

# 'THE LIBERAL CLUB'

## WHAT LIBERAL POLITICS GAINED

In 1981 the Barton-on-Humber Liberal Club was reopened by Liberal MP Richard Wainwright, who asserted that 'if it wasn't for Clubs such as this, the whole Liberal movement would die, for they embody the momentum and spirit of the Party.'<sup>1</sup> Wainwright had a long association with Liberal clubs, and his claim showed a mixture of experience, nostalgia and optimism, for the role of Liberal clubs in the history of British Liberalism is the story of a powerful and often neglected contribution as well as difficult and shifting relations in more recent years. By **Matt Cole**.



**M**ODERN POLITICAL CLUBS emerged in the new political environment created by the Great Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884. It was Robert Peel's relaunch of the Tories as the Conservative Party in 1834 which first prompted the establishment of social clubs to encourage party support. This started with the Carlton in 1832, but was soon

followed by Conservative and Constitutional dining clubs around the country intended to recruit the newly represented to the Conservative cause, with tickets 'at such a price as would be within the reach of the lowest individuals connected with the associations.'<sup>2</sup>

Liberal politicians rallied their forces at the Reform Club, which was founded in 1836 and which

# CHO CHAMBER'

## AND LOST WITH LIBERAL CLUBS

opened its Pall Mall buildings in 1841. Conditions for membership included support of the Reform Act, and it became a meeting place for Whig peers and their successors. Lord Strabolgi remembered that, even at the party's weakest point in the 1950s, 'we used to have a dinner every year for the Liberal Peers – a sort of "thank you" I think – at the Reform, a rather splendid dinner starting with caviar.'<sup>3</sup> The Reform competed with Brooks's in St James's, which had been established in 1764 by twenty-seven leading Whig nobles and where Charles James Fox had held court.<sup>4</sup> These two London Liberal gentlemen's clubs were joined in 1874 by the Devonshire Club and the City Liberal Club, and six years later by the Eighty Club. Though their expansion reflected the increasing scope of party political activity amongst the public in the nineteenth century, these clubs remained open only to the affluent, and limited to London. In the new age of a mass (albeit still restricted) electorate, these were useful only as meeting points for the political and social elite.

### **The Victorian and Edwardian periods: the high point of Liberal clubs**

It was with the development of representative democracy that Liberal clubs emerged alongside the National Liberal Federation as one of the mobilising forces for a vastly increased electorate and activist

base. Following the passage of the Second Reform Act in 1867 enfranchising most men in borough constituencies, and Gladstone's Secret Ballot Act of 1872 which made a democratic discourse with these voters even more essential, the great Liberal or Reform clubs of Manchester (1867), Birmingham and Newcastle (both 1880), Leeds (1881) and the National Liberal Club (1882) were founded.

These clubs enjoyed prestigious Liberal Party patronage, quickly attracted impressive memberships and established equally impressive club buildings. The National Liberal Club, built between Whitehall and its terraces on the Thames, boasted a membership of around 3,500 even at the party's nadir in the 1950s. Asquith was the president of Birmingham Liberal Club and its early officers included John Bright and Joseph Chamberlain; Gladstone laid the foundation stone of the Manchester Reform Club's King Street premises in 1871 and Churchill was amongst its early members; and the Leeds and County Liberal Club, the new building of which was opened by Sir James Kitson MP in 1890, had a membership of 1,650. In the grand circumstances of these institutions, Liberals could hear leading party figures speak, discuss and develop ideas for local and national policy, and, equally importantly, raise funds to fight elections.

