

Soon after I had taken over from Prata at Party HQ in mid 1962 I was sent on a grand tour of all the towns involved in order to give the local council groups the hard word that the party officially disapproved of electoral pacts. Armed with both the political and mathematical evidence of the damage caused by these arrangements it was possible to make a strong case for their termination. I had little direct effect, but the pacts petered out of their own accord as the senior Liberal aldermen and councillors either lost or died off. But, at the time, it was a curious task, which produced a number of eminently retellable anecdotes!

By coincidence, I was also very much involved in the Southport Liberal scene which had one of the very rare instances of a Liberal–Labour electoral pact. This stemmed not from a wish to maintain past glories but from a very different standpoint – a desire to abandon the staid Liberalism of the past in order effectively to challenge the massive Conservative domination of the County Borough Council – on which, at its peak, there were 56 Conservative members, three Liberals (two aged aldermen and one elderly councillor) and a single Labour member (a very dedicated socialist, Ernest Townend, who had been Labour MP for Stockport).

Following a disastrous parliamentary by-election in February 1952, which saw the only instance of a lost Liberal deposit in Southport, there were strenuous efforts to rejuvenate the local party. The advent of an able and charismatic local doctor, Sidney Hepworth, led to the convenient absence of Labour candidates in his local ward and Hepworth scraped in at the first attempt.

Labour Councillor Townend subsequently recounted the moment at the first council meeting after the election when he rose to propose an amendment – all of which had for years hitherto failed for lack of a seconder – and, he said, ‘I looked

round, and Councillor Hepworth rose to second it. I knew we were going to have some fun!’

Under Hepworth’s persuasion able candidates came forward and fought and won more and more wards which Labour willingly abandoned to the Liberals. Eventually, ten of the fifteen wards were being fought by Liberals and five by Labour, and a Lib–Lab administration took control in 1962. Alas, it did not last long enough to reap the electoral fruits of its bold planning policies and, of course, Southport CB disappeared into that bureaucratic nonsense, Sefton Metropolitan

District, at local government reorganisation in 1974.

The Southport case is an example of a leader able to renew the party locally and to create an electoral strategy without losing many of the older brigade. Sadly Sidney Hepworth became the only Liberal involved in the Poulson corruption case and he served a prison term, dying a few years later.

All pacts become greater than the parties that make them and they have a dangerous momentum of their own.

Michael Meadowcroft

REVIEWS

Man of many talents

Andrew Adonis and Keith Thomas (eds.): *Roy Jenkins – A Retrospective* (Oxford University Press, 2004)

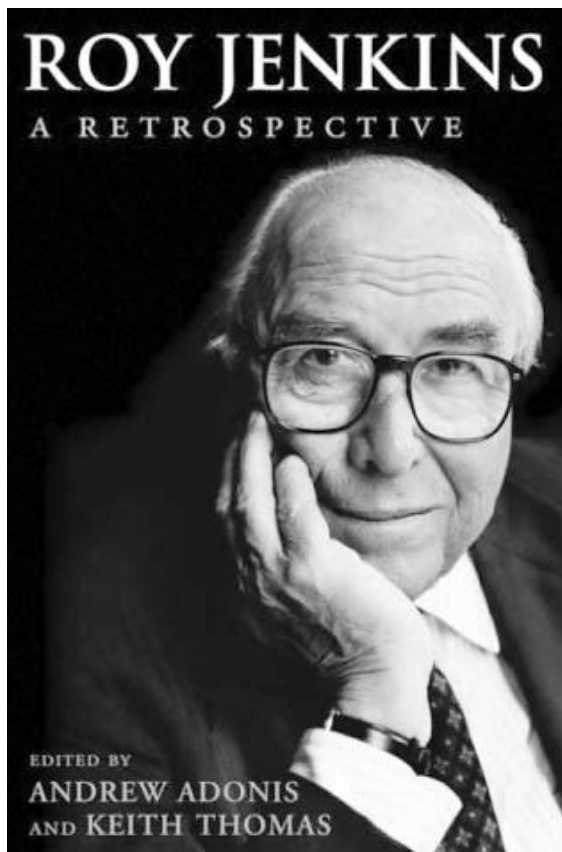
Reviewed by **Dr Julie Smith**

In 1994, Andrew Adonis suggested to Roy Jenkins that he would like to become his biographer. Jenkins demurred for three years before giving Adonis a key to his East Hendred home and access to his papers. Eight years on, the biography has yet to appear. In the meantime Adonis has collaborated with Keith Thomas to edit a series of essays about Jenkins by people who knew him at various stages throughout his life, from friends to political colleagues, academics and other writers.

