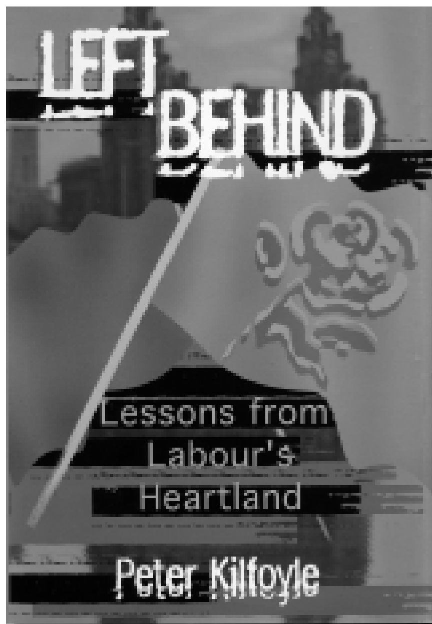

the by-election was a straight Labour versus Militant fight, I am confident that Liberal candidate Paul Clark (who had succeeded Trevor Jones) would have won. As it was, Paul Clark polled 36% of the vote, the Militant candidate lost her deposit (as did the Tory) and Peter Kilfoyle held the seat with Eric Heffer's majority cut from 23,000 to 6,000.

I met Peter Kilfoyle recently, found him to be a charming man and told him how much I enjoyed his book. I chose not to tell him, however, of my own role in running Paul Clark's campaign, and how I felt that with a bit of luck I would have kept him out of Parliament – and this very good book would probably never have been written.

Chris Rennard (Lord Rennard of Wavertree) was Secretary of the Liverpool Wavertree Constituency Liberal Association in 1976, agent to David Alton (Lord Alton of Liverpool) when he first won his Liverpool Mossley Hill Constituency in 1983, and has been the Liberal Democrats' Director of Campaigns and Elections since 1989.

'When in doubt what should be done, do nothing'

David Cecil: *The Young Melbourne & Lord M* (Phoenix Press, 2001)
Reviewed by **David Nolan**

William Lamb, the 2nd Viscount Melbourne (1779–1848) was Home Secretary at the time of the Great Reform Act in 1832 and went on to lead the Whig government that held office from 1835 to 1841. In the first of these roles he was tasked with suppressing the violent disturbances that accompanied the passage of the reform legislation through Parliament; in the latter, more famously, he guided the young Queen Victoria through her early years as head of state.

David Cecil's *The Young Melbourne* appeared in 1939; *Lord M,* his study of Lamb's ministerial career, followed fifteen years later. The two are now reissued in a single volume, although they amount to more than a single 'life', not least because the first part is as much about his wife Caroline Ponsonby as it as about the future Prime Minister. Both sections, even that dealing with the late blossoming of Melbourne's career, are more personal than political biography. Yet this is almost inevitable given that Melbourne always gave a higher priority to personal rather than political considerations.

Reading Cecil's book, it is almost possible to forget that England in the years following Waterloo was a country beset by fear of revolution, nonetheless going through a period of significant change and reform. Riot and disorder are mentioned, but they somehow lose their sting amid the mood of calm that prevails through this book. Melbourne, we are told, could smile at anything; it seems his biographer is inclined to do the same.

It is not all smiles, however, for Melbourne's life was frequently touched by sadness. His marriage to Caroline Ponsonby was an unhappy one. A romantic dreamer, who saw the world as an epic poem with herself cast as the heroine, Caroline was easily bored and soon turned to men other than her husband for romantic gratification. Had she merely confined herself to discreet affairs there would not have been a problem: the era of rigid Victorian morals (or hypocrisy depending on your viewpoint) had not yet dawned, and it was still possible to retain your place in polite society even when someone other than your spouse was occupying their place in your bedchamber. However, Caroline overstepped the mark by the degree to which she publicised her liaisons, not least a stormy affair with the poet Byron, which culminated in her cutting her arms with broken glass in a fit of rage over being spurned by him at a ball. Such tantrums were a serious embarrassment to the future Lord M, and to the families on both sides. As a result, repeated efforts were made to persuade William to separate from his wife, but on more than one occasion he backed down in the face of emotional demonstrations of regret from Caroline and, as a result, they were not to be finally separated until her death in 1828.

