

Liberal divisions

Ian Hunter looks at the attempts to reunite the Liberal Nationals with the official Liberal Party in the 1940s

The final quest for Liberal reunion 1943–46

The decline of the Liberal Party as a party of government during the first half of the twentieth century was marked by a series of splits and personal rivalries. Most famous and most damaging was the split in 1916 between the followers of H. H. Asquith and David Lloyd George, which saw the Liberal Party divided in allegiance from top to bottom until the mid 1920s, although personal animosities lasted much longer.

A further fault line divided the party again in the early 1930s. This schism centred on a divide between those Liberals who followed the then Liberal Party Leader and National Government Home Secretary Herbert Samuel, and those who aligned themselves with Sir John Simon, a leading Liberal and Foreign Secretary under MacDonald. The issue that divided the party on this occasion was less the personalities of the leaders, although there was little love lost between Samuel and Simon, than their attitudes to the National Government. Simonite Liberals had found that over the course of the period 1929–30 they had become increasingly discontented with the record of the Labour Government and more sympathetic to and attracted by the policies of the Conservative Party. This preference grew through their involvement in the National Government formed in 1931.

Simon had also abandoned the traditional Liberal commitment to free trade with his belief that tariff protection was necessary to help British industry weather the storms of economic recession. This created a rift with the Samuelite Liberals in the National Government which proved unbridgeable. In September 1932, when the three Samuelite Liberal ministers in the National Government resigned over the Ottawa Convention's tariff reforms, Simon and his followers (who were then known as Liberal Nationals) remained on the National Government benches. For the rest of the period 1932–40, the Liberal Nationals operated as a

separate organisation from the Samuel-led Liberals and remained firm supporters of the Tory-dominated National Governments.

With the formation of Churchill's Coalition Government in May 1940, the Liberal Nationals and Liberals again found themselves working alongside each other in the national cause. The leaders of both the Liberal Party and the Liberal National Party (Sinclair¹ and Simon) entered the government together with the Labour Party leaders. Sir Archibald Sinclair took over the responsibilities of the Air Ministry and Sir John Simon accepted a peerage and became Lord Chancellor. For the Liberals, Sir Percy Harris became Deputy Leader and Ernest Brown became the leader of the Liberal Nationals in the Commons. This experience of cooperation and the approach of the pending general election at the end of the war ignited an outbreak of reunion negotiations that ran from 1943–46.

This interesting period of the Liberal Party's history has been mostly overlooked by political historians who have tended to focus on the wartime politics of the Conservative and Labour parties during the Coalition. Those historians who have covered the period from a Liberal angle have argued that the involvement of the leaders of the Parliamentary Liberal Party in the Churchill coalition had a detrimental effect on the prospects of the party. Malcolm Baines, for example, has argued that Sir Archibald Sinclair's involvement as Air Minister 'removed his skilled management, which had helped preserve unity in the thirties'.² More recently, Garry Tregidga has observed that in the traditional Liberal stronghold of South-West England, where by 1939 the Liberals had finally consolidated their position, 'the war years removed the possibility of a recovery. Sinclair's effective absence from party politics meant that the Liberals lost the initiative.'³ However, less frequently commented upon is the disastrous impact

that the Second World War had on the fortunes of the Liberal National party.⁴

The formation of the Coalition Government in May 1940 initiated a period of formal electoral truce between the main parties. With normal competition between the parties suspended it might have been expected that each political party would remain on an even keel. However, while the Sinclair Liberals suffered no desertions or resignations from their parliamentary team, the Liberal Nationals showed significant signs of falling apart. In early 1940 Clement Davies resigned the Liberal National whip and sat as an independent Liberal, before rejoining the mainstream Liberal Party in early 1942. Four more Liberal National MPs followed Davies' route, with Leslie Hore-Belisha, Sir Henry Morris-Jones, Edgar Granville and Sir Murdoch Macdonald relinquishing the whip or refusing to participate in Liberal National party activities – a loss of over 15% of the parliamentary party.⁵ This situation was compounded in April 1943 by the loss of a further Liberal National seat at the Eddisbury by-election, to the newly formed Common Wealth party.

