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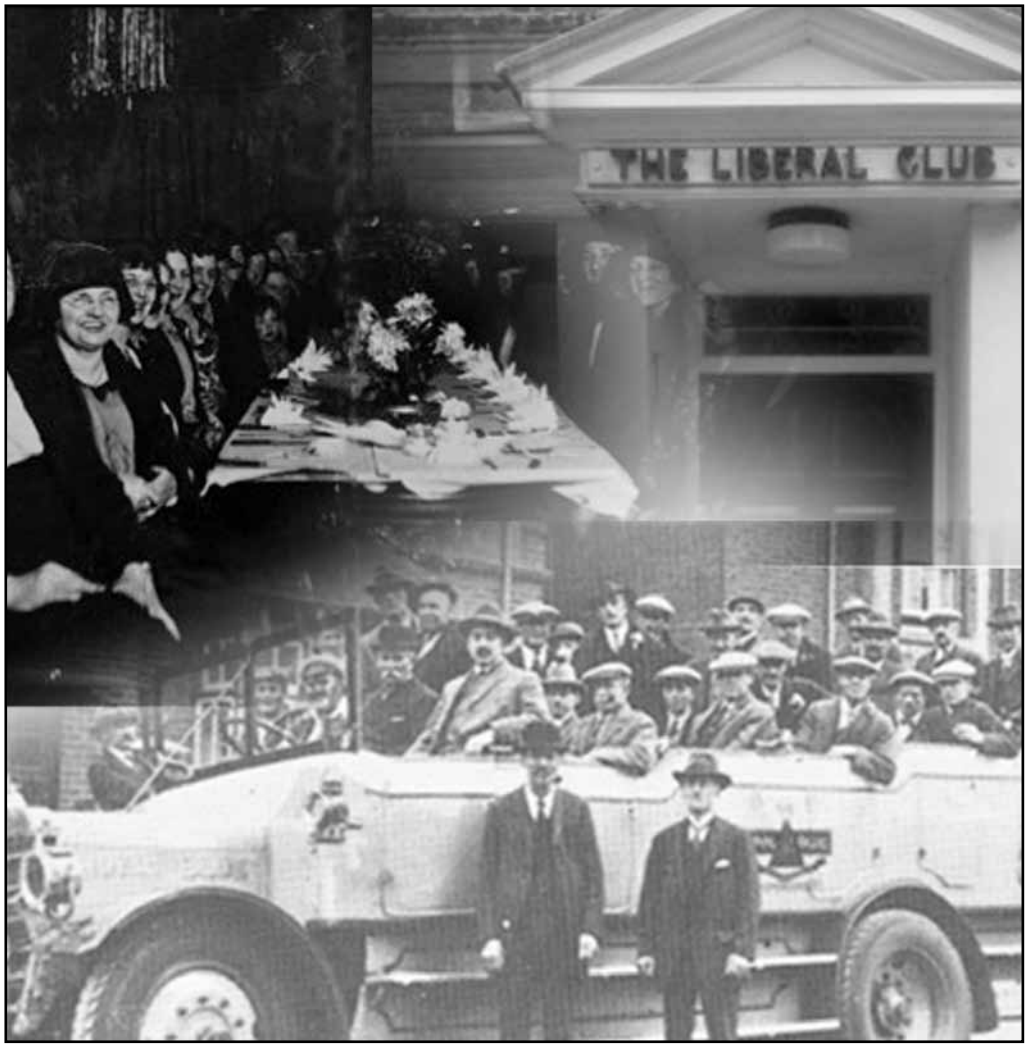
Journal of Liberal HISTORY



Liberal clubs and Liberal politics

Matt Cole
'The Liberal echo chamber' What Liberal politics gained and lost with Liberal clubs

David Dutton
Liberalism's radical Lord Chancellor Robert Threshie Reid, Lord Loreburn

John Shepherd
A Lancashire miner in Walthamstow Sam Woods and the by-election of 1897

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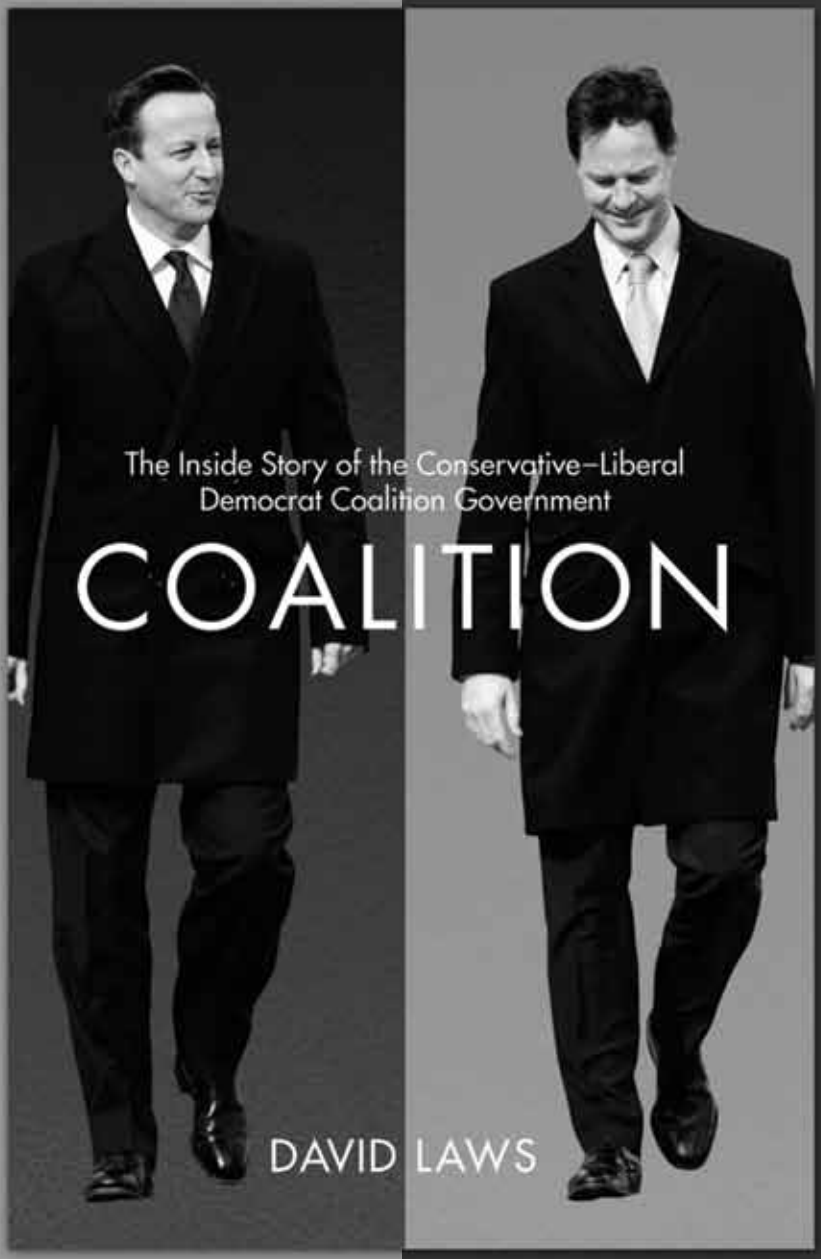

