

All political parties require backroom engineers who do the donkey-work of political organisation, without enjoying public recognition or the opportunity for political advancement. Raymond Jones was an outstanding and loyal servant of the Liberal Party during its days of decline from a party of government to little more than a parliamentary pressure group. A lifelong Liberal, Jones held senior positions within the party from the height of its success in 1906 until his retirement in 1948. A constituency organiser, election agent and parliamentary candidate, he passed through the party's central finance organisation in the 1920s to become Secretary to the Liberal Central Association (the support organisation for the Chief Whip and Parliamentary Party) in the 1930s and 1940s and in his last year become Chairman of the National Liberal Club. In this article his daughter, **Brenda Tillotson**, recalls her father and his involvement in the Liberal Party during its long decline in the first half of the twentieth century. Written with **Ian Hunter**.

AT THE HEART

Raymond Victor Jones was born on 11 June 1883, in the family house at 47 Broad Quay, Bristol. He was the third of seven children to Alfred Edmund and Mary Ann Jones. Raymond's father owned three 'Jones and Sons' furniture shops. The family was Nonconformist Baptist, Liberal and teetotal. Ironically, his grandfather, James Jones, worked as the accountant for George's Brewery in Bristol, but this was never discussed by his abstemious descendants. The family had voted Liberal since the formation of the party in the mid-nineteenth century – though prior to the Ballot Act of 1872, which allowed secret ballots, Raymond's grandfather had required police protection before he dared record his Liberal vote.

Raymond Jones was a pupil at St Mary Redcliffe School, a Church of England grammar school, situated opposite the

Lloyd George once dubbed him 'the loyal-est of the loyal'.

main 'Jones and Sons' shop at the top of Redcliffe Hill. He excelled as a student and chorister but, although he matriculated from school, he did not attend university. He did, however, maintain a powerful tenor singing and speaking voice throughout his life, and enjoyed public speaking, conversation, reading aloud, and telling yarns and jokes. His education gave him an understanding of the established Church of England which, combined with his thorough knowledge of Nonconformist church history, gave him a broad view of Christian doctrine and the social structure of his day. Despite his strong views, he was tolerant of the lifestyle of others – his belief in freedom of choice reigning supreme.

On leaving school Jones joined his father in the furniture business, and he was apprenticed to the clock and watch trade. He gave up the latter due to the onset of severe migraine headaches, a

problem that plagued him for the rest of his life.

On 14 September 1914 he married Mary Beatrice Poole, also of Bristol, in a quiet, informal ceremony, overshadowed by the outbreak of the First World War. It was a very happy marriage and produced one child, Brenda, in 1927. As she remembers:

My father was a Nonconformist churchman and a strong supporter of the Temperance Movement throughout his life. As well as abstaining from alcohol, he never smoked, gambled or went to the races. He kept to a vegetarian diet with the addition of fish, poultry and eggs, which was meant to limit the precipitation of the migraine attacks. As an occasional supplement to his diet my father was fortunate enough to receive, during the shooting season, birds from Scotland, and at Christmas a large hamper from Fortnum and Mason – both sent by Sir Archibald Sinclair (future



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leader of the party between 1935 and 1945).

Jones took an active part in the 1906 election, which resulted in a landslide victory for the Liberal Party, and he became a ward secretary in his local area of Bristol. This was a time of great social reform when, under Prime Ministers Campbell-Bannerman (1905–08) and Asquith (1908–16), the authority of the House of Commons was established and the foundations of the welfare state were laid. As a passionate believer in social reform, Jones became professionally involved with politics, and in 1912 became assistant to H. F. Lane in the constituencies of South and West Bristol. After nine months he became agent to Sir Charles Hobhouse, MP for East Bristol, who was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster from 1911 to 1914, and Postmaster General from 1914 to 1915. Jones served as his agent until 1918.

Medical problems prevented Jones from joining up during the First World War. The government struggled to cope with the demands of what became a more protracted war than the country had ever experienced, and this conflict prompted the decline of the Liberal Party. Jones' war work related to voluntary recruiting, war aims, war savings, and managing the local distribution of potatoes. In addition, he ran the cashier and shipping departments of the Pool Board Petroleum Supplies Company.

The party was deeply divided during the war, as Asquith entered a coalition with the Conservatives in 1915. In 1916 Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister, and, in the 1918 general election, Asquith lost his seat. Jones had much in common with Lloyd George, as they were both from middle-class, Nonconformist families, but Jones would have disapproved of Lloyd George selling

Raymond Jones as a young man; in 1928, with a very young Brenda; and in middle age.

honours for the benefit of his personal campaign fund.