The first round: negotiations 1943–44

From this weakened platform in July 1943 Ernest Brown inaugurated discussions with Sir Archibald Sinclair over fusion of the two parties. Negotiations continued until the end of November 1944, when they eventually collapsed at Sinclair's insistence that the Liberal Party would not continue with the National or Coalition Government beyond the end of the war. However, in the aftermath of the 1945 general election, when both Liberal parties lost their parliamentary leaders and many of their remaining seats,⁶ reunion negotiations were resumed during mid- to late 1946. Papers that have recently come to light during research on the Liberal Party and its role in the Churchill coalition have cast light on the reasons for the final failure to heal the long-standing split within Liberal ranks.⁷

The two teams of negotiators first met on 3 August 1943 at St. Ermins Hotel in London, in response to Ernest

Brown's offer of discussions. For the Liberal Party the team included the Deputy Leader, Sir Percy Harris, Lord Gilpin, Wilfred Roberts, Crinks Johnstone, Geoffrey Mander and Dingle Foot. For the Liberal National Party the negotiators were Lord Teviot, Sir Frederick Hamilton, Geoffrey Shakespeare, Alec Beecham, Stanley Holmes and Henderson Stewart. Harris was elected as Chairman by both teams. The main terms of the negotiations did not focus on the position of leader, as Brown had previously indicated that he would be satisfied to serve under Sinclair. The key issues surrounding the terms of reunion for the Liberal Nationals were highlighted at the start of the negotiations by Sir Geoffrey Shakespeare. According to a memo written by Dingle Foot to Archibald Sinclair⁸ the Liberal Nationals were particularly concerned with the following issues:

1. The importance of the 'gospel of free enterprise';
2. The need for a 'sound' agricultural policy;
3. That the government post-war would not be a party government but a continuance of the National Coalition government of wartime;
4. That the Liberal Party could not support or put into office a minority Labour government.⁹

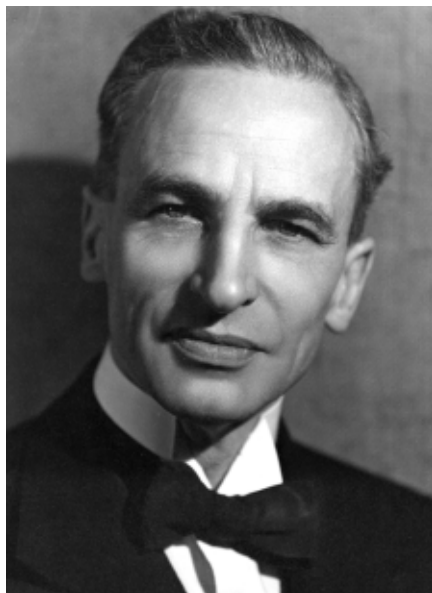
The Liberal National Party's willingness to go into coalition with the Conservatives after the end of the war proved to be the main source of contention with Sir Percy and his team. Crinks Johnstone, himself a minister in Churchill's government at the time, as Secretary for Overseas Trade, declared that it would be fatal to declare any willingness to enter a coalition government after the war. This would undermine the Liberals' position; the only sensible policy was to continue to build from a platform of independent strength so as to be in a good position to make terms as and when the time came.

The Liberal Party representatives were of the opinion that something of a Liberal revival was under way in the country and that many young candidates were being selected in seats where Liberals previously had been inactive. Dingle Foot noted that 'the strength of Liberal feeling in the country must not

be underrated. The Prime Minister [Churchill] was popular of course, but the Conservative Party was very unpopular. Even in this last year, in the middle of a war, Independent candidates, had got in, and polled big votes against the Government.'¹⁰ Foot observed that Government candidates standing at by-elections were in effect standing under a 'coupon' arrangement and it was not doing them much good. The Liberal Nationals were of the view, however, that a 'coupon' election was unavoidable and that those of a Liberal persuasion should be positioning themselves in order to get the best deal possible in terms of seats. For the Sinclairites, Sir Percy Harris stuck to the line that they wanted the Liberal Party to remain free and independent. Although the Liberal Nationals agreed that this was an admirable objective it was clear, in the words of Foot, that 'we understood very different things by the words "independent" and "free"'.¹¹