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Liberal Democrat History Group

The Liberal Democrat History Group promotes the discussion and research of topics relating to the histories of the Liberal Democrats, Liberal Party, and SDP, and of Liberalism. The Group organises discussion meetings and produces the *Journal of Liberal History* and other occasional publications.

For more information, including historical commentaries, details of publications, back issues of the *Journal*, and archive and other research sources, see our website at: **www.liberalhistory.org.uk**.

Subscribers' code for discounted sales from the History Group online shop: mbr011

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LIBERAL HISTORY NEWS SPRING 2016

The Gladstone Umbrella

Gladstone's Library, at Hawarden in North Wales, is holding a colloquium, titled 'The Gladstone Umbrella', from Friday 15th to Sunday 17th July 2016 to discuss William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), the greatest Liberal Prime Minister.

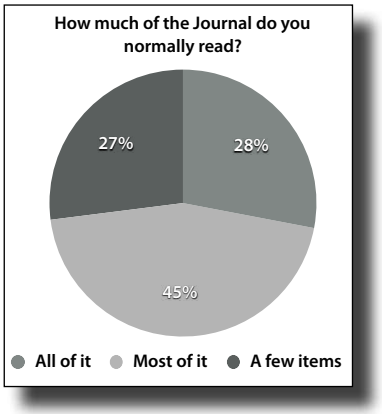
Liberal Democrat History Group members are welcome to apply. Residential prices (bed and breakfast, morning and afternoon coffee, lunch and dinner) start from £192, and non-residential from £150. Discount rates for clergy and students apply. To book, please call 01244 532350 or email enquiries@gladlib.org. Offers of papers should be sent to d.r.brooks@qmul.ac.uk.

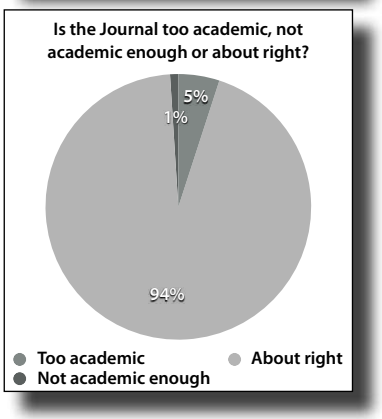
The residential library, which was founded by Gladstone and contains his own books, is to be found at Church Lane, Hawarden, CH5 3DF, about ten miles west of Chester. Their web site is www.gladstoneslibrary.org.

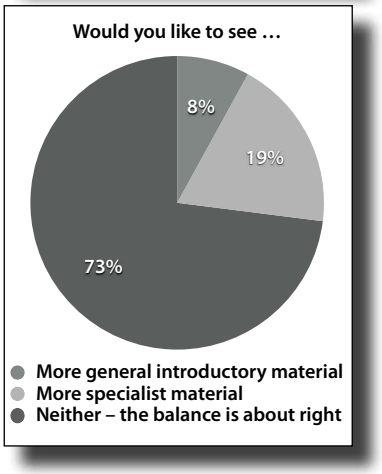
Survey of subscribers

Thank you to the seventy-one subscribers of the *Journal of Liberal History* who completed our online questionnaire in January. The feedback we received was immensely helpful; here we summarise the key points and give our responses.

We asked a series of questions about how much of the *Journal* subscribers normally read, how they rated different aspects of the *Journal*, what they thought of the length of the articles and other items, and whether the *Journal* was striking the right balance between accessibility and authority, and between general introductory pieces and more detailed treatment of specific topics. As you can see from the charts, the clear message is that our subscribers are very happy with almost all aspects of the *Journal* (though of course we recognise that people who don't like what we publish may not respond, or may simply stop subscribing – though our retention rate is quite high). These findings, which are in line with our previous feedback exercises, are obviously reassuring! Many of the individual comments subscribers added were along the same lines ('excellent content and great value' was a typical observation); but we will of course repeat the survey







Future History Group meetings

- Monday 27 June, House of Lords: **The legacy of Roy Jenkins**, with John Campbell and David Steel (see back page for full details)
- September (either Sunday 18 or Monday 19), Liberal Democrat conference, Brighton: **The 2010–15 coalition: what could the Liberal Democrats have done differently?** Speakers to be announced.
- January/February 2017: History Group AGM and speaker meeting; details to be announced

On This Day . . .