Jones moved from his post in Bristol to take responsibility for the Liberal Associations of the four Leicester constituencies, and by 1920 he was appointed Secretary to the Liberal organisation embracing the twelve Birmingham constituencies. This was a much tougher challenge than either Bristol or Leicester, as Birmingham was the former stronghold of the Chamberlainite Liberal Unionists. It was, in 1920, a strongly pro-coalition Conservative city with very few Liberal activists or credible constituency organisations.

By the early 1920s those industrial areas such as Bristol and Leicester that had been Liberal strongholds had now fallen to Labour, and it was difficult to predict which parts of the country could be counted on for Liberal support, apart from rural Wales. The prominence of the right-wing and new left-wing

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parties sidelined the divided Liberals into third place, and after the 1924 election many supporters defected. Churchill went to the Conservatives and many former Liberal ministers joined the Labour ranks. In 1925 Jones was promoted to the finance department at Liberal Headquarters.

Jones stood as the Liberal candidate for Mitcham, Surrey, in the 1929 general election. Party leader, Lloyd George, with campaign funds left over from the sale of peerages, had set about reinvigorating the party with new ideas. The unemployment issue dominated the campaign, inspired by economist J. M. Keynes, who was one of Lloyd George's main advisers. For the first time, Keynes advocated the use of public money to alleviate unemployment, thereby boosting national income. Jones made impassioned speeches broadcast from a van as it drove round the streets of Mitcham. He spoke of:

The total inability of the Conservatives to deal with unemployment. This failure is a tragedy, which is reflected in hundreds of thousands of homes today. Men and women, healthy and strong are unable, though willing, to find work. More than a million of these awake every morning to face a day of hopeless seeking, and as each night comes round they close their eyes upon another day of dark despair. We Liberals say to both of these parties ... Conservative and Labour ... 'Enough of this dallying! If you can do nothing yourselves, then make room for those who can and will face this problem with courage and determination.'

Although the Liberals won over five million votes they won only fifty-nine seats, and in Mitcham Jones took third place, with the Conservative candidate, R. J. Meller, winning the seat. The 1929 election marks the point when the Liberal Party became permanently identified as a third party by the electorate, although

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the minority Labour government depended on Lloyd George and Liberal support in order to achieve progress on unemployment and electoral reform. In the election, the Conservative and Labour parties won seats in their now traditional heartland areas, but the Liberal vote was spread evenly across the country and did not convert to seats under the first-past-the-post electoral system – a situation which still persists today.

After his defeat by Meller, Jones was appointed Secretary of the Liberal Free Trade Association. In 1928 he moved his family to a three-bedroom detached house in Edgware, Middlesex. 'Father loved "do it yourself" projects, best of all he loved gardening. He was a very warm, loving father and husband. He taught me to set goals, make decisions, never to be afraid of being in the minority, and to prepare for meetings,' remembers Brenda.

He took an active part in his local community, attending the Presbyterian Church where he was an Elder. Like his father and grandfather before him he was a Freemason, belonging to a Temperance Lodge. He was a founding member of the Edgware Rate Payers' Association, which lobbied Hendon Borough Council and was instrumental in obtaining local improvements such as walkways under the Watford bypass.

The financial crisis of 1931 touched the lives of everyone. The Jones family furniture business was no exception, and the shops that Jones managed eventually went out of business in the mid-1930s. As a result of the crisis, in 1931 Prime Minister Macdonald formed an emergency coalition with the Conservatives and Liberals and called another election. The Liberals split three ways: Liberal Nationals (Simonites), Liberals (Samuelites) and Lloyd George's Independent Liberals. As a lifelong supporter of free trade, Jones supported Sir Herbert Samuel's official Liberals, and vigorously opposed Sir John Simon's

Liberal Nationals who unconditionally supported the coalition.

As an eight year old, Brenda gained some experience of the poverty and poor housing that blighted parts of Britain. Before the 1935 election, she accompanied her parents to South West Bethnal Green, Sir Percy Harris' constituency from 1922 to 1945. 'Lady Harris, my mother and I stamped and stuffed envelopes for hours ... One afternoon for a change I was taken door-to-door canvassing in the poorest part of town and was shocked at what I saw – the dank, dismal buildings of a London slum.' Brenda also remembers the tramps who roamed the country knocking on doors seeking a free meal and who at night could be seen curled up in newspapers on London's park benches.