The pivotal position of Winston Churchill, himself a former Liberal, in the strategic thinking of both groups of Liberals can be seen in Sir Percy Harris's comment that 'Winston was nearly sixty-nine and not immortal. In the event of his breakdown or death they [the Liberal Nationals] should ask themselves whether they were still prepared to commit themselves to close association with the Conservative Party'.¹¹ Foot's impression of the Liberal Nationals was that they were strongly in favour of a Conservative-Liberal coalition against Labour and that they dreaded and disliked the Labour Party and its leaders. Foot commented to Sinclair that the highest hope and aspiration of the Liberal Nationals, at the election expected at the conclusion of the war, 'is a coupon election with some charitable allocation of seats'. The negotiations broke up with the promise that the teams would meet again and that the Liberal Nationals would consider their position over the issue of proportional representation and read the resolutions and minutes passed at the last two Liberal Party Council Meetings ('poor devils' as Foot commented!) to see if there was common ground for further exploration.

Meetings continued on and off into



Sir Archibald Sinclair, Liberal leader
1935–45

early 1944 but no real progress was made. The stumbling block remained the Liberal Nationals' insistence on favouring a coalition-style relationship with the Conservative Party, which Sinclair's Liberals feared would undermine their existence as an independent party. Fundamentally, as Dingle Foot observed, the Liberal Nationals were totally immersed in one absorbing preoccupation – how to get elected again if they were opposed by anyone whatsoever. This concern appeared to completely dwarf any other political issue on the Liberal National agenda.

As the general election of June 1945 demonstrated, this preoccupation with electoral self-preservation was completely justified. The election results of 1945 were disastrous for both groups of Liberals. At the previous election in 1935 the Liberal Nationals had seen thirty-three MPs returned. In 1945 only thirteen scraped back in and two of those had stood as independent Liberals. The Sinclair Liberals saw their party strength fall from nineteen to twelve and the leadership of both Liberal parties failed to hold their seats. Sinclair lost his seat by a whisker (sixty-one votes) and was replaced as leader by Clement Davies, who had until 1940 been a leading member of the Liberal Nationals. This was, perhaps, a new opportunity for rapprochement between the two branches of Liberalism.

In the wake of these electoral setbacks Liberals and Liberal Nationals

entered into renewed debate about forming a single party. The discussions were led by constituency parties in Devon, Cornwall and in London. Indeed in London the local Liberal Nationals did rejoin the main party but as neither group by then held any London seats the parliamentary position remained unchanged. The Liberal Nationals were unsure whether to cooperate with the Conservatives or with the Liberals. Lord Simon, the former Liberal National leader, wanted a quick union with the Conservatives, while the majority of grassroots activists and a significant portion of the parliamentary leadership, led by Lord Mabane and Henderson Stewart, wanted to reunite in an anti-socialist alliance with Clement Davies' party.

At the Liberal Party's highest levels there was great enthusiasm for achieving some kind of reunion. Any recruitment into the small Parliamentary Liberal Party, especially from erstwhile former alliance partners of the Conservatives, would send a clear message that Liberalism was not dead. In a letter to Sir Geoffrey Mander, the former Liberal MP for Wolverhampton East, who was defeated in 1945, Sinclair wrote: 'Clem Davies seems to be doing well ... if he could only get some of the Liberal Nationals to join up with the Party, people would begin to take the Liberal Party seriously again'.¹²

The second round: 1946

Ernest Brown reopened the talks on reunion which had lain dormant since 1944 in the second week of May 1946, by the peculiar method of a letter to the *Glasgow Herald* saying, on behalf of the Liberal Nationals, that he was very anxious to bring about a reunion of Liberals, and he would be willing to work with any 'Sinclairite' toward that end. The Duke of Montrose responded, on Clement Davies' behalf, with a letter to Brown suggesting that they meet in London on 23 May for unofficial talks. Montrose also informed Samuel and Sinclair of the approach from the Liberal Nationals.