Every day the History Group's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed carry an item of Liberal history news from the past. Below we reprint three. To see them regularly, look at **www.liberalhistory.org.uk** or **www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup** or follow us at: **LibHistoryToday**.

March

26 March 1896: Death in Brighton of Thomas Hughes, author, social reformer and Liberal MP for Lambeth 1865-68 and Frome 1868-74. Educated at Rugby and Oxford, Hughes used his experiences in his famous novel of 1857, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, and its sequel, *Tom Brown at Oxford*. Hughes was involved in the both the Co-operative and the Christian Socialist movements and was one of the founders of the Working Men's College in Great Ormond Street. In parliament Hughes campaigned to improve the legal position of co-operatives and trade unions. In later life he founded a settlement in the US – Rugby, Tennessee – designed as an experiment in utopian living for the sons of the English gentry; it still exists today.

April

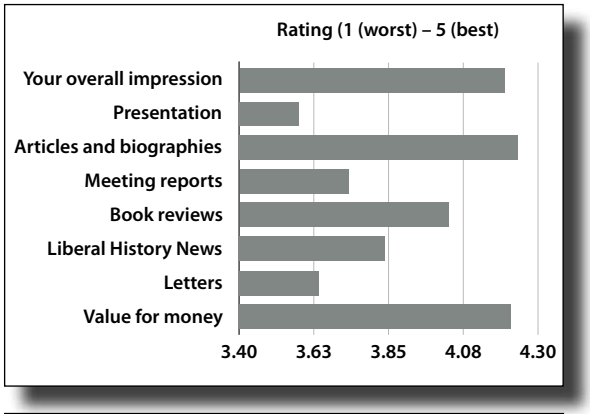
8 April 1908: H. H. Asquith is appointed Prime Minister by King Edward VII in a hotel room in the South of France. The king was holidaying in Biarritz and, unwilling to interrupt his holiday, Asquith was summoned there. Following the adjournment of the House of Commons on 6th April Asquith secretly caught the boat train for Paris. Writing to his wife Margot afterwards, Asquith described the scene: 'This morning I put on a frock coat and … went to the King who was similarly attired. I presented him with a written resignation of the office of Chr. of the Exr; & he then said "I appoint you P.M. & First Lord of the Treasury" whereupon I knelt down and kissed his hand. Voila tout! He then asked me to … breakfast with him. We were quite alone for an hour & I went over all the appointments with him. He made no objection to any of them and discussed the various men very freely & with a good deal of shrewdness.'

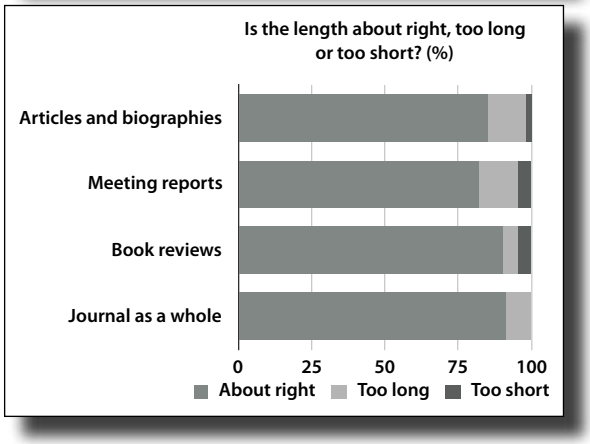
May

31 May 1877: The National Liberal Federation is launched by Gladstone at the Bingley Hall Birmingham, 'to form new Liberal Associations based on popular representation'. While its decisions were non-binding on the party leadership, they came to be seen to represent the party's grassroots and were sympathetic to radical causes within the party, such as universal male suffrage, extension of the factory acts and reform of the House of Lords. Joseph Chamberlain was a dominant force in the Federation in its early days, though his influence declined after the mid 1880s when the NLF decided to ally with Gladstone over the 1886 Irish Home Rule Bill.

periodically to make sure subscribers have a chance to tell us what they think.

Thanks also for all the suggestions for new articles and authors; we will do our best to follow them up. The single most commonly suggested topic was more articles on Liberal parties outside the UK. We have occasionally published these in the past, but will make efforts to publish more in the future.





The lowest score for any of the rating questions was on what subscribers thought of the presentation (layout and design) of the *Journal*, and quite a few of the individual comments were critical of our current layout. Accordingly, this issue will be the last in the current three-and-half column layout; we will introduce a new, and hopefully more attractive, layout in the summer issue. The cover design will, however, remain the same.

Subscribers also gave us valuable suggestions for future History Group meetings, and we will aim to follow up as many of these as we can. There were a number of requests for greater advance notice of the meetings, so from this issue we are adding a forward diary to this 'Liberal History News' section listing our planned meetings – even where we don't have a confirmed date, we will let you know what subjects we're thinking of.

Feedback on future ideas for books, and on our website, Facebook page and Twitter feed was also useful; about two-thirds of our subscribers at least occasionally looked at our website. We aim to increase both its accessibility and the resources contained in it, and will keep subscribers updated on developments.

Finally, we held a prize draw for any of the History Group's books as a reward for completing the survey; the winner is one of our regular contributors, Michael Meadowcroft. Congratulations!

Volunteer needed

For the first fifteen or so years of the History Group, we recorded our meetings on cassette tapes; about ten years ago, we switched to digital recordings, which we hope to make accessible via our website. We would like to do the same for our tape recordings, so if anyone has access to technology which can convert them to digital files, and would be willing to spend time doing so, we would very much like to hear from them. Please email the Editor at journal@liberalhistory.org.uk.

Apology

We would like to apologise for the late despatch of this issue of the *Journal of Liberal History* – it went to press about six weeks later than originally planned.

We will aim to catch up with the summer issue, due out in mid-July.