The election of 1935 saw a further erosion of Liberal seats, when the party won just twenty-one. Sir Archibald Sinclair took over from Samuel as party leader. He and his colleagues supported Churchill in warning of the dangers posed by Nazi Germany, and in arguing for the need to uphold the League of Nations and for rearmament. When Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940, the Liberal Party joined the coalition government, with Sinclair appointed Secretary of State for Air until the end of the war. Soon after Sinclair took over at the Air Ministry he was invited to speak at a meeting. Brenda remembers:

Archie, being busy in his new role, hadn't prepared a speech. He grabbed father, who called a cab and wrote the first page of the speech as they raced to their venue. Father continued to write the speech off stage. As he completed each page he passed it over to Sir Archibald. All went without a hitch. Father wrote well, fast and easily. He looked upon this small challenge with great amusement.

Jones admired Sinclair and always enjoyed working for him.

During the 1938–39 era of Conservative government appeasement, Jones limited his vacations and worked long hours, particularly supporting the many refugees who approached the Liberal Party. It was at this time that Jones met Dr Peres, an international lawyer appointed by Jan Masaryk, the Czech ambassador to London, to negotiate with the British government on behalf of Czechoslovakia. ‘Peres approached the Liberal Party for help,’ recalls Brenda. ‘It must have been devastating to fail in this mission.’

As an ardent supporter of free trade, in 1937 he compiled and edited a hard-cover booklet, *100 Flashlights on Trade* – an important reference at a time when armament profiteers were in evidence and war was looming. Sources for the booklet included the work of Sir Herbert Samuel, Sir Norman Hill and Alfred Beesly.

Jones was appointed Secretary of the Liberal Central Association in 1938, a post which he held for ten years until his retirement. This included the role of Chief Agent, and, with his extensive knowledge of electoral law, he hosted seminars at the National Liberal Club for party agents and travelled the length and breadth of the country once an election was called.

In 1939 Jones was invited to join the newly formed Ministry of Information that was established to monitor the media during the conflict. He moved his office to the Ministry, but returned to the headquarters of the Liberal Parliamentary Party at Gayfere Street in Westminster after a short time. He worked closely with the Chief Whip, members of the press and, during the wartime coalition government, his counterparts in the Conservative and Labour parties. He volunteered for air raid duty on the roof of the National Liberal Club where he extinguished fires from incendiary bombs.

Jones devoted considerable time and effort to understanding the procedures and protocol of the House of Commons and became a much valued adviser

to prospective Liberal candidates and newly elected members. His close friend, Major General Wulff Grey, a much decorated veteran of the First World War, with whom he lunched every week during the war, had a son, George, who stood for the Liberal Party in 1941. Jones became something of a mentor to George Grey when he entered the House (becoming its youngest member) as MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed. Jones assisted Grey with his maiden speech, and advised him on party policy, parliamentary protocol and how to nurse a constituency. ‘Father, and I believe the party as a whole, thought George Grey had the potential to become a national leader,’ said Brenda. ‘As an MP he was exempt from military service, but chose to fight. Regrettably Captain George Grey was killed in Normandy just a few days after D Day, a deep sorrow for his family, my father and the Liberal Party.’ In the by-election following his death, Sir W. H. Beveridge was elected MP for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Party work continued at the Club. ‘I’m sure many important plans and decisions were made over lunch, or sitting in a quiet lounge,’ recalls Brenda. ‘Unless Father had a specific engagement he lunched with six to eight friends at the large round table near the entrance to the dining room where conversation and jokes were enjoyed.’ Although he was much loved by many, there were a few who were a target for Jones’s outspoken opinions and quick temper, not least the club chef who would occasionally serve a rare delicacy only available on the black market. Jones had no time for illegal trading and would insist that the offending ingredient be removed from the menu immediately.

Jones suffered from migraine attacks throughout his life and during an attack would retreat to his room at the Club. On occasion a migraine would render him unable to speak so he carried the address of the Club on a card to show to taxi drivers. The club

porter would take care of him for a few hours.

Harcourt (‘Crinks’) Johnstone was frequently mentioned in conversation, Brenda recalls. ‘Father probably worked for him on a daily basis during the coalition government.’ Johnstone was elected MP for Middlesbrough West in 1940, and served as Secretary to the Department of Overseas Trade in the coalition government. ‘I don’t remember him referring to Harcourt as “Crinks”. This may or may not have social significance. They shared similar political views and enjoyed each other’s company, despite vastly different tastes, lifestyle and backgrounds.’ For some years Jones was prospective Liberal candidate for South Shields, Johnstone’s previous constituency, and spent considerable time nursing it. However, in 1940 he found a replacement candidate so that he could commit himself solely to his work in London.