These striking examples established high-profile hubs of Liberalism in the growing industrial

centres of the provinces, but were still limited in number and far too exclusive to draw in newly enfranchised voters and the wider activist base of the National Liberal Federation formed in 1877. Though a few other, smaller clubs emerged at the same time – Tydesley, Burslem, Chester, Barrow, Bradford and Ipswich all had clubs before 1882 – it was in the wake of the Third Reform Act of 1884, widening the franchise in the counties, that the real growth in provincial town and village Liberal clubs began. By the end of the century, most districts had a cluster of clubs of varying sizes, from the great dining clubs of the cities to the modest village halls or terraced houses in small towns where liberal opinion was shared amongst new voters. Some of these – such as at Crowle near Scunthorpe, and Leamington – were specifically titled 'Liberal working men's clubs'. East Devon had at least six, including the 600-strong Torquay and Cockington club; West Somerset had eight, with 750 members at Bristol Liberal Club, where John Morley was president; Warwickshire, which had none before the Second Reform Act, and the Lancashire industrial town of Burnley (population 95,000), had at least ten clubs each by 1900.<sup>5</sup>

These clubs performed vital functions for a campaigning party, both explicit and implicit: explicitly they were the venues for party meetings ranging from speeches by visiting party leaders to regular

Barnstaple and  
North Devon  
Liberal Club

## 'THE LIBERAL ECHO CHAMBER': WHAT LIBERAL POLITICS GAINED AND LOST WITH LIBERAL CLUBS

committee and general meetings of the local association or Young Liberal socials: Newcastle-upon-Tyne Liberal Club's Memorandum of Association stated its objects as 'the promotion of the cause of Liberalism'; 'the delivery of lectures



on political and other subjects' and 'the rendering of voluntary aid to Liberal candidates at parliamentary, municipal and other elections.' In one year alone of its first decade the club welcomed Campbell-Bannerman, Lord Granville, Sir William Harcourt, Earl Kimberley, Lord Ripon and Earl Spencer. Later guests included Lloyd George, R. B. Haldane, Earl Carrington and Lord Herschell. Smaller clubs like Longridge (1887) and Gainsborough (1902) were opened by visiting Liberal MPs. Especially at election times many agents used the local Liberal club as headquarters and even recruited club staff – stewards and their families were often resident, even at smaller clubs – to the campaign.

Clubs from Peckham to Lincoln, from Rochdale to Kendal, were the regular meeting place of Liberal associations, or provided funds to support local associations or federations. It was to Manchester Reform Club that the Rochdale Radical Association executive invited Ludovic Kennedy to assess his fitness to be the Liberal candidate for the by-election of 1958; the presidency of Lancaster Reform Club was, during 1947–49, in the hands of Harold Rogerson – as sole (and then leading) liberal councillor, parliamentary candidate and rebuildier of the local party in the post-war years, he used the club as an organising base, and it continued to donate to party funds until 1998.<sup>6</sup> Egan points out how Dundee Liberal Association was 'peculiarly reliant' upon its Liberal club for fundraising,<sup>7</sup> and Blondel showed that significant elements of Reading Liberals' income had been generated by the Reading and County Liberal Club in the decade after the Second World War.<sup>8</sup>

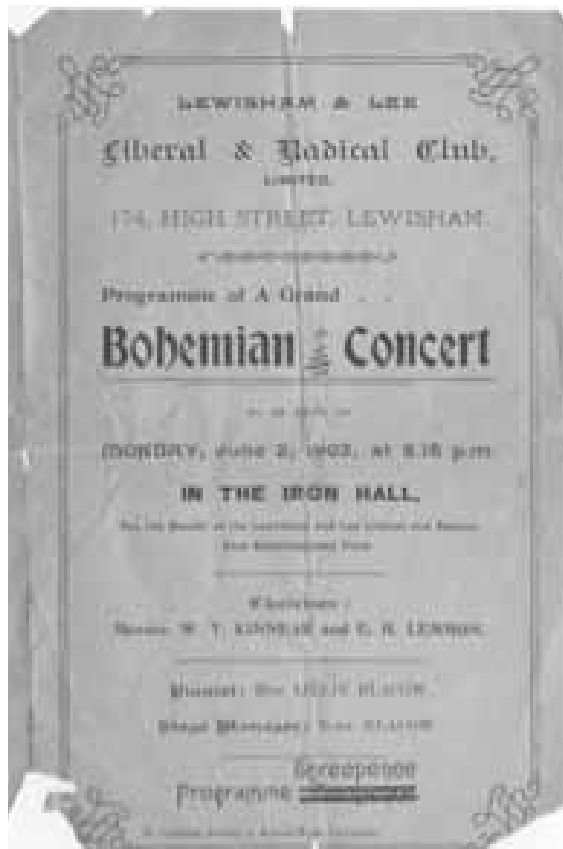
The value of this support was recognised by Liberal officials, especially as the party's fortunes plummeted. In 1954, the organising secretary of the West Midlands Federation asked his opposite number at Bedworth Liberal Club in Nuneaton 'to give all your members my best wishes to them for 1954, and thank them for the co-operation we have always received from them.'<sup>9</sup> The Yorkshire Liberal Federation reiterated in annual reports of the 1940s and 1950s that 'for the continued support of the Liberal Clubs and the Federation of