The essays are broadly chronological, ranging from interviews about his early years with Jenkins’s cousin and his best friend from secondary school, via an essay on his time as an undergraduate in Oxford, to one on his period as Chancellor of the

University. Overall they cover eighty years of British political history, offering not only a range of fascinating insights into Jenkins’s own life but an excellent overview of British political, economic and social history from the General Strike through to the New Labour government that took office in 1997, from his father’s time as an MP and on through Jenkins’s own political career. It takes us through the internal divisions of the Labour Party – the differences between the Gaitskellites and the Bevanites, the pro- and anti-Europeans, between Jenkins and Wilson, and Jenkins and Callaghan, and the ultimate rupture that was to lead to the creation of the SDP – recalls the social reforms of the 1960s which Jenkins did so much to facilitate, and the economic

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crises that Jenkins sought to tackle, and finally reminds us of the ongoing British problem with 'Europe'.

One of the dangers of a book such as this is that repetition can creep in as each contributor seeks to give a definitive picture of the subject. Yet the editors have contrived to produce a set of essays that complement each other extremely well. True, there are certainly episodes of Jenkins's life, his origins or his personal traits that are covered by more than one entry but they are never repetitious. That Jenkins was a man who loved numbers of any sort – be it sums or railway timetables, university league tables or the Enigma machine – came across from a composite of several chapters, which stressed his varying fascinations for counting (including the numbers of people he met when out campaigning), distance and time. As his cousin Pita Karaka put it, 'The main thing about Roy as a child was his addiction to numbers. He was always silent and counting or working out some sum. He was like that ever after!' (p. 4).

Perhaps it was not surprising, therefore, that he should be sent to work at Bletchley Park in April 1944. He did not himself work on the now-famous Enigma codes, although contributor Asa Briggs did, as he recounts at some length in an essay that reveals rather more about Briggs and about Bletchley than about Jenkins. Briggs implies that Jenkins did not particularly relish his time at Bletchley working on 'Fish', yet Jenkins clearly retained an interest in the Enigma machine. Almost by chance he met Robert Harris, the author of *Enigma*, and upon learning that Harris had one of the machines on loan, Jenkins rapidly made plans to meet Harris and the machine, and thereafter ensued a deep friendship based, in part, on Jenkins's determination never to eat lunch alone (p. 308). Despite his prolific output Jenkins claimed to find writing much harder than politics. He told Harris that 'the sheer deadweight effort' of getting up in the morning and trying to fill a blank page with words 'is the hardest sheer intellectual work, harder than anything in a minister's life, which I've ever done' (p. 312).

If Jenkins found writing difficult, it did not show. Although not trained as a historian (he read Modern Greats – otherwise known as PPE – at Balliol), he began writing about political history, and often about Liberal politicians, before his career in politics really took off. As Alan Watkins recalls, when he first met Jenkins in 1959, he was still 'best known as the author of *Mr Balfour's Poodle*, which was about the battle between Asquith's government and the House of Lords before 1914, and *Dilke*' (pp. 31–32). And he did not stop writing for the rest of his life, winning prizes for his biographies of *Gladstone* (1996) and *Churchill* (2001), and when he died he had almost finished a book on Franklin D. Roosevelt and was thinking about commencing a biography of JFK

(p. 272). As David Cannadine notes (p. 293), after 1964 Jenkins did not undertake any 'original archival research' work; nevertheless, he believes that four at least of his works are likely to endure: *Asquith* (1964), the prizewinning biographies of *Gladstone* and *Churchill*, and Jenkins's autobiography, which Cannadine considers 'one of the few outstanding political autobiographies of the twentieth century' (p. 305).

And, of course, it is Jenkins's career as a politician that leads many to read his work, and works about him, such as this *Retrospective*. Many of the contributors note that Jenkins's parents, particularly his mother, were very ambitious for their only son. It is not so clear what those ambitions were, though Oxford was clearly mentioned at an early stage. By contrast, the young Roy's own ambitions seem to have been obvious from his youth. The son of a miners' leader, Arthur Jenkins, who became an MP and PPS to Clement Attlee, his childhood was suffused with politics, including visits from leading Labour Party figures to the family home in Wales. And thus it seems that Roy's ambition from a young age was a life in politics. As his friend from grammar school, Hugh Brace, remarks, 'Politics came absolutely naturally to him' (p. 9).