During 1941 Jones escorted William Beveridge to meetings on the ‘Construction of a Modern Welfare State’ which Beveridge chaired. Jones listened to

Raymond Jones in Liberal Party HQ, Gayfere Street, Westminster.



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the discussions at these meetings, but he was not directly involved. He also served on the 1942 Electoral Machinery Committee, chaired by the Registrar-General, Sir Sylvanus Vivian. Issues such as electoral boundaries, registration of voters and proportional representation were discussed and Jones was an invaluable contributor with his in-depth knowledge of electoral law and first-hand experience of constituency work during elections.

Jones took an active part in the life of the National Liberal Club and served on the executive that dealt with the Club's management and business arrangements. He became Chairman in 1946. He invited distinguished politicians and foreign dignitaries as luncheon speakers. Brenda joined her father at some key events following the end of the war. As well as the Victory in Europe Thank-giving Service at St Paul's Cathedral, she attended the opening session of the General Assembly of United Nations in London. 'It was the second day and Mr Trygve Lie had taken the chair – another day of excitement and hope for the future, though the failure of the League of Nations was still in our minds,' she said.

After the war there seemed to be a national shift in political mood towards the left, and the Liberal Party hoped to benefit, especially since Beveridge had been elected as a Liberal MP in 1944. However the Labour Party routed the other parties, leaving the Liberals with just twelve seats, all rural. Clement Davies was elected temporary chairman of the Liberal MPs and, when the expected by-election to re-elect Sinclair did not materialise, Davies continued to lead the party for another eleven unremarkable years.

Jones retired as Secretary of the Liberal Central Association on 30 June 1948. On 8 July he was entertained to dinner at the House of Commons by seventeen of his closest colleagues in the party. Viscount Samuel and Clement Davies gave speeches. He had made plans for his retirement,

Raymond Jones was a passionately committed Liberal throughout his life and, although he was angered by injustice, he never became depressed or despondent.

having been invited to do work for the BBC and also considering opening a chain of coffee shops in London. In August 1948, however, he suffered a coronary thrombosis and died on the Isle of Wight while on holiday with his family celebrating Brenda's twenty-first birthday.

Raymond Jones was a passionately committed Liberal throughout his life and, although he was angered by injustice, he never became depressed or despondent. The publication of the Beveridge Report and the formation of the United Nations gave him much hope for the future. Lloyd George

once dubbed him 'the loyallest of the loyal'.

After her father's death and, sadly, that of her mother a year later, Brenda Jones (now Tillotson) left England to work in Canada, the United States and South Africa as a physiotherapist. She settled in Vancouver, British Columbia. Throughout her career she found that the lessons learned at her father's knee were invaluable. She is now retired and lives with her husband near Vancouver. Ian Hunter is the editor of Winston & Archie: The Letters of Winston Churchill and Archibald Sinclair (Politicos, forthcoming, 2005).

More on Lib Dem voting in the House of Commons

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In our earlier article in *Journal of Liberal History* 43 (Summer 2004) tracking Liberal Democrat voting in the Commons between 1992 and 2003, we showed that the party had shifted from being almost indistinguishable from Labour in terms of its voting to having become a *bona fide* party of opposition. Analysis of the last full session's voting data (ending in November 2004) shows that that trend has continued: out of the 284 Commons whipped votes in which Lib Dem MPs participated, the party's MPs voted against the government in 208 (73 per cent). They voted with the government in just 76 divisions (27 per cent). (There were also 53 Lib Dem free votes, and three occasions when the Lib Dem frontbench line was to abstain.)

The party's tendency to vote with the Conservatives has now been growing steadily year on year: from 27 per cent in the first session of the 1997 Parliament, to 40 per cent in the second, 44 per cent in the third, 47 per cent in the fourth, to 54 per cent in

the first session of this Parliament, to 66 per cent in the second session, and reaching 67 per cent between 2003–04. Liberal Democrat MPs are now therefore more than twice as likely to vote with the Conservatives as they were at the beginning of the 1997 Parliament.

These overall figures continue to mask some differences between the different types of votes. The Lib Dems are more supportive of the government over the principle of legislation than over its details – although even here, there has been a noticeable drop in their levels of support. The third session saw the Lib Dems back the government in 53 per cent of votes on the principle of government legislation (voting with them on either second or third reading). Where they really get stuck in, though, is over the fine print – voting against Labour in more than four out of every five votes on the detail of government legislation.

More information on this and related issues can be found at the website www.revolts.co.uk.