Liberal Clubs we are most grateful and we appreciate the loyalty and help of all Club members.' In the Federation's Golden Jubilee booklet of 1953, a full-page advertisement by the National Union and the Yorkshire Federation of Liberal Clubs reflected this support.<sup>10</sup>

Just as important, however, was the unstated way in which the clubs embedded Liberalism in their communities. Voters who did not see themselves as political activists could nonetheless acknowledge their broad sympathies without buying a membership card or attending meetings – and they could meet others who shared their sympathies and engage with elected representatives and party officers in the course of ostensibly non-political leisure activities. Most clubs had a regular schedule of whist drives, dances and facilities for billiards, snooker, dominoes or darts. Many competed in local sports leagues: the tiny John O'Gaunt Liberal Club in Lancaster ran teams in several sports in the 1920s; Greet's Liberal Club was delighted to win the West Bromwich Division One Snooker trophy in 1947; Saffron Waldon Liberals ran their own tennis club, and Winsford Liberal Club won the *Manchester Evening News* bowling cup; and as late as 1977 Huddersfield Liberal Clubs Winter Games League arranged fixtures for over thirty teams at each of snooker, dominoes and All Fours. Other clubs offered coach outings to the seaside or the country, or elaborate artistic entertainments such as Lewisham Liberal Club's 1902 'Bohemian Evening' featuring twenty-four items including soloists, duettists and groups offering songs, instrumental performances, dance, recitation and two comedians.

It is easy to forget in the age of home entertainment and central heating how integral collective voluntary organisations were to the social life of all classes, and how useful they could be in maintaining the bond now sadly lost between politicians, activists and the wider electorate. Colley Lane Liberal Club in Cradley Heath went further and ran a sickness insurance scheme in the days before Lloyd George's reforms.

Liberal MP Richard Wainwright was a member of Leeds Liberal Club from the 1930s, and



used links with the dozen clubs in his constituency of Colne Valley to great effect from the 1950s onwards. He advised his constituency organiser in the run-up to the 1970 election that rather than trying to recruit unwilling patrons of Liberal clubs to the party, 'it is more a question of talking to them, hearing from them what is being said locally, and sorting out who can be relied upon.'<sup>11</sup>

Though he lost the 1970 election, Wainwright later remembered that 'immediately after the defeat, it was agreed (and carried out) that the Officers visit each Liberal Club in turn, fraternising and running a full-scale monthly public draw with a very wide sale of tickets. That certainly helped morale.'<sup>12</sup> Wainwright regained his seat at the next election, and at subsequent elections local Liberal clubs provided up to a third of his campaign costs. He regularly toured the clubs in his constituency on Friday evenings, and the political secretary of the largest of them watched him at work: 'I could take him to Golar Liberal Club, and he knew most people; and he didn't just stand at the bar talking to his own colleagues. He spoke to everybody in the Club – he went out of his way in some cases to talk to people, and they liked that. Since then I've found politicians – local as well as national – stand in the corner.'<sup>13</sup>