'THE LIBERAL E

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.'[1] 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**.

Modern 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.'[2]

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

CHO CHAMBER'
D 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.'[3] 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.[4] 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.

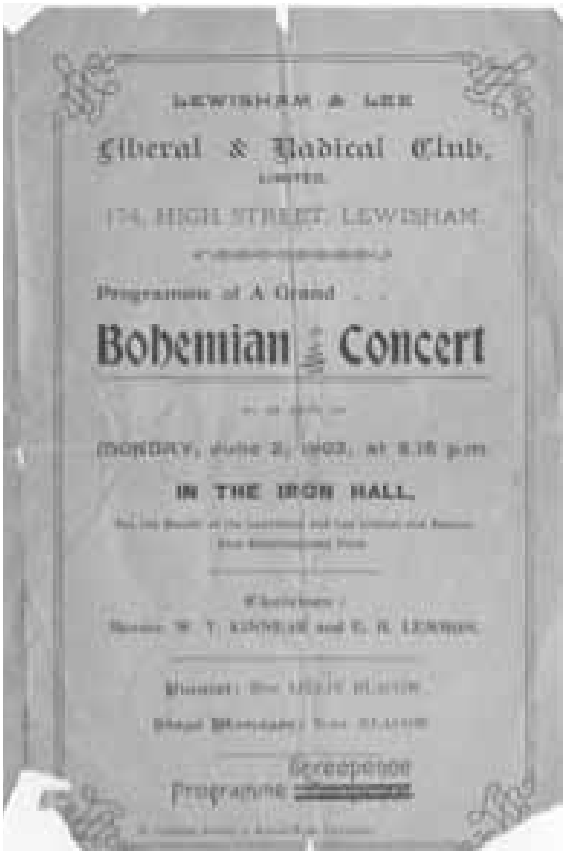
These clubs enjoyed prestigious Liberal Party patronage, quickly attracted impressive memberships and established equally impressive club buildings. The National Liberal Club, built between Whitehall and its terraces on the Thames, boasted a membership of around 3,500 even at the party's nadir in the 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.[5]

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

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 rebuilder 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.[6] Egan points out how Dundee Liberal Association was 'peculiarly reliant' upon its Liberal club for fundraising,[7] 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.[8]

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.'[9] 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.[10]

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; Greets 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.'[11]

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.'[12] 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 Golcar 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.'[13]

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.'[14]

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 Yeadon to Yeovil as well as Oxford, Blandford, Torquay, Tavistock, Chippenham, Poole and Sidmouth – and of course at the National Liberal Club in London.[15] 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.

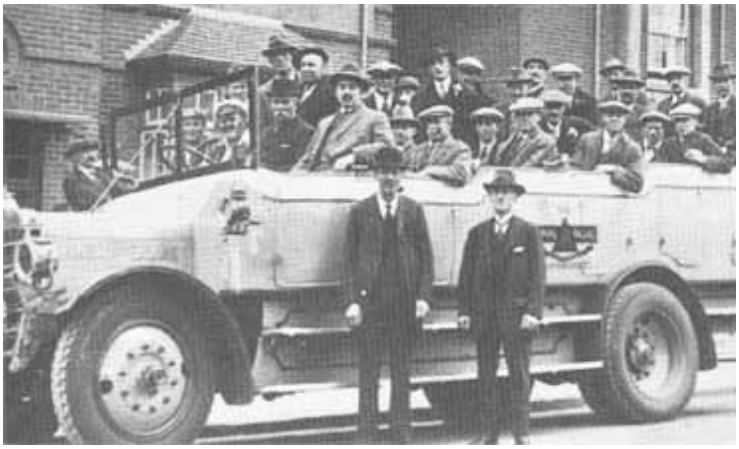
In the 1920s and 1930s the great clubs of the cities shrank and drifted from the Liberal Party, itself fragmented by repeated internal conflict: the clubs at Manchester and Newcastle-upon-Tyne abandoned political conditions for membership; the Bristol Liberal Club's political committee did not meet after 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;[16] 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 to keep quiet about his apparent duplicity. If it had got back to his employers he would certainly have lost his job.[17]

Above: Burslem Liberal Club, with detail of gable

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

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.'[18] 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



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

recommend what action should be taken to encourage such Clubs to give more support to the Liberal Party.'[19]

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.[20] In Scotland, the Helensburgh and Gareloch Liberal Club in West Dumbarton was sold to the Red Cross Society in 1948,[21] and the destination of the proceeds of the sale of clubs became a matter of legal contest in Newbury and Leicester in the 1950s.[22] In 1945 and 1947 the Executive of Cambridge 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.[23]

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.[24] 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.[25]

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

of affiliates almost halved from around 400 to just over 200 between 1945 and 1962.[26] By 1981 the NULC could not summon 100 delegates to its conference.[27] 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.[28]

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

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.[29] Likewise in 1967 the Bristol Liberal Club closed its doors after annual reports showing 'concern over membership numbers' and 'many resignations'.[30] 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.[31] Leeds Liberal Club had only 178 members by 1941 and was abandoned in 1947[32] 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.[33] By 1955 Bradford Liberal Club was negotiating its merger with the local Conservative club;[34] 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.'[35]

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.[36]

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 Yeadon Liberal Club.[37] 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';[38] yet today the club at Yeovil echoes the Reform's insistence that 'we are not affiliated to any political party!'[39]

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.'[40] 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.[41] 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.