Lord Samuel wrote to the Duke of Montrose on 17 May 1946: 'I am much interested to know that you are getting

into touch with Ernest Brown with a view to promoting a reunion. I have not hitherto been at all optimistic as to the result of any such efforts for one simple reason – namely, that the Liberal National members of the House of Commons nearly all hold their seats through the support of Conservative Associations in their constituencies.' Samuel was also dubious about the quality of some of the Liberal National MPs, stating candidly that 'if they were to rejoin us some at least would be a liability rather than an asset'. Samuel was also concerned about the impact on the Liberal activists and leftist radicals, such as Tom Horabin, in the parliamentary party if the party too quickly embraced a group who had been 'indistinguishable from Conservatives, in policy and in action, throughout the whole of the last fifteen years'. He felt that the most desirable course would be for the Liberal Nationals, who had left the party of their own volition in 1931 and 1932, now to declare themselves in agreement with Liberal policies and to rejoin. Samuel went on to warn that if reunion happened then the Liberal Nationals would no doubt have to 'discard a certain number who are, without question, essentially Conservatives, and whose proper place is in the Conservative Party, and not to serve as a clogging element in Liberalism'.¹³

Sinclair wrote to Samuel on 20 May urging that the Liberals ought to make every effort to reach agreement with Brown, providing that Liberal independence was not threatened. Furthermore, Sinclair observed that the removal, by the elimination of the party, of the name 'Liberal National' from ballot papers would have a positive effect on public opinion. Sinclair also noted that at the 1945 election the Liberals had lost all their Scottish seats (including his own at Caithness) and that the Liberal Nationals held three seats in Scotland which, if they returned to the Liberal fold, 'would have a most heartening effect upon the Party in Scotland', so consequently the need for reunion was much stronger in Scotland than in England.¹⁴

When Montrose met Brown on 23 May he emphasised the importance of complete independence for the Liberal

Party. Brown agreed that there should not be an alliance but insisted that there should be some definite arrangement with the Conservatives, in which case it should be clearly understood that in certain eventualities the Liberals should have their fair share of offices and appointments if the Conservatives formed an administration.¹⁵ This was a contradictory position which did not convince Montrose.

In Scotland on 28 June 1946 the Scottish Liberal Party and the Scottish Liberal National Association issued a draft statement setting out the basis for fusion. This included forming a united front to oppose the Labour Government, which 'presents the antithesis of all that gives Liberalism a meaning', and opposing the nationalisation of great industries, the extension of the power of the executive and the regimentation and restrictions of the liberties of the individual.

The joint statement went on to declare that 'it is the over-riding duty of all Liberals to secure the overthrow of the Socialist Government'. However, in order to achieve this, the statement argued that the party should be 'prepared to cooperate with all other political forces whose primary objective is the same'.¹⁶

It was this last statement that caused disquiet amongst the Liberal Party leaders when issued to the press by the Liberal Nationals. The Liberal Party Chairman, Philip Fothergill, wrote to William Mabane, the Chairman of the Liberal Nationals, seeking clarification that the Liberal Nationals agreed that a reunited and independent Liberal Party would contest by-elections and at the next general election seek to put forward its own positive policy and candidates in opposition to both Socialists and Conservatives.¹⁷

Fothergill was also becoming increasingly concerned about the competence of the Scottish Liberal Party's negotiating team. In particular he was concerned that the Chairman of the Scottish Liberals, Lady Glen-Coats,¹⁸ was not up to the task because of political inexperience and would be outmanoeuvred easily by Henderson Stewart, the leading negotiator for the Scottish Liberal Nationals. Fothergill

feared that if the Scottish Liberal Party merged with the Scottish Liberal Nationals then it would be impossible to prevent the same situation occurring in England – which would mean the end of the Liberal Party as a separate entity, sucked into an electoral alignment with the Conservatives. This was an embrace that he felt would be both impossible to escape and terminal for the Liberal Party's long term viability as a distinct party.