The high point of these developments was the formation of the National Union of Liberal Clubs in 1913. The NULC linked the hundreds of clubs in the country to each other, and to the Liberal Party nationally because it had guaranteed representation on the Liberal Party Council. Its rules confirmed that their objective and that of their affiliated clubs was 'to carry on, both amongst its members and the general public, propaganda in support of the Liberal Party.'<sup>14</sup>

In October 1956 – the month before Jo Grimond took over as party leader – the diary column of *Liberal News* shows that Liberal clubs and Halls hosted party meetings, lectures, socials and dances everywhere from Hyde to Hereford and Yeovil as well as Oxford, Blandford, Torquay, Tavistock, Chippenham, Poole and Sidmouth – and of course at the National Liberal Club in London.<sup>15</sup> At the party's lowest point, Liberal

clubs provided a redoubt for supporters and a physical reminder of the Liberals' glory days. Most of the experience of the twentieth century, however, was to be one of decline in the fortunes, of the clubs and the party, and of their relationship.

**1918 onwards: drift and decline**

The interwar years and especially the period after 1945 saw first a distancing in the relationship between the party and many of the Liberal clubs and subsequently the financial collapse of most of the clubs.

In the 1920s and 1930s the great clubs of the cities shrank and drifted from the Liberal Party, itself fragmented by repeated internal conflict: the clubs at Manchester and Newcastle-upon-Tyne abandoned political conditions for membership; the Bristol Liberal Club's political committee did not meet after 1929; and in the 1920s Leeds Liberal Club began to rent out space as offices. The number of temporary members joining Birmingham Liberal Club annually fell from 78 in 1918 to single figures in the 1930s;<sup>16</sup> at Newcastle the same figure went from nearly 700 to barely 100 between 1926 and 1939. Few, if any, new clubs were founded after 1918, and the smaller clubs also experienced difficulties maintaining their political identity. Though with many it was not so well documented as with their more prestigious counterparts until later, there is clear anecdotal evidence of it in the inter-war period. A relative of one official at Port Talbot Liberal Club, for instance, remembers that:

The local employer was a Liberal, so unless you also professed to be a Liberal you had no access to jobs either in the Docks or Tin Works. Consequently the Labour-voting constituents of Sandfields joined the Liberal Club. As a committee member Dai was called on as a representative at certain Liberal party venues and was once quizzed by a newspaper reporter who had seen him at the equivalent Labour party venue only the previous week. Ever the fast talker, Dai manufactured some tale and persuaded the reporter



Above: Burslem Liberal Club, with detail of gable

Left: Blackpool Liberal Club, 1897 'Bohemian Concert' at the Lewisham and Lee Liberal Club, 1902

to keep quiet about his apparent duplicity. If it had got back to his employers he would certainly have lost his job.'<sup>17</sup>

From the earliest stages of the post-war period, Party officials were expressing their disquiet that clubs were no longer fulfilling the useful functions expected of them: in 1945, a meeting of the London Liberal Party Executive agreed that 'all possible information be obtained regarding the status of 'Liberal clubs' in and around London. 'The Battersea Liberal Association Club ... and the Ilford Liberal Club ... appeared to be typical cases of Clubs being Liberal in name only, being actually social clubs run for profit. The Secretary will conduct investigations and report to the Committee and to the LPO.'<sup>18</sup> Similar concerns were raised by the Western Counties Federation Executive in 1947: a resolution was passed appointing a small committee 'to investigate and report on all Liberal Clubs in its area and to

## 'THE LIBERAL ECHO CHAMBER': WHAT LIBERAL POLITICS GAINED AND LOST WITH LIBERAL CLUBS



From top:

Colley Lane Liberal Club, Cradley Heath, about 1906.