If national – Labour – politics were to come naturally to Roy, success in university debating came perhaps less easily (college friend Ronald McIntosh noted that 'he never achieved the complete mastery of Union audiences which he displayed in the House of Commons during the 1960s'), and he failed to achieve an early ambition to become President of the Oxford Union. Roy forged a number of friendships at Oxford that were to persist into later life – politically with Tony Crosland, and on a personal level with Madron Seligman, later a deeply pro-European Conservative MEP, and Mark Bonham Carter,

who would later also become a political ally. As McIntosh and Asa Briggs remind us, Jenkins was responsible, with Crosland, for splitting the Oxford Labour Club in August 1939 over the issue of participation in the war. McIntosh draws the parallels with Jenkins's decision to leave the Labour Party in 1981: 'in what was almost a dry run for the formation of the SDP forty years later, [Jenkins] created a breakaway – and highly successful – social democratic organisation' (p. 16) – and one that left Denis Healey behind, still associated with the Communist-dominated Labour Club.

Despite the decision to split the Labour Club, Jenkins remained loyal to the Labour cause and was desperate to secure a seat in the 1945 general election. He fought the unwinnable Solihull that year and then agreed to stand in the Southwark Central by-election in 1948 – even though he knew he would not be able to fight the new seat after the next election, such was his determination to enter Parliament. Thereafter, he secured a safe Labour seat, Birmingham Stechford, which he served loyalty and which treated him well for twenty-seven years. Long-time fellow Labour MP in Birmingham, Roy Hattersley, argues, 'Part of the rapport between Jenkins and his constituency was the result of his ability to make and keep friends' (p. 54). This sort of sentiment re-emerges time and again in the book.

Jenkins, it seems, put a great deal of effort into his friendships and was never pompous or aloof in private, even if he sometimes appeared so in public. The same sort of warmth and loyalty extended not just to close personal friends but to supporters in Birmingham and later in Glasgow Hillhead, the seat he took for the SDP in the famous by-election. He took Glasgow, with which he had no previous links, so much to his heart that he referred to it as a 'senile love affair' (p. 239) – and the feeling

was reciprocated, according to Donald McFarlane. Similarly, as Chancellor of Oxford University, a mantle he donned in 1987 and which gave him great pleasure, he was loyal and deeply committed, always recognising, Anthony Kenny notes, that his role was ceremonial compared with that of the Vice-Chancellor who held real power (p. 260–61). In turn, he inspired as much affection in Oxford as elsewhere.

And what of Jenkins's political career? The book covers the many facets of his political life – from Home Secretary and Chancellor, to President of the Commission, to leader of the SDP – from a range of angles, too. If I have not gone into them in more detail here, it is because in many ways his achievements and legacies are so much better known than his personal traits. But they cannot be ignored. The chapter by Kenneth Baker perhaps best summarises Jenkins's political career: through a piece on cartoons from Jenkins's time as Minister of Aviation (a job that Alan Watkins believes he secured because of his journalistic writings on the topic), then as Home Secretary and Chancellor of the Exchequer, through to becoming the 'Grand Old Man' and mentor of Tony Blair, Baker reminds us of Jenkins's notable achievements and his problems with the Labour Party.

Jenkins's first stint as Home Secretary was ground-breaking in many ways; legalising abortion and homosexual activity between consenting adults are long-term legacies for which he will be remembered. Both the relevant Acts came about because Jenkins supported Private Members' Bills – the Abortion Act being introduced by opposition Liberal MP David Steel, with whom would later lead the Alliance. Such cross-party co-operation was something that Jenkins seemed to relish – he had worked with the Conservative Norman St John-Stevas on the Obscene Publications Act of 1959 and was later to serve as President of the

cross-party Britain in Europe group, campaigning for Britain to stay in the Common Market in 1975. By that time, Jenkins and his followers were disillusioned with the Labour Party and its attitude to Europe and thus, as David Marquand remarks, 'the referendum was pure joy for Jenkins and the Jenkinsites' (p. 132). Jenkins enjoyed working with Liberals and Conservatives in that campaign, the mark of a politician who, despite his undoubted convictions, was able to deal with consensus and compromise. In this he was in many ways ideally suited to his next task – as President of the European Commission – and later for co-operating with the Liberals.

