

party from the plunge in support in 2010–15. When there is only 8 per cent of the vote to go round, with or without targeting the results are necessarily grim in all sorts of seats.

Mark Pack

Madam Mayor

Jaime Reynolds' piece 'Madam Mayor' (*Journal* 89, Winter 2015) is a formidable piece of research. It clearly represents a remarkable commitment to produce such a comprehensive article. He deserves congratulations for producing such a piece which is a great addition to the record.

I can add one small additional point. The penultimate paragraph refers to Miss Kitson in Leeds. She was actually always known by her second name, Beatrice, rather than her first name, Jessie. She in fact became Lord Mayor under the most curious circumstances.

After long decades of party wrangling over the Mayoralty (from 1897 Lord Mayoralty), a concordat was signed between the Conservatives and Liberals in 1902 to alternate the office annually between the two parties. In 1918 the concordat was amended to include the Labour Party. Perhaps surprisingly, the arrangement continued even when the Liberals were reduced to a handful of members on the Council.

In 1942 it was the Liberals' turn to nominate the Lord Mayor. They put forward Alderman Arthur

Clarke. He was duly proposed, seconded and voted in. He made his acceptance speech, sat down in the Lord Mayor's chair – and died! He was Lord Mayor for ten minutes.

The Town Clerk approached the Liberal Leader, Eric Morrish, and gave him ten days to nominate a replacement. Morrish believed that in the circumstances it would be appropriate to put forward a Liberal who was not regarded as unduly partisan. Miss Kitson was certainly known as a Liberal but she had contested elections, unsuccessfully, as a candidate of the Citizens' Municipal Association. Despite this she was certainly not regarded as 'non-political' in the city and, being a member of a strongly Unitarian family that had been in poverty only two generations earlier, was not really 'elite'! And, of course, as the first woman Lord Mayor, she was quite a radical appointment, and made an excellent job of the task.

It was her uncle, Sir James Kitson, later Baron Airedale, who developed a vast engineering works which made the family extremely wealthy. He had a conspicuous role in Liberal history nationally – see 'Leeds and the Liberal Pantheon' in *Journal of Liberal History* 69 (Winter 2010/11).

The real question to ask is why Leeds has almost completely failed to produce influential women politicians, right up to the current Leader of the Council, Judith Blake.

Michael Meadowcroft

on polling day drove me round all the polling stations in his black Humber. We were clearly better organised in the eight towns than the Tories (thanks to funds and the persuasion of Jeremy to draft in six party organisers from around the country), but we came across one village where the enemy were manning a caravan outside the polling station surrounded by blue posters. When we left Jeremy wryly commented: 'I think we had better concede Romanno Bridge'.

His personal victory in building up North Devon over two elections is well recounted. His extraordinary ability to record names and faces, and even details of their children and pets; his adoption of local grievances with his inimitable slogan of 'mains, drains and a little bit of light'; the devotion in which he was held by his constituents are all faithfully portrayed in detail, and will bring joy and encouragement to party readers.

His later establishment of the winnable seats strategy during Jo Grimond's leadership was the first real attempt at national priority targeting which eventually paid off and without which the party would have remained floundering.

The author also provides us with detail about his early upbringing, very much in Conservative circles, and his youthful display of gifts – as well as some manipulation – in his time at the Oxford Union. The fact that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth did inevitably colour his political career, though, as Bloch credits, he chose to break away from his surroundings to adopt the Liberal cause. On big issues such as human rights, the Commonwealth and the European Community he gave the Liberal Party distinctive leadership.

His much derided 'bomb the railway line' proposal to end the Smith rebellion in Rhodesia was in fact remarkably sensible, had he just used the word 'cut' instead of 'bomb'; and his decisive leading of his MPs into the lobbies in support of EEC membership deserves to be recalled as one of the highlights of his career.

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REVIEWS

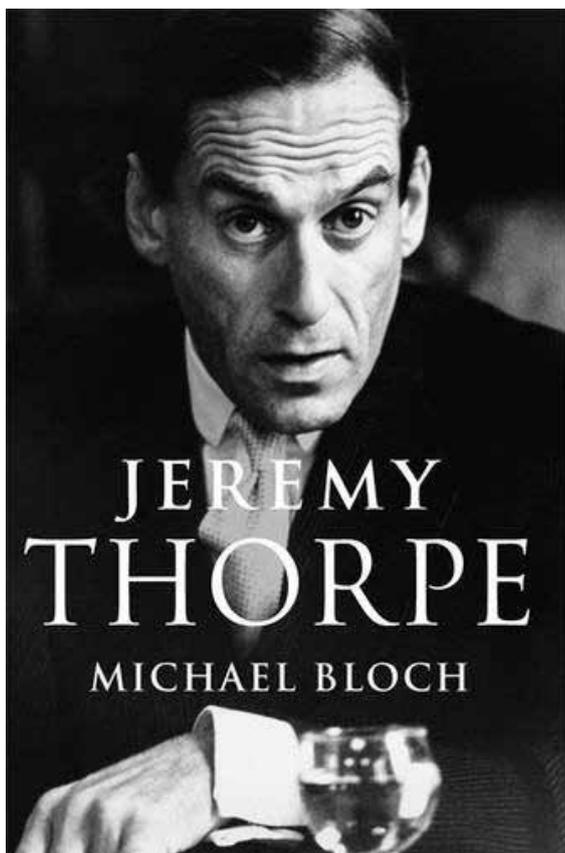
Jeremy's story

Michael Bloch, *Jeremy Thorpe* (Little, Brown, 2014)