The members pictured include a warehouseman, a painter, a butcher, a works manager, two engineers and a colliery engine-minder, a twine maker, a coal merchant, a schoolteacher, two blacksmiths and four chainmakers

Castleford Liberal Working Men's Club Billiard team in the 1920s

Eastleigh Liberal Club charabanc outing, 1926



County Liberal Association expressed concern that Soham Liberal Hall 'should not be lost to the Liberal Party', and asked their secretary to secure the deeds for the property.<sup>23</sup>

A deteriorating relationship between the clubs and the party had been rightly identified. Even in areas of relatively strong contact between the two, the evidence of increasing distance was unavoidable. The West Midlands Federation kept a contact list of at least twenty-nine Liberal clubs in its area. However, this network was misleading in its scope: a fundraising raffle in 1952 secured a total sum approaching £10 from seven of the addresses on the list (in cases like the Woodside Liberal Club 'after a struggle'); but most returned all the tickets to Federation Headquarters. Some excused themselves as having already sought contributions from their members for the Liberal Fighting Fund or their own benevolent funds; others claimed to have lost the tickets. Some, like Foleshill Liberal Club in Coventry, were more frank: 'Regret we have been unable to sell any. I am very much afraid that this sort of raffle does not go down well here but we still wish you good luck.'

The clubs were allied to two movements in gradual but seemingly inexorable decline: men's social clubs and the Liberal Party.<sup>24</sup> Some therefore understandably sought to play down their relationship with at least one of those causes to preserve their membership. Witness to this is borne by the membership figures of the clubs, and by the controversies within them. The chairman of Blackheath Liberal Club in the West Midlands (motto 'Unity is Strength') resigned after he found his committee unwilling to expel a member who had expressed Labour sympathies in the bar and suggested the club's window bearing the Liberal Party name be removed. The West Midlands Federation was consulted about both this incident and a second one, in 1953, along with Clement Davies himself, in which the Portobello Liberal Club in Willenhall, Staffordshire had apparently been sold privately to its secretary.<sup>25</sup>

This decline in numbers and party activity in clubs was part of a national picture which saw the National Union's number

recommend what action should be taken to encourage such Clubs to give more support to the Liberal Party.<sup>19</sup>

Truro Liberal Club also closed down following the Second World War – it had been the former meeting place of the local association where 'your Liberalism was taken for granted.' It was also the meeting place of the Trewins, the couple who in 1964 were to welcome

future Truro MP David Penhaligon into the party, but by then meetings were held in private homes or hired rooms.<sup>20</sup> In Scotland, the Helensburgh and Gareloch Liberal Club in West Dumbarton was sold to the Red Cross Society in 1948,<sup>21</sup> and the destination of the proceeds of the sale of clubs became a matter of legal contest in Newbury and Leicester in the 1950s.<sup>22</sup> In 1945 and 1947 the Executive of Cambridge

## 'THE LIBERAL ECHO CHAMBER': WHAT LIBERAL POLITICS GAINED AND LOST WITH LIBERAL CLUBS

of affiliates almost halved from around 400 to just over 200 between 1945 and 1962.<sup>26</sup> By 1981 the NULC could not summon 100 delegates to its conference.<sup>27</sup> The 1946 Liberal Party Reconstruction Report recommended the formation of a special committee of enquiry into the position of Liberal clubs, which went on to become a standing committee of the party. The LPO Executive returned to the matter a decade later, and took stock of the situation in a report commissioned from a member of the Liberal Clubs Committee, B. S. White. White's interim report was peppered with health warnings because 'it is quite possible when further information is gathered conclusions might vary; because of the lack of confirmed information it is brief.' The difficulty in gathering data was itself evidence of the awkwardness of the relationship between the clubs and the party; rather than focus upon this, however, White looked for short-term, individual factors, and the optimistic prospects they implied for turning things around. He attributed the concurrent decline in memberships of both clubs and associations to poor communication and to the fact that 'the Liberal Party has not been able to give financial aid as other parties have to their clubs.' White claimed that 'difficulties have arisen chiefly between individuals on both sides more than general hostility. A great deal of this can be overcome *in time* by a personal approach of the *right type* of Federation Officer or representative.'