Writing to Sinclair in August 1946, Fothergill stated that 'when I saw Lady Glen-Coats [and her colleagues] they left me in no doubt that they were in some danger of being outmanoeuvred by Henderson Stewart. I do not doubt their genuine desire to act in conformity with the Party south of the border, but I am afraid that Henderson Stewart is a much more skilled negotiator than anybody on our side'.¹⁹ This view was shared by Violet Bonham Carter, who wrote to Sinclair asking him, as President of the Scottish Liberals, to intervene and assist Glen-Coats. Bonham Carter was particularly concerned that the position of Liberal independence be safeguarded and worried that 'it would be disastrous if through incompetence the "pass" were sold and our position in Scotland compromised. It might lead to a breach between the Liberal Party and the Scottish Federation which would be disastrous'.²⁰

Fothergill's suspicions about the possible duplicity of the Liberal Nationals were deepened when he discovered that they had told Lady Glen-Coats that it would be impossible for the three Scottish Liberal National MPs to sit as simple Liberals. Henderson Stewart had told Lady Glen-Coats that he and his Liberal National colleagues were in a difficult position vis-à-vis their constituencies and that they would have to sit in the House as Liberal Nationals. Ingeniously, he proposed that this need not be a barrier to unity as he suggested that they agree to form a new Liberal Party in Scotland to be called 'The Scottish United Liberal Party' to which Liberal and Liberal National Associations should become affiliated.

Fothergill was shocked that Glen-Coats felt that this was an acceptable solution which would save face for all con-

cerned. Fothergill regarded the suggestion as ludicrous, providing a potential Trojan horse into the Liberal camp from which the Liberal Nationals could begin to form pacts and understandings with Conservative Associations. Fothergill wrote to Glen-Coats and urged her to play for time. He reminded her that the Liberal National organisation was showing signs of disintegration, with the London branch of the organisation having closed down their offices and come over to the Liberal Party against the wishes of its national leaders. Fothergill felt it was perfectly possible that this experience would be repeated in other areas of the country and that the process of locally driven reconciliation would deliver the bulk of the Liberal National Party without the need to do any potentially damaging deals.²¹

Fothergill, Sinclair and Clement Davies were united in their determination that any union with the Liberal National Party should only come about once clear agreement had been reached on the need to field candidates in opposition to both Conservative and Socialist parties. The vital question of independence, which had been the stumbling block during the previous talks in 1943–44, remained the issue on which this final set of negotiations collapsed.

Fothergill and Sinclair suspected that the Liberal National parliamentary leaders had been pressured by their activists in certain constituencies to make moves towards reunion. However, they feared that the Liberal Nationals were

Edward Clement Davies, Liberal leader 1945–56



not genuine in their dealings and that they were only embarking on the negotiations to strengthen their position with their Tory colleagues by bringing the Liberal Party – or some substantial fraction of it – into an anti-Socialist alignment. Fothergill and Sinclair feared that the Liberal Nationals would engineer some reason to break off negotiations and leave the Liberal Party weakened and discouraged.

Meanwhile, the separate discussions in London came to a head. After a further exchange of increasingly acrimonious letters Mabane wrote to Fothergill on 23 October rejecting the Liberal Party's insistence on preserving equidistance between the Labour and Conservative Parties. 'Believing that Socialism is destructive ... we [National Liberals] took the view that the first task was to secure the overthrow of the present Government ... In effect, however, your letters make it clear that before any discussions can take place we must agree to a tactical decision (relating to the candidates at the next general election). To insist on such a conclusion before negotiations are even started stultifies them in advance by making freedom of discussion impossible ... We are forced with regret to conclude that no further purpose would be served by pressing the matter further.'²²

Fothergill immediately wrote back claiming that Mabane was completely misrepresenting the Liberals' position: 'to our great regret, you have given the impression that what you had in mind was not the support of an independent Liberal Party ... but to draw us into an alliance with other Parties (including the Conservative Party with which you have closely worked for so long) in creating a purely anti-socialist bloc'.²³ Fothergill made it clear that had the Liberals known that this was the crux of the matter for the Liberal Nationals they would have never entered into negotiations on such a 'barren and negative issue'. Fothergill spelt out that while the Liberal Party was prepared to fight socialism it was equally opposed to the Conservative Party, which had 'rightly forfeited the confidence of the nation'.