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23 Cambridge County Liberal Association Executive minutes, 24 Nov. 1945, 17 May 1947 and AGM 15 Mar. 1958, Cambridgeshire Record Office, R93/73.
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25 West Midlands Liberal Federation papers, University of Birmingham Special Collections, ref. MSS 11/i, Box 25.
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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).
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LIBERALISM'S RADICA
ROBERT THRESHIE REID, LO

At the edge of the churchyard in the tiny parish of Mouswald, a few miles south-east of Dumfries, a simple, now broken, stone cross marks the last resting place of Robert Threshie Reid, first and last Earl Loreburn. The casual visitor might easily fail to notice this grave, overshadowed as it is by a number of larger and far grander funerary memorials, of the kind so favoured in the nineteenth century, to no doubt worthy but relatively unknown local figures. In a similar manner, Reid's historical reputation has now largely been eclipsed by those of the distinguished contemporaries alongside whom he held high office. By **David Dutton**.

AL LORD CHANCELLOR
ORD LOREBURN, 1846–1923

When Reid was appointed to the Woolsack by Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman in December 1905, he entered a government that would boast three future prime ministers, H. H. Asquith, David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill, as well as such secondary luminaries as Edward Grey, Richard Haldane, John Morley and Herbert Gladstone. Yet Reid's elevation was one of the most significant of Campbell-Bannerman's cabinet nominations, not simply because of the intrinsic importance of the office involved, but also as an expression of the new prime minister's determination to maintain a balance between opposing factions of the Liberal Party and his refusal to accept dictation over cabinet appointments from its Liberal Imperialist wing.

Reid was born in Corfu in April 1846. His father, himself a distinguished lawyer, had been prominent in the reform agitation of 1830–32, but was serving as a judge in the Supreme Court of the Ionian Islands, then a British protectorate, at the time of his son's birth. The future Lord Chancellor was educated at Cheltenham College, where he showed signs of both academic distinction and sporting prowess. In October 1864 he won a demyship at Magdalene College, Oxford, but risked losing it when he competed for a scholarship at Balliol a month later. He won that too. Two years later he secured a First Class in Honour Moderations and, in 1868, a First in Greats, together with the university's leading classical scholarship, the 'Ireland', the equivalent of the senior wranglership at Cambridge.

Despite being warned by the Master of the College, Benjamin Jowett, that he thereby risked getting a Third, Reid had not devoted himself entirely to his studies. He kept wicket against Cambridge for three successive years and also secured a 'Blue' for rackets. Despite this impeccable record, Jowett insisted on telling Reid, before he left Oxford, that he had one great defect – a lack of imagination. To this Reid is said to have replied: 'I am sure, sir, you would not have reminded me of a defect unless you could prescribe a remedy.' 'The fact that you ask that question,' responded Jowett, 'shows that my criticism was just.'[1]

After Oxford, Reid seemed set fair to follow his father and pursue a career in the law. He was called to the Bar at the Inner Temple in June 1871 and, in the same year, married Emily Douglas, the daughter of a captain in the Dragoon Guards.[2] He devilled for Sir Henry James and made steady, if not spectacular, progress. He took silk at the exceptionally young age of 36 in 1882, but by then had embarked upon a second career in politics. James's influence helped secure his election in the Liberal interest in the two-member constituency of Hereford in the general election of 1880 and he made his maiden speech in September of that year at the committee stage of the Employers' Liability Bill. He did much to advance reforming legislation, notably the Allotments Act (1887), for which credit is usually accorded to Joseph Chamberlain's close associate, Jesse Collings. His career suffered a temporary setback when, after redistribution removed Hereford's second seat, Reid unsuccessfully sought election for Dunbartonshire in the general election of 1885. Mistakenly anticipating his success, the *Scotsman* described 'a sound, well-formed politician, who can be of great service not only to the Liberal party but to the constituency'.[3] In 1886, however, the opportunity arose to contest the seat of Dumfries Burghs. The sitting Liberal MP, Ernest Noel, found himself at odds with Gladstone's policy towards Ireland and withdrew from the general election called for July. At the invitation of the local party, Reid agreed to fight the seat as 'an advanced Liberal in favour of Home Rule'.[4] It was, the

Robert Threshie Reid, 1st Earl Loreburn GCMG PC QC (3 April 1846 – 30 November 1923)

new candidate declared, the most important political issue to have arisen in his lifetime and was at the heart of his local campaign.[5] Reid took the seat with a majority of 330 votes over his Unionist opponent, Miles Mattinson, and held it until his elevation to the Lord Chancellorship in 1905.

Despite his precocious talents, few at the time would have predicted that Reid's career would one day culminate in the most decorous and dignified of ministerial appointments. Looking back from the vantage point of 1910, Sir Henry Lucy doubted whether 'the most daring seer, casting the horoscope of Bob Reid … would ever have perched him on the Woolsack … At that period [the 1880s] Reid was by instinct and habit far too radical in his views for the convenience of his pastors and masters on the Front Bench.'[6] Reid not infrequently voted against the party's Gladstonian leadership and seemed almost to delight in finding himself among minority opinion. He was, for example, an early advocate of giving Indian natives a share in the government of their country and, while supporting Gladstone's Home Rule Bill, suggested that the only long-term solution lay in a scheme of 'Home Rule All-Round'. Soon after entering parliament, he made a vigorous attempt to limit the excesses of vivisection.[7]

Gladstone's commitment to Irish Home Rule badly split the Liberal Party, casting it into opposition for the next two decades, save for a brief and somewhat unhappy interlude of minority government between 1892 and 1895. This did, however, afford Reid his first taste of ministerial office. Changes among the government's law officers gave him his opportunity. In the summer of 1894 the Attorney General, Charles Russell, became a Law Lord and was succeeded by the Solicitor General, Sir John Rigby. Granted his reputation as something of a loose cannon on the Liberal benches, Reid was not an automatic choice to fill the resulting vacancy. But circumstances worked to his advantage. Of the candidates in contention,

> [Francis] Lockwood it is believed looks for promotion to the Bench and has an uncertain seat. [Richard] Haldane is backed strongly by Asquith, and is probably the ablest man of the three; but he is an equity lawyer, and it would not do to have him as well as Rigby for Law Officers. So the appointment will probably be offered to Reid, though Rosebery [the prime minister] said that he thought it a bad principle to reward a man who, like Reid, has shown a good deal of discontent.[8]

Then, that autumn, Rigby himself became a judge in the Court of Appeal, leaving Reid the opening to become the government's chief legal officer.