White pointed to the good work done by many Liberal clubs, especially in the North, West Midlands and Devon & Cornwall, and argued that 'if there had been no Liberal Clubs in some parts of the country there would have been fewer candidates for both Local and General Elections.' He proposed a series of measures to a dozen club secretaries and chairmen: they approved the ideas of joint membership and mutual publicity drives by clubs and associations, and in *Liberal News*; they were uncertain about party money-raising events at Liberal clubs or prize competitions (a Clement Davies Snooker Cup or Jo Grimond Bowls Cup were suggested); they even thought the ambitious idea of opening new Liberal clubs worth discussing. Yet this

was a small and distorted sample: they were by White's admission all known to him, and thus from that minority of club secretaries who valued close relations with the party.<sup>28</sup>

White proposed closer consultation with the LPO Liberal

Clubs Committee and the National Union of Liberal Clubs (still very supportive of the party), and suggested a conference of all club secretaries and LPO officers. But the writing was on the wall, and nowhere was this better illustrated than in the demise of the most



From top:

Newcastle Liberal Club, Barrack Road, 1930

Greets Green Liberal Club snooker team, winners of West Bromwich Division 1 trophy 1947

Bloxwich Road North Liberal Club, Walsall, around the 1950s



## 'THE LIBERAL ECHO CHAMBER': WHAT LIBERAL POLITICS GAINED AND LOST WITH LIBERAL CLUBS



From top:

Garstang Liberal Club

The Liberal Working Men's Club, Royal Leamington Spa

Yeovil Liberal Club

Greg Mulholland MP celebrates the centenary of Yeadon Liberal Club with Liberal Democrat councillors in 2013



high-profile clubs in major population centres. In each case, declining membership was accompanied by diluting political identity, and ultimately closure.

Manchester Reform Club eventually merged on its hundredth anniversary with the Engineers' Club to form the Manchester Club, which closed in 1987.<sup>29</sup> Likewise in 1967 the Bristol Liberal Club closed its doors after annual reports showing 'concern over membership numbers' and 'many resignations'.<sup>30</sup> Birmingham Liberal Club continued only in name, sharing the address, and secretary, of the West Midlands Liberal Federation until in 1957 its name finally disappeared from local trade directories.<sup>31</sup> Leeds Liberal Club had only 178 members by 1941 and was abandoned in 1947<sup>32</sup> and the representatives of other Liberal clubs in Leeds complained in 1954 that they were made to feel unwelcome at the city's federation executive meetings.<sup>33</sup> By 1955 Bradford Liberal Club was negotiating its merger with the local Conservative club;<sup>34</sup> Holmfirth in Colne Valley closed in 1961, and Blackpool and Garstang in Lancashire held on until the 1970s and 1980s respectively. As recently as 2013 the Liberal club at Chester closed its doors after 130 years. The Devonshire and Eighty clubs closed in the 1970s and of the longest-established London clubs only the Reform and the National Liberal Club still survive – the former now reassuring visitors to its website that it is 'no longer associated with any particular political party, and now serves a purely social function'.<sup>35</sup>

In 1959, a proposal to drop the word 'Liberal' from Newcastle-upon-Tyne Liberal Club provoked 'a very animated discussion,' in which some argued the name was deterring potential new members from joining, but others replied that the building itself 'was well known throughout the country as the Liberal Club [and] was the home of Liberalism.' The name was kept, and the membership kept falling until a meeting of only thirty-nine members vacated the premises in 1962, formal AGMs (latterly of two members) being held at the County Hotel until 1970.<sup>36</sup>