The collapse of talks in London

hamstrung the Scottish negotiations. Glen-Coats and Henderson Stewart agreed in late October 1946 to submit a draft statement supporting reunion in Scotland to the Scottish Liberal and Liberal National organisations for comment and verification. By then it was too late and both sides in London reacted to the draft with dismay. The Scottish Liberal Party ignored the advice from London and approved the draft on 7 November. However, the Liberal National leaders in London (especially Lords Teviot, Hutchinson and Rosebery) refused to endorse the draft document and in effect overthrew their Scottish negotiating team. On 9 December 1946 the secretary of the Scottish Liberal National Association published a statement in *The Scotsman* newspaper that the negotiations for Liberal reunion in Scotland had irretrievably broken down.

This proved to be the last time that the breach between the two parts of the old Liberal Party came close to being healed. The dependence of sitting Liberal National MPs on Conservative support in their constituencies and the refusal of the national leadership to countenance anything but an anti-Socialist reunion under the protective umbrella of an electoral pact with the Conservative Party proved insurmountable. In May 1947 the Woolton-Teviot agreement was announced, confirming the Liberal Nationals' future as a junior partner of the Conservatives rather than part of a reunified Liberal Party. The door to reunion was finally shut.

Conclusions

For the Liberal Party the collapse of the talks was the loss of an opportunity potentially to double the size of the parliamentary party and to make people, in Sinclair's words, take the party seriously again. A united Liberal Party that was worth more than 3,000,000 votes would be in a far better position to bargain with either the Labour or the Conservative Party in any close-run election, as of course the elections of 1950 and 1951 were to prove. Fothergill's and Clement Davies' insistence on remaining independent

was to cost the party dear in the short term. An understanding, if not a pact, with the Conservatives could possibly have helped deliver a sizeable block of seats for the Liberals at the 1950 and 1951 elections. As it was the party won only nine seats, a net loss of three.

The attractions of reunion for the Liberal Party were patently clear, but were less so for the Liberal Nationals. Were the negotiations merely an attempt to entrap the Liberals into a position whereby the anti-socialist vote could be unified under one Tory-dominated umbrella, or was it a more deep-seated unease at the scale of the Tory defeat in 1945 and a desire to forge a credible alternative to the Labour Party?

Either way, for the sake of the long-term survival of the Liberal third force in British politics it was critical that the Liberal leaders did not 'sell the pass' of Liberal independence.²⁴ The refusal of Fothergill and Clement Davies to compromise on the maintenance of Liberal equidistance from the two main parties was key to the survival of the British Liberal Party in the 1940s and '50s.

Ian Hunter is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive, and is completing a part-time doctorate on the Liberal Party and the Churchill Coalition.

- 1 Herbert Samuel, the former leader, had narrowly lost his seat in the 1935 General Election and Sir Archibald Sinclair, with Lloyd George's nomination, had replaced him.
- 2 Malcolm Baines *The survival of the British Liberal Party 1932–1959* D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1989, p.66.
- 3 Garry Tregidga, *The Liberal Party in South-West Britain*, p.115 (University of Exeter Press, 2000).
- 4 Confusingly the party changed its name soon after the 1945 election to the National Liberal Party. For the sake of clarity the term Liberal Nationals has been used throughout the article.
- 5 Hore-Belisha joined the Conservatives, Morris Jones rejoined the Liberal Nationals in 1943, and Granville joined the Labour Party in April 1945.
- 6 The actual results saw 12 Liberal MPs (including the semi-detached Gwilym Lloyd George) elected on 9% of the popular vote, and 11 National Liberal MPs returned on 2.8% of the vote. Two further 'liberals' were elected in 1945 – Sir M. McDonald and J. MacLeod. Although elected under the title 'Independent Liberals' they aligned themselves with the National Liberals for the duration of the parliament.

