

Letters to the Editor

Alan Beith MP

As an admirer of Violet Bonham Carter's loyalty to Liberalism in its dark years, I am nevertheless obliged to point out that Malcolm Baines' enjoyable review of her *Diaries* (*Journal* 31) should not have accepted unquestioningly her own explanation of why she was not chosen as Liberal candidate for Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1941. She inferred that it was because of a local prejudice against women MPs, following their experience of a Tory woman MP, a former actress, who had taken over the seat when the Liberals got her husband unseated on an election expenses petition. It is more likely that the local Liberals preferred George Grey because he was local, whereas Violet had shown no previous interest in Northumberland. Local party workers who were still active when I was elected believed fervently that, had he not been killed at the front, George Grey would have been a future party leader.

There is also a Berwick connection with C. P. Trevelyan, about whom Duncan Brack writes in the same issue of the *Journal*. Some years after his death, Wallington became part of the Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency, and I have been very glad to have the firm support of one of Trevelyan's daughters, the late Pauline Dower, and his grandson, Robin Dower. Liberalism has been well-established in this corner of Northumberland.

Hugh Pagan

Further to David Dutton's review of the final volume of Mark Pottle's edition of the diary and letters of Lady Violet Bonham Carter (Reviews,

Journal 31), I wonder if Mark Pottle could himself be persuaded to comment briefly on the extent to which the material in the diaries which he has chosen not to publish is enlightening on the history of the Liberal Party after 1945.

It is noticeable, for example, that although the diaries are said by him to cover the years 1946–69 'in almost unbroken sequence' (p. xv), the only entry relating to the Liberal Party's internal affairs selected for printing by Pottle for the year 1946, a year in which Lady Violet was President of the Liberal Party Organisation, is a brief mention of a fund-raising interview with Viscount Allendale (p. 11), and it would be helpful to know whether or not it was her normal practice at this time to record internal Liberal Party business in her diaries. Rather more entries of direct Liberal Party relevance are printed by Pottle for 1947, but after that entries of this kind again become somewhat sporadic in the published volume, and it would be interesting to know to what extent this is due to Pottle's editorial policy and to what extent it may reflect Lady Violet's own distancing of herself from regular Liberal Party activities before and after her controversial candidacy for Colne Valley in 1951.

Nor is it entirely clear to what extent Lady Violet may have commented in her diary on prominent individual Liberals of the 1940s and 1950s other than Clement Davies and Frank Byers. It is something of a surprise that Pottle prints no reaction by her to the defection from the party of Lady Megan Lloyd George, and although Lady Violet may indeed not have thought it worth dignifying

Lady Megan's departure by a diary comment, it is hard to believe that she did not remark in her diary on the defections from the party of Dingle Foot and Wilfrid Roberts, both of whom she had previously thought well of; Pottle does indeed record that Lady Violet 'regarded Dingle Foot as a renegade for having deserted the Liberal cause for Labour' (p. 252, note), and if this statement is based by Pottle on a contemporary diary entry by her, we ought perhaps to know.

In the same general context, it seems quite likely from the fact that Churchill's offer of the post of Lord Chancellor to Cyril Asquith (Lord Asquith of Bishopstone) in 1951 is sourced by Pottle to *DNB* (p. 378), rather than to Lady Violet's diary, that neither Churchill nor Cyril Asquith told Lady Violet of the offer at the time that it was made. If they did not, that is probably creditable to Churchill and Cyril Asquith rather than not, for they both must have been aware of how bitterly disappointed Lady Violet had been at her own political ill-fortune at the 1951 general election, which had deprived her of the opportunity to become Churchill's Minister for Education. It would be interesting if Mark Pottle could tell us if Lady Violet, Clement Davies and Sir Archibald Sinclair ever knew that the seat for a Liberal in Churchill's cabinet which he had offered to each of them prospectively or actually before or after that general election might in the end have been occupied by Lady Violet's younger brother.

Lastly, Pottle is understandably a little unfamiliar with the lesser known personalities of the Liberal Party of that era, and he may like to know that 'Mrs Gomsky', who he fails to identify on p. 114 was, as surviving older Liberals will readily recognise, Doreen Gorsky (Doreen Stephens), and that Frances Louise Josephy (1900–85), although certainly not liked by Lady Violet, was an able speaker who fought six general elections as a Liberal at a period when women candidates were few and far between.