When the Liberals merged with the SDP in 1988, official recognition of the NULC by the party was

ended, and Liberal clubs lost the representation they had enjoyed on national party committees. Some Liberal MPs like Richard Wainwright revived the relationship to mutual advantage locally, but usually only temporarily or with a strong air of nostalgia: Nick Harvey's campaign to defend his North Devon seat in 2015 was based in the premises of Barnstaple Liberal Club (where portraits of Grimond, Thorpe and Gladstone decorate the meeting room), and in 2013 a Commons Early Day Motion was sponsored by six Liberal Democrat MPs celebrating the centenary of Yeaton Liberal Club.<sup>37</sup> In 1976 Paddy Ashdown was selected as Liberal candidate for Yeovil at Crewekerne Liberal Hall and in 1982 his refurbished offices were opened by David Steel at Yeovil Liberal Club 'which had become little more than a working men's club',<sup>38</sup> yet today the club at Yeovil echoes the Reform's insistence that 'we are not affiliated to any political party!'<sup>39</sup>

B. S. White remarked that 'politics being very much a social thing, if other parties have clubs in an area where there are no Liberal Clubs, they have an advantage.'<sup>40</sup> This was unfortunately as important about the past as it was irrelevant about the future. However, to the extent that they cooperated with the party, Liberal clubs lent it not merely material resources, but a sense of its historical existence, links with long-standing Liberal values, and a belief in the intangible property referred to by the Blackheath Club chairman so exercised by his dissident member as 'a really Liberal atmosphere'. In 2015 the Liberal Democrat campaign organiser in Barnstaple could still recognise the value of the Liberal club as an 'echo chamber' in which Liberals were reassured by their shared opinions with fellow members.<sup>41</sup> The psychological effect of this is not to be underestimated, and it proved especially valuable to the party at its weakest moments in the 1950s. The clubs reminded Liberals and their opponents that

Liberals had been around for a century and more, that there still were enough around to run a club, and that as long as the club was there, there still would be.

*Matt Cole is a Teaching Fellow at the University of Birmingham. The author would appreciate contact with any readers with further information about Liberal clubs past or present. Please email m.r.cole@bham.ac.uk.*

- 1 *Lincolnshire and Humberside Times*, 31 Oct. 1981.
- 2 *Manchester Operative Conservative Association: Proceedings of the First Anniversary Meeting, Monday August 24<sup>th</sup> 1835* (pamphlet reprinted from the *Manchester Courier* by T. Sowler, Manchester, 1835)
- 3 Lord Strabolgi, interview 19 Aug. 2003.
- 4 See C. Sebag-Montefiore and J. Mordaunt Crook (eds.), *Brooks's, 1764–2014: The Story of a Whig Club* (Paul Holberton Publishing, 2013).
- 5 The details of club numbers are drawn from local trade directories such as Kelly's and local press references; there is also some useful reference to the role of Liberal clubs in Lancashire and Yorkshire in P. Wrigley and J. Reynolds, 'Liberal Roots', *Journal of Liberal History*, 80, and J. Reynolds, 'The Strange Survival of Liberal Lancashire', *Journal of Liberal History*, 85.
- 6 Information from George Howson, interview 27 Mar. 2004, and John Wilson, Treasurer, Lancaster Reform Club, interview 9 Aug. 2004.
- 7 M. Egan, 'Grassroots Organisation of the Liberal Party, 1945–64' (PhD, Oxford 2000) p. 68.
- 8 Blondel, 'The Political Structure of Reading', unpublished thesis, Oxford 1955, p. 216, quoted by Egan op.cit., p. 68.
- 9 Newton Hyde to Bedworth Liberal Club, 4 Jan. 1954, West Midlands Liberal Federation papers, Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, WMLF/25.
- 10 See for example Yorkshire Liberal Federation Annual Report 1950; this and the Golden Jubilee booklet are in Yorkshire Liberal Federation papers, West