Review by David Steel

MICHAEL BLOCH HAS WRITTEN a most thoroughly researched book on the life of Jeremy Thorpe. Unfortunately but predictably, the newspaper serialisation dwelt on the man's private life, thus overshadowing the considerable impact Jeremy

had on the politics of our country. Bloch gives full credit to his campaigning skills, and I personally have good cause to remember them. When I was fighting my by-election in 1965 he spent several days acting as a well-known draw as supporting speaker, and indeed



in that but I recall John Pardoe commenting that, whilst Jeremy was endlessly briefing about the tour and the wellingtons they should bring, there was no mention of what they were actually going to say, though John admired his impromptu speeches on the nation's beaches. And that tended to characterise his whole approach to politics – it was a series of fascinating dramas.

One of those was the aftermath of the February 1974 general election. Jeremy without consulting anybody dashed to London to meet the prime minister, who had just lost the election. The first I (as chief whip) knew of this was a report on the Saturday lunchtime car radio news whilst I was touring my constituency branches to thank them. Bloch says I drove to London – no I flew and got there by evening, talked with Jeremy and in fact drove him to the back entrance of Number 10 on Sunday evening for a second meeting after our Sunday lunchtime meeting with Jo Grimond and Frank Byers (leader in the Lords). We all raised objections but agreed he should probe Ted Heath further on electoral reform. At the Monday meeting of the parliamentary party Bloch describes Jo Grimond as 'speaking in favour of a coalition'. That is potentially

misleading. Jo was as firmly against propping up Heath as the rest of us, but he was perturbed by some of the arguments against coalition in principle which he said were nonsense. It was his stern warning on that issue which coloured my own later judgments on the Lib–Lab pact and indeed the formation of the Cameron–Clegg coalition. It is doubtful whether Jeremy was ever offered any specific cabinet post – certainly it was not discussed.

I question Bloch's assertions on two other points. Firstly, he suggests, as regards the speakership issue in the summer of 1965, that Jo Grimond may have fancied the position himself at some time in the future. I have never thought that was the case: the truth is that the matter was badly handled because the MP for Cardigan, Roddy Bowen, did not come clean and say he would accept the deputy speakership. Had we known that, we might as well have supported him for Speaker. Secondly, he claims that Jeremy offered Ludovic Kennedy a peerage in 1967 and that thereafter Kennedy defected to the SNP. Both are wrong. Ludo was a constituent of mine at the time; he never joined the SNP – merely supported their winning candidate in the Hamilton by-election. Some years later I tried to persuade him to stand in West Edinburgh with the promise that if he failed to win I would nominate him for the Lords. He declined, but never suggested he had been offered a peerage before. Of course when I became leader there was a queue of people who thought they had been promised peerages by Jeremy, and some undoubtedly had been – that was part of his style.

Bloch also records correctly that Jeremy hankered after a peerage himself. Certainly Thorpe bombarded every successive leader on the subject, but the author is a bit unfair to describe Paddy Ashdown's refusal to nominate him as the party being unwilling to forgive him. There was rather more to it than that. Following his acquittal at the famous trial for conspiracy to murder Norman Scott (which is well covered in this volume), the party executive was keen to pursue Jeremy for the return of £20,000, which was part of the Hayward election donation which had been used in his attempts to suppress Scott. I was appalled at this suggestion and argued that we had suffered quite enough bad publicity. The party president and the chairman agreed the matter should be dropped on the clear understanding that Jeremy would play no further part in the party's hierarchy: in other words, no peerage. I and each of my successors stuck to that.

On the matter of Norman Scott, the author tells me that he never spoke to him in view of the many differing accounts he has given of his relationship with Jeremy. Bloch has however spoken to others of Jeremy's liaisons leaving all of us who thought we knew him well astonished at his recklessness. The book – which is a rattling good read – is indeed also an intriguing and valuable study of the extraordinary high-wire behaviour of a public figure; none of which should allow us to forget his charismatic leadership.

David Steel was a Liberal/Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament from 1965 to 1997 and Leader of the Liberal Party, 1976–88.

Pioneering study of Welsh Liberals

Russell Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals: the History of the Liberal and Liberal Democratic Parties in Wales* (Welsh Academic Press, 2014)

Review by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

THIS FINE VOLUME is the latest in a spate of authoritative works regularly produced by the enterprising, Cardiff-based Welsh Academic Press,

run by Ashley Drake, ever since 1994. For the first time ever, we have a comprehensive, substantial study of the Liberal Party (later the Liberal Democrats) in Wales