Given the Rosebery government's minority status, it was always likely that this first episode in Reid's ministerial career would be relatively brief. But he did enough to enhance his standing in the party. Reid's main responsibility in parliament was to help the Chancellor, Sir William Harcourt, to get his budget through the Commons. This was the famous Finance Bill that first introduced death duties to the British public. According to George Goschen, Reid 'was doing very well as Solicitor-General; and … progress [on the budget] would be much more rapid if Harcourt would leave more to Reid and interfere himself less frequently'.[9] Reid had 'fully justified his promotion to the Solicitor-Generalship', noted Edward Hamilton at the end of the parliamentary session.[10]

Rosebery's government was visibly disintegrating even before a narrow Commons defeat on 21 June 1895 on a motion to reduce the War Secretary's salary, following allegations of a shortage of cordite and small arms ammunition, provided the coup de grâce. Ever since Gladstone's retirement from the premiership in March 1894, the Liberal Party had found it impossible to coalesce around an agreed programme and strategy. Resignation was not automatic but, 'by electing to resign … the Liberal Government arguably chose the worst of the three options available to it. Going out of office on an issue of military preparedness could do it no good in the country, and the Liberals forfeited thereby part of the entitlement which they could have claimed by virtue of their extensive programme of naval rearmament to be regarded as reliable custodians of national security.'[11] The resulting landslide Unionist general election victory was entirely predictable. The Unionists gained 110 seats, giving them a 152-seat majority in the new House of Commons. By this stage in his career, however, Reid clearly benefited from a significant 'personal vote' among the electors of Dumfries Burghs and, despite arriving somewhat late in the constituency, he never seemed in danger of defeat. With his Unionist opponent making the tactical mistake of focusing too narrowly on the issue of home rule – 'the supreme matter now before you' – Reid defied the national trend and secured a slightly increased majority.[12]

According to George Goschen, Reid 'was doing very well as Solicitor-General; and … progress [on the budget] would be much more rapid if Harcourt would leave more to Reid and interfere himself less frequently'.

In opposition the Liberal Party conspicuously lacked the strong leadership which might have helped it to regroup. In Michael Bentley's words, 'the overwhelming sense conveyed by Liberal history after 1895 is one of shrinking horizons and a feeling of involution. What Liberals want to discuss is themselves.'[13] Following an apparent call from the ageing Gladstone for British intervention in response to Turkish atrocities in Armenia, Rosebery unexpectedly announced his resignation as Liberal leader on 6 October 1896. As the party was not in government, the leadership was divided between Harcourt in the Commons and the Earl of Kimberley in the Lords. This arrangement was short-lived. Harcourt soon became aware that he could not command the loyalty of the whole of the parliamentary party and he announced his own resignation on 14 December 1898. With Asquith ruling himself out of contention for fear of the impact on his earning potential at the Bar, the Liberals were running out of viable leadership candidates. The mantle now passed to the 63 year-old former Secretary of State for War, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, very much a compromise candidate drawn from the centre ground of the party's increasingly broad ideological spectrum. Few believed that, if and when the time came, Campbell-Bannerman would become prime minister. Such a situation might induce Asquith to put political honour before financial advantage. Alternatively, the monarch could decide to send for Lord Spencer, a former Viceroy

of Ireland. Or perhaps Rosebery would be persuaded to abandon his self-imposed Olympian detachment and return to the political fray. Yet, as opposition leader in the Commons, Campbell-Bannerman would reveal 'previously unsuspected talents'.[14]

By the time that Campbell-Bannerman succeeded Harcourt, the focus of the Unionist government and of British politics in general was increasingly fixed upon the deteriorating situation in southern Africa which led, in October 1899, to the outbreak of the second Boer War. But events, which might have been expected to channel Liberal energies into hostility towards the government's policies, served only to exacerbate lines of division within the Liberal opposition itself. As Reid's local newspaper put it in March 1900 following a meeting of the council of the National Liberal Federation, 'there are some who hold that the war is just and necessary, some that it is just but unnecessary, some that it is both unjust and unnecessary'.[15] The last group, of which Reid became a leading member, were inevitably dubbed the 'Pro-Boers' by the Unionist government and its backers in the right-wing press, but the title was misleading. Being a 'Pro-Boer' did not require any degree of support for the Transvaal and Orange Free State republics and their governments, nor did it mean hoping for their military victory. It was based rather on the conviction that the conflict had been wilfully engineered by the British authorities and, in particular, by the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain.[16]

In opposition after 1895, Reid tended to concentrate on his legal career and in 1897 Sir Richard Webster, Attorney General in the Unionist government, asked him to assist in the so-called Venezuelan Boundary Dispute. Reid was in fact in Paris during the autumn of 1899 for the arbitration of this case as the diplomatic conflict with the Boers moved towards open hostilities. But he took steps to ensure that his constituents were fully informed of his views:

> I see no points between Great Britain and the Transvaal which could not be settled honourably without a sacrifice of interests on either side. The obstacle seems to be the profound distrust of British policy entertained by the Boers. They think we are aiming at their internal independence, which is plainly guaranteed to them by the Convention of 1884.

As Reid's local newspaper put it in March 1900 following a meeting of the council of the National Liberal Federation, 'there are some who hold that the war is just and necessary, some that it is just but unnecessary, some that it is both unjust and unnecessary'.