- Yorkshire Archive Service, Sheepscaer, ref. LIB/P.
- 11 Richard Wainwright to Maurice Burgess, 22 Apr. 1970.
- 12 Richard Wainwright to David Ridgway, 16 July 1987.
- 13 Barry Fearnley, interview 31 Oct. 2008.
- 14 National Union of Liberal Clubs Ltd. Rules, 1935, p. 1, and revised rules, 1965 and 1998.
- 15 *Liberal News*, 5, 12, 19 and 26 Oct. 1956.
- 16 Birmingham Liberal Club Fortnightly Members Book, Birmingham City Archives, MS 810.
- 17 Pam Walsh, <http://trees.ancestry.co.uk/tree/21181252/person/1067859960/photox/314841ac-d88b-417e-9c5f-478e8c6b9fdo?src=search> (accessed 5 Jan. 2015).
- 18 London Liberal Party Executive minutes, 20 Dec. 1945, Metropolitan Archives, ACC/1446/4.
- 19 Western Counties Liberal Federation Executive minutes, 12 July 1947, University of Bristol Special Collections, GB003 DM1172.
- 20 A. Penhaligon, *Penhaligon* (Bloomsbury, 1990) p. 12.
- 21 Helensburgh and Gareloch Liberal Association papers, National Library of Scotland, acc. 11765/38.
- 22 Egan op.cit. p. 68.
- 23 Cambridge County Liberal Association Executive minutes, 24 Nov. 1945, 17 May 1947 and AGM 15 Mar. 1958, Cambridgeshire Record Office, R93/73.
- 24 A measure of the decline in working men's clubs more generally is that even since the 1970s the Clubs and Institutes Union, to which most working men's clubs belong, has lost half of its 4,000 member clubs (see *BBC News*, 'Brewers call time on Barrow working men's club', accessed 11 May 2015). The CIU's enthusiasts' website, <http://www.clubhistorians.co.uk/> (accessed 11 May 2015), does not give detailed figures, but regrets the necessity for its 'Obituary' page marking the regular closure of clubs.
- 25 West Midlands Liberal Federation papers, University of Birmingham Special Collections, ref. MSS 11/1, Box 25.
- 26 Information from Bernard

- Simpson, Secretary, National Union of Liberal Clubs, 18 Aug. 2004.
- 27 'Yes Liberal Clubs do matter', *Liberal News*, 16 June 1981. The website of the NULC (<http://www.interface-wizardry.co.uk/nulc/>, accessed 11 May 2015) contains little evidence of recent activity and gives an impression of the current state of clubs which is further reduced from the position in the 1980s.
- 28 A copy of White's interim report is in West Midlands Liberal Federation papers, op.cit. Four years later a similar report was prepared by D. Fletcher Burden, secretary of the NULC, for Richard Wainwright, reaching similar conclusions (Wainwright papers, LSE, file 8/2).
- 29 Manchester Reform Club records, John Rylands Library, Manchester ref. MRC, Administrative History.
- 30 Bristol Liberal Club records, Bristol Record Office ref. 36202/A/1–3. See also Western Counties Liberal Federation Executive minutes op. cit., passim, and Bristol East, Bristol South and Bristol South East Liberal Associations minute books 1946–71 passim., University of Bristol Special Collections GN 0003 DM668 & DM1172.
- 31 See Kelly's Directory of Birmingham, 1957.
- 32 J. Newiss and K. Grady, 'Leeds and County Liberal Club: Historical Notes', Leeds Civic Trust leaflet, July 2004.
- 33 Egan op.cit., p. 68.
- 34 Bradford Club papers, West Yorkshire Archive Service, Bradford ref. 50D86.
- 35 <http://www.reformclub.com/> (accessed 11 Jan. 2015).
- 36 Newcastle upon Tyne Liberal Club records, Tyne & Wear Archive Service ref. 200.
- 37 EDM 246, tabled 13 June 2013 by Greg Mulholland MP.
- 38 P. Ashdown, *A Fortunate Life* (Aurum Press, 2009), pp. 176 and 200.
- 39 <http://www.libclub.co.uk/> (accessed 11 Jan. 2015).
- 40 See report by B.S. White (1956), West Midlands Liberal Federation papers, op.cit.
- 41 Alice Bridges-Westcott, interview 8 Apr. 2015.