Jenkins, a late convert (p. 119), was wooed to Europe by Helmut Schmidt's suggestion that being President of the European Commission was like being 'Prime Minister of Europe' (p. 182). He rapidly discovered it was not and friends found he was withdrawn in his early months in Brussels. Yet, as with his time as Home Secretary and Chancellor, so he left a positive legacy in Europe too, having fought to secure a seat at the table for himself, and his successors as President, in G7 and EU meetings. He acted as midwife for the European Monetary System, the forerunner of economic and monetary union (pp. 206–07). For a while, he seemed disengaged from British politics, to the extent that he did not even vote in 1979 (p. 213). This was all to change with his Dimpleby Lecture later that year. Expected to be on a European theme, Roy chose to call for 'a strengthening of the radical centre'. Some, like Marquand, saw it as 'a call to arms' (p. 138); his friend and fellow member of the Gang of Four, Bill Rodgers, recalls being far less impressed (pp. 214–15). Yet, the lecture marked a turning point – members of the Labour Party seriously began to talk about leaving and finally did so to form the SDP in January 1981. Without Jenkins and his Dimpleby

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Lecture this would not have occurred.

A historian, a politician, Chancellor of Oxford University, *bon viveur*: Roy Jenkins is remembered as a man of many talents. In addition, what comes across most vividly throughout this book is what a warm-hearted man he was – someone who nurtured friendships and whose friends appreciated him. This is perhaps best summed up by Sir Crispin Tickell, Jenkins's *chef de cabinet* during his time as President of the European Commission, who writes, 'Throughout, his most conspicuous qualities were wide-ranging intelligence, tolerance,

a sense of history, sympathetic understanding of others, and loyalty to his friends'. Adonis and Thomas say in their Preface (p. viii) that they sought to avoid hagiography in the contributions – and they succeed, just. Yet each of the articles is essentially a memoir about Jenkins by someone who held him at the least in high esteem and in most cases rather more than that. The biography is still avidly awaited but in the meantime this *Retro-spective* serves Jenkins well.

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ity remains elusive. His personal magnetism, which attracted both intellectual advisers and new recruits in large numbers, is referred to only in passing; so is his whimsical and self-deprecating air, as if he was looking down (from his considerable height) at his audience and wondering why they took him so seriously. Barberis attributes 'the sense of Olympian distance' (p. 157) that Jo sometimes displayed to his growing deafness; but it was evident long before he began to go deaf. It's a pity that there is no photograph of Jo with a group of student Young Liberals. He was at his most appealing with them, ranging widely across political principles and policy choices. The phrase that struck home best for me was: 'Jo ... had a lazy streak ... yet his presence generated electricity.' (p. 103).

The strength of this biography is in its focus on Grimond's political ideas, their origins and evolution. Barberis sums him up as 'an anti-establishment establishment man' (p. 169). From a comfortable Dundee family, he was educated at Eton

'His presence generated electricity'

Peter Barberis: *Liberal Lion. Jo Grimond: A Political Life* (IB Tauris, 2005)

Reviewed by **William Wallace**

A second biography of Jo Grimond in less than five years, from a different (and more sympathetic) angle than Michael McManus, offers a chance to compare interpretations of the politician who, more than anyone else, gave the contemporary Liberal Party its shape – and, in his call for a 'radical realignment of the left', first spelt out the rationale for the alliance with the Social Democrats. Barberis does not credit Grimond with saving the Liberals from extinction, though Clement Davies had saved them from Churchill's embrace only to remain a marginal party, in non-conformist seats. It was Jo who led the party's revival, in terms of policy and political appeal; he was, for example, one of the first politicians to adapt successfully to television.

Barberis underestimates the scale of Grimond's success as party leader. The Liberals gained only twelve seats in the 1996

election, but all had been won against two or more opponents; in 1955 Grimond himself was the only one of the six MPs who had won against a Conservative opponent. Party membership surged to a peak of 300,000 in 1963, bringing in a new generation (myself included) who stayed with the party throughout the ups and downs of the years that followed. He shifted the party from an anti-socialist stance to social liberalism, spelling out coherent themes and policies that held the party together.

This is an academic study: carefully researched, and supported by a wide range of interviews. It even references several PhD theses on the Liberals. (I should admit, for future scholars, that my own thesis contains two quotations from Jo Grimond that I had myself written for him in the 1966 election campaign – but then, as Barberis makes clear, Jo took ideas and drafts from a great many people.) But Jo's personal-