The only way of securing peace, he insisted, was by unreservedly respecting this convention in actions and not just words. The alternative policy of 'trying to frighten the Boers may land us in a ruinous war'.[17] The following month a mass Liberal meeting in Leeds heard Reid's words read out from a letter. Calling for a British reiteration of the Boers' internal independence to be balanced by steps from the Transvaal government to recognise the civic rights of all its residents and for points of difference to be referred to arbitration, Reid warned of the grave danger posed by 'incendiary speeches and newspaper articles'. His need to speak out was compelling. 'Silence in such circumstances is next door to complicity, and if on such an occasion as this the Liberal party fails to act up to its traditions, it will cease either to deserve or enjoy the public confidence.'[18]

The actual outbreak of fighting made Reid's position no easier, as it was the Boers who took the first military action when President Kruger of the Transvaal sent his commandos into the northern Cape and Natal on 12 October. While Rosebery now called upon the nation to 'close its ranks and relegate party controversy to a more convenient season', Reid needed to put across a more nuanced message. While insisting that the attack on the Queen's dominions had got to be repelled, he trusted that at the end of the war both British and Boer interests would receive fair and generous treatment. Furthermore, he thought it difficult to condemn too strongly the 'miscarriage' of South African affairs that had led to the present situation. He held the British government to be guilty of 'exasperating, injudicious and ill-considered conduct, the disastrous consequences of which we are now watching in operation'.[19]

The extent of Liberal disunity in relation to the war was soon made public. An amendment in the House of Commons on 19 October, moved by the radical backbencher, Philip Stanhope, which expressed 'strong disapproval' of the government's conduct of negotiations, produced an embarrassing three-way split. More than forty Liberals followed Campbell-Bannerman's lead and abstained; but over ninety, including Reid, supported the amendment, while fifteen voted with the Unionist government. Reid himself quickly emerged as one of the government's most effective critics. A Commons speech at the end of January 1900, in which Reid gave a detailed critique of government 'treatment of the South African question from first to last' and called for the reopening of the enquiry into the Jameson Raid of 1896, was described by the *Manchester Evening Times* as one 'the like of which has not often been heard during recent years in Parliament'.[20] At its conclusion he received 'a most remarkable ovation, the Liberals cheering again and again and crowding round him with congratulations in the lobby'. The reply from the War Secretary, St John Brodrick, 'did little to remove the effects of the powerful pleading of the ex-Attorney-General'.[21]

Over the months that followed, Reid continued to make his case in what was an extremely difficult political environment. Initial Boer victories, culminating in the so-called 'Black Week' of December 1899, were followed by a series of British victories, secured by the now augmented forces led by Field Marshal Roberts and General Kitchener. The danger always existed that Reid and those who agreed with him would be overwhelmed in a tide of jingoistic support for the national war effort. He clearly felt the need to emphasise that he was not opposed to the idea of Empire per se:

> If Imperialism means a sober pride in our great Empire, an earnest desire to knit together the bonds of friendship of the various populations, and a firm determination to preserve the integrity of our Empire and to use its resources as a means of advancing civilization, there is no one who is more Imperialist than I am.[22]

At the same time, Reid worried that military victory in South Africa might be followed by the annexation of the Boer republics:

> We have already more than we can digest; anything we do in that direction increases the burden upon us, and does not increase our strength, but on the contrary diminishes our strength, because it increases the drain upon our resources. I hold that no statesman ought, if he can fairly help it, to increase any further the already enormous territories which are under the British Crown.[23]

Reid's position became particularly vulnerable when the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, judging that the war was effectively won, persuaded a somewhat hesitant prime minister, Lord Salisbury, to call a general election, to be held between 28 September and 24 October 1900. Nationally, the contest found the Liberal Party deeply divided, a situation which Reid's Unionist opponent in Dumfries Burghs, William Murray, clearly hoped to exploit:

> It might be that the fate which had attended the Radical party in the House of Commons might attend it in the constituencies also. The divisions of opinion which had driven brother from brother, which had sent Mr Haldane in one direction, Sir Robert Reid in another direction and left that poor old leader Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman stuck upon the highest hedge, might appear in the Dumfries Burghs also. He did not say they would, but it was something at all events worth waiting for.[24]

Indeed, securing Reid's defeat became an important objective of the government's election campaign. As Chamberlain himself put it:

> I saw the other day a report of a speech by Sir Robert Reid … who is himself, I have no doubt, a conscientious pro-Boer and 'Little Englander' and he said that, among the things that you were to vote against at the election, above all was the scandalous administration of the Colonial Office. Scandalous is a strong word, but weak people always use the strongest words. I believe Sir Robert Reid is a most amiable man at home, but in politics he loses his head. He cannot conceive of anybody venturing to differ from him without attributing to him a double-dyed depravity which is almost beyond the powers of his expression.[25]

While these developments came close to destroying any remaining cohesion within the Liberal Party, they worked to Reid's long-term personal advantage by forcing the party leader to abandon his efforts to occupy the middle ground and, appalled by Britain's 'methods of barbarism', to come out decisively, like Reid, as an opponent of government policy.

In response, Reid conceded that Boer aggression had indeed made it necessary to fight, but he still insisted that government diplomacy could and should have prevented matters ever reaching the point of armed conflict. Granted that the swing against 'pro-Boers' was, on the whole, greater than against Liberal supporters of the war, he did well to hold on to his seat, his majority down by just fifty votes from 1895.