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- mance languages: Mary Williams and James A. de Rothschild (editors) *A Miscellany of Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures presented to Leon E. Kastner Professor of French Language and Literature in the University of Manchester* (Cambridge, Heffer (1932)).
- 5 S. Schama, *Two Rothschilds and the Land of Israel* (1978), p. 188.
 - 6 *Ibid.* pp. 209 and 252.
 - 7 *Ibid.* p. 267.
 - 8 Although it has to be admitted that casual anti-Semitism was to be found in all the parties at this time; see R. Griffiths, *Fellow Travellers of the Right* (1980), pp. 59-84. Griffiths points out that there was a great deal of 'parlour anti-Semitism' between the wars from which none of the parties was immune; *ibid.* p. 65.
 - 9 See H. M. Hyde, *Strong for Service – the Life of Lord Nathan of Churt* (1968); E. Janner, *Barnett Janner - A Personal Portrait* (1984),
 - 10 There are various anecdotes about Rothschild's popularity with Labour MPs, e.g. Aneurin Bevan; F. Morton, *The Rothschilds*.
 - 11 H. Pelling, *The Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910* (1967), p. 96.
 - 12 M. Kinneer, *The British Voter - An Atlas and Survey Since 1885* (1968), pp. 119-20; C. Cook, *The Age of Realignment - Electoral Politics in Britain 1922-1929* (1975), p. 116.
 - 13 On the other hand Rothschild may have picked up some of the local 'turf' vote. In neighbouring

- Newmarket it was said that wealth and an interest in racing were requirements for a successful Liberal candidate. See Pelling, *op cit.*, p. 96, and *Journal of Liberal Democrat History* 26 (Spring 2000), p. 21.
- 14 Liberals took 20% of the votes in 1950 and 11% in 1964, but did not contest the other general elections of the period. Freud held the redrawn seat until 1987.
 - 15 The others included Leslie Hore-Belisha, Geoffrey Shakespeare and Ernest Brown.
 - 16 Sir Geoffrey Shakespeare, *Let Candles Be Brought In* (1949), pp. 133-34. Sir Henry Morris Jones, *Doctor in the Whips' Room* (1955), p. 84, describing the March meeting, records that 'James Rothschild [was] amusing. He always sat in a chair within our circle and just in front of the Chairman. His silk hat well tilted over the back of his head, he read his contribution to the debate with deliberation and weight.' Perhaps he sat where he did because of his poor eyesight.
 - 17 Shakespeare, *op cit.*, p. 135.
 - 18 However, his loyalty to Samuel took a hard blow in 1937 when the former High Commissioner made a speech in the Lords accepting the need for Jewish immigration controls (which he himself had imposed) and the restriction of land settlement – a speech which has not done much to endear his memory to Zionist history; Schama, *op cit.*, p. 377 n9.
 - 19 N. Smart, *The Diaries and Letters of Robert Bernays 1932-1939* (1996), p. 12. Bernays, a fellow Liberal MP, wrote that 'Rothschild

- ... though a bad speaker himself, is a good judge of others'.
- 20 *Ibid.* pp. 183-84.
 - 21 R Rhodes James (ed.), *Chips – the Diaries of Sir Henry Channon* (1967), p. 247, entry for 17/12/42. The remarkable impact of the speech was confirmed by Lloyd George's assistant, A. J. Sylvester, in his diary: 'Disregarding all the rules of procedure and, in a voice that was full of emotion, he made a speech thanking the Foreign Secretary. During the whole of this time, the House was as silent as the grave. The atmosphere was extraordinary. Although every word uttered by de Rothschild was out of order, not even the Speaker stopped him ... Members of the House then stood in silence. At lunch I asked LG if he had ever seen anything similar to it. "Never in my experience," he replied ... Speaking of de Rothschild's speech, LG said it was really an intonation, such as you get in a synagogue.' A. J. Sylvester, *Life with Lloyd George* (ed Colin Cross), p. 308.
 - 22 E. de Rothschild, *op cit.*, p. 87.
 - 23 Roy Douglas *A History of the Liberal Party* (1970).
 - 24 According to Sir Percy Harris, it was due to his membership of the exclusive Tory-Liberal dining club; *The Other Club, Forty Years In and Out of Parliament* (1947).
 - 25 Churchill Archive at Churchill College, Cambridge CHAR 20/20741. I am grateful to Ian Hunter for drawing my attention to this document.
 - 26 *Ibid.* p. 197.

