. Hugh-Jones served through that 1983 election, where he had to use to the full his diplomatic as well as his political skills. He formally retired in October 1983, but stayed with the cause as a volunteer and one of the party's treasurers (no doubt because his own experience as Secretary General had acquainted him with the difficulties of working with a lack of resources) until the autumn after the 1987 election. Hugh was often referred to in an endearing way as 'Uncle Hugh Jones' and unlike many who both preceded and followed him, when he left as the head of our professional service it was of his own volition.