Contrary to most expectations, however, the war was not in fact over. The Boers, aware that they could not prevail in a conventional military conflict against the British army, resorted to guerrilla tactics. The forces of the Crown, now under Kitchener's command, replied with a ruthless scorched earth policy, whose implementation increasingly outraged moderate opinion in Britain. Emily Hobhouse's revelations of conditions in the concentration camps set up by the British authorities were of particular importance. While these developments came close to destroying any remaining cohesion within the Liberal Party, they worked to Reid's long-term personal advantage by forcing the party leader to abandon his efforts to occupy the middle ground and, appalled by Britain's 'methods of barbarism', to come out decisively, like Reid, as an opponent of government policy.[26] It was, therefore, in the later stages of the war that firm bonds were established between the two men, which would ensure Reid's prominence in any future government which Campbell-Bannerman might have the opportunity of forming. At the beginning of 1902, the *Dumfries Standard* singled out Reid and John Morley as 'trustworthy colleagues' of the leader in the 'crusade for peace on terms that will ensure to the Boers the largest, earliest measure of self-government that is consistent with the supremacy of this country'.[27] A fortnight earlier, the writer of the same newspaper's 'London Letter', anticipating an early general election, had suggested that some commentators were beginning to construct 'imaginary Cabinets'. 'In one I see that Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman is Prime Minister and Sir Robert Reid is set down as Lord Chancellor.'[28]

It has become something of an historical truism to suggest that the Liberal Party made a dramatic recovery following the final ending of the Boer War in May 1902.[29] Nor is this contention without substance. It was the Unionist government which now showed clear signs of disintegration, especially after the launch of the campaign for Tariff Reform by Joseph Chamberlain in May 1903. Most Liberals rallied unhesitatingly to the defence of free trade. Other aspects of government policy, such as the Balfour Education Act of 1902, with its bias towards Church of England establishments, also had the effect of bringing Liberalism's warring factions together. Yet the point must not be taken too far. The Boer War had opened up serious divisions within Liberal ranks which, if now less obvious, had not gone away. This became evident in the events surrounding the formation of a Liberal cabinet in December 1905.

Three months earlier, with Balfour's Unionist administration evidently on the verge of collapse, senior members of the Liberal Party's Imperialist wing, who had never really accepted Campbell-Bannerman's claims to the leadership and still less the premiership, met to determine their tactics. Under the terms of the resulting Relugas Compact, the three conspirators agreed that H. H. Asquith should be appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in any forthcoming Liberal government, Edward Grey Foreign Secretary and R. B. Haldane Lord Chancellor. In addition, Campbell-Bannerman himself would be largely sidelined by the enforced acceptance of a peerage, leaving Asquith to lead the administration in the Commons.

But the conspirators had consistently underestimated Campbell-Bannerman's strength of character and purpose. The latter was determined to construct a balanced cabinet, reflective of all strands of party opinion. At the same time, he recognised that acceptance in full of the Relugas terms, while not achieving this, would also fatally undermine his authority within the new government. On two points, therefore, the would-be new prime

minister was adamant. He would not compromise his own premiership by going to the Lords and he would insist upon Reid's claims, as a former law officer, to the Woolsack. It seems reasonable to conclude that Campbell-Bannerman envisaged that his personal alliance with the radically inclined Reid would be a key axis in counterbalancing the influence of the government's leading Liberal Imperialists. Once he had loosened Asquith's ties with his fellow plotters, Campbell-Bannerman was home and dry. Asquith tried to press Haldane's claims to the Lord Chancellorship, arguing that Reid would make a suitable Home Secretary, but to no avail.[30] Accordingly, Reid took office as Lord Chancellor on 11 December 1905, assuming as his title the old war cry of his native town of Dumfries and emerging now as Baron Loreburn.[31]

The ancient office of Lord Chancellor, at least until the reforms introduced by the Blair government after the general election of 2001, was one of the curiosities of the British constitution, combining in one person and in apparent contradiction of Montesquieu's dictum on the separation of powers, judicial, legislative and executive functions. The office holder was, at one and the same time, head of the independent judiciary, a senior government spokesman in the House of Lords and, in practice, that chamber's Speaker, and a leading cabinet minister. Some occupants of the position were clearly uneasy about this combination of functions and saw the need to minimise their strictly political activities, especially those falling outside their direct departmental responsibility. As the longest-serving Lord Chancellor of the twentieth century put it, 'I assumed that my appointment was, in a sense, a signal from my younger colleagues that the more political aspects of government policy should be left to others. I was grateful, and took the hint.'[32] By contrast, even if his public pronouncements became more restrained, the evidence suggests that Loreburn remained active across the entire range of the government's political agenda.

Loreburn's position as a government minister in the House of Lords came to assume particular importance. In part, this was a function of the Opposition Unionists' overwhelming numerical superiority in the upper chamber; in part the result of the constitutional crisis which soon developed as a succession of government bills met their fate at the hands of intransigent Unionist peers. The government had a strictly limited pool of oratorical talent upon which to draw. Apart from the Lord Chancellor, the chief Liberal spokesmen in the parliament of 1906 were the Earl of Crewe (Lord President), the Marquess of Ripon, already nearly 80 years of age (Lord Privy Seal and Leader of the House), Lord Tweedmouth (Admiralty), the Earl Carrington (Agriculture and Fisheries) and the Earl of Elgin (Colonial Office). It was not a strong team and much responsibility fell on Loreburn's shoulders.[33] The Lord Chancellor was taken seriously ill in the autumn of 1906.[34] He recovered, but the strain did not go away. As the clerk to the Privy Council recorded a few months later:

> He spoke with great emphasis and concern of the immense burden cast upon him by the combination of his judicial and ministerial work with the duties of the Speakership in the House of Lords, which tended to become more and more onerous. He deplored, too, his obligation to intervene so often in debate, as he said 'they are so few' and added that his Cabinet work, which he would not shirk, was in itself a heavy load.[35]

The Lord Chancellor hoped that his colleagues would agree to the appointment of a salaried deputy Speaker who would be able to take his place in the event of prolonged sittings of the House.[36]

For all that, few questioned the success of Loreburn's tenure of the Woolsack. In some respects it had been 'the most daring of