Liberals cheer Mr Churchill

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Crewe, preceded the unveiling of the portrait.

Sir Archibald Sinclair, Lord Simon and Mr Ernest Brown were among those present.

In his speech at the unveiling Lord Crewe recalled that in the Middle Ages, 'When people believed in magic', it was the custom to fashion a wax image of one's enemy and to stick pins into it in the hope of inflicting some bodily ailment upon him.

'It seems possible', said Lord Crewe, 'that some historically-minded members of the Luftwaffe may have supposed that if they could deface the Prime Minister's portrait with a bomb he would suffer physically, and would be seen an emaciated and hollowed-cheeked figure addressing a distracted House of Commons in tones of desperation'.

'If that were their calculation, they failed here as they have failed elsewhere and as they are going to fail until the end of the War.'

The above speech is reprinted with the kind permission of Curtis Brown.

The final quest for Liberal reunion, 1943-46

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- 7 These papers were originally part of Sir Archibald Sinclair's political papers found at his old shooting lodge, Dalnawillan, in Caithness. The papers have now been deposited with the rest of the Thurso archive at Churchill College, Cambridge.
- 8 'Liberal Reunion – 1943' memo to Sinclair from the Dingle Foot papers (DEFT 1/3) Churchill College, Cambridge.
- 9 'Liberal Reunion – 1943' memo to Sinclair from the Dingle Foot papers (DEFT 1/3) Churchill College, Cambridge.
- 10 'Liberal Reunion – 1943' memo to Sinclair from the Dingle Foot papers (DEFT 1/3) Churchill College, Cambridge.
- 11 'Liberal Reunion – 1943' memo to Sinclair from the Dingle Foot papers (DEFT 1/3) Churchill College, Cambridge.
- 12 Sinclair to Sir Geoffrey Mander 6 December 1945, Thurso Papers
- 13 Letter from Samuel to Montrose, 17 May 1946, Thurso Papers.
- 14 Letter from Sinclair to Samuel, 20 May 1946, Thurso Papers.
- 15 Letter from Samuel to Sinclair 24 May 1946, Thurso Papers.
- 16 Memo written by Herbert Brechin, Secretary of the Scottish Liberal National Association, June 28 1946.
- 17 Letter from Fothergill to Mabane, 23 July 1946, Thurso Papers
- 18 Lady Louise Glen-Coats was an outstanding example of the tough and independent breed of

- women who did so much to keep the Liberal Party a viable entity during its electoral low points in the twenty years after 1935. She was originally selected to fight the winnable seat of Orkney & Shetland but stood aside to allow Jo Grimond his chance to stand in 1945.
- 19 Letter from Fothergill to Sinclair, 8 August, 1946, Thurso Papers
 - 20 Letter from Violet Bonham Carter to Sinclair, 11 August 1946, Thurso Papers. There is some evidence in the surviving papers that Fothergill and Bonham Carter underestimated Glen-Coats' skills and that, as she wrote to Sinclair on 8 August, 'I am not under any delusion as to the type of person I am up against in the leaders of the opposite camp'.
 - 21 Letter from Fothergill to Glen-Coats, 23 July 1946, Thurso Papers.
 - 22 Letter from Mabane to Fothergill, 23 October 1946, Thurso Papers
 - 23 Letter from Fothergill to Mabane, 24 October 1946, Thurso Papers
 - 24 This was a battle that the leadership were having to fight on two fronts: as well as the talks with the Liberal Nationals a group of Liberal candidates was talking directly to a group of Tory reformers led by Peter Thorneycroft about a possible direct merger with the Conservatives. This went as far as the publication of a joint document, *Design for Freedom*, and led to a statement from Liberal headquarters in November 1946 denying rumours of any pact with the Conservatives.