Further sadness was to follow with the illness and premature death of his son and only child, and with Melbourne being named in a divorce case as a result of an apparently innocent relationship with Caroline Norton – all of which gives Cecil plenty of material with which to spin a good old historical yarn.

The dramatic episodes of Melbourne's marriage are not the only aspects of this book that keep it from being a dry-as-dust political biography. Wit is also present. In a phrase characteristic of this biographer's engaging style, Cecil points out that: 'Like the other young men of his circle, he thought chastity a dangerous state: and he seems early to have taken practical steps to avoid incurring the risks

attendant on it.' This remark is typical of a book that is as easy going as the character it depicts.

At the same time as telling his tale, Cecil does find time to explore Melbourne's deeply cautious political outlook. He took a sceptical view of grand reform schemes put forward by various interests, once remarking, 'When in doubt what should be done, do nothing.' He may have mistrusted reform, but he was ready to accept it when he judged it necessary in order to achieve his most abiding aim, the preservation of order and tranquillity. On occasion his concern for order led to mistakes, such as his heavy-handed treatment of the Tolpuddle Martyrs – one of the few features of his career to come in for criticism by Cecil – but it also led him to change his mind in favour of an extension of the franchise, and it motivated his constant efforts to chart a middle course between the radical and conservative pressures on his government from 1835. Like Gladstone later, though less frequently and far more reluctantly, his conservative ends sometimes led him to employ reforming means.

Unlike Gladstone he got on extremely well with Queen Victoria. Ascending the throne at just eighteen, she looked to her Prime Minister as her principal source of advice and guidance on the execution of her duties. Nor was it all strictly business; they became very close friends who met several times a day as much as a means of mutual support than because of any need to attend to matters of state. Indeed, Victoria became so reliant upon him, and as a result so prejudiced against his political opponents, that Melbourne had to work hard to educate her out of her antipathy to Peel and the Tories. In the end though, it was Melbourne rather than the Queen who had the harder time adapting to the drastic change in their acquaintance that inevitably followed the collapse of his government in 1841.

With narrative history now very much back in fashion it is hardly surprising that David Cecil's novelesque and sympathetic study of Melbourne should now be republished. Whilst it may be rather too hagiographical by modern standards, it is nonetheless welcome as one of the surprisingly few biographies of the man currently in print.

David Nolan is Secretary of Crosby & Bootle Liberal Democrats, and an amateur historian with an interest in 19th century British political history.

The most complex character

Antony Lentin: *Lloyd George and the Lost Peace: From Versailles to Hitler, 1914–1940* (Palgrave, 2001)
Reviewed by **David Dutton**

The main problem with this book is its title. It is not, as the reader might have suspected, a systematic survey of Lloyd George's attitude towards the problems of the peace settlement between the signing of the Treaty of Versailles and the fall of France two decades later. It consists in fact of a collection of six essays, four of which deal with various aspects of the 1919 settlement itself. Furthermore, earlier drafts of all but one of the essays have already been published, and the author himself wrote a monograph on Lloyd George, the peace settlement and the seeds of the next war almost twenty years ago. Is there, then, much to be said to justify the present volume?

The answer is an emphatic 'yes'. It is precisely because Antony Lentin has devoted the majority of his academic career to trying to get to grips with this most slippery of biographical subjects that his latest book may be read with such profit. What we have is a perceptive and insightful study of the complex Welshman, which at times borders on the psychoanalytical but which rarely fails to convince, such is the author's rapport with the subject of his enquiries. The analysis of the relationship between Lloyd George and Lord Cunliffe over the negotiation of the reparations settlement is particularly persuasive, and represents a significant modification of accepted historical wisdom. Lentin probably takes us nearer to a genuine understanding of what Lloyd George was seeking to achieve during the peace negotiations than has been reached by any other author. The British Prime Minister rejoiced in what he had done in the Versailles settlement, but was fully aware of the work which remained to be tackled. He would probably have endorsed General Smuts' conclusion that 'the real work of peace will only begin after this treaty has been signed'.

A continuous narrative, covering the whole period from 1919 to 1940, might have made it easier to make sense of the two final and still somewhat bizarre episodes examined in the last two chapters of this book – Lloyd George's visit to Hitler in 1936, and his response to the fall of Poland in 1939, and the possibility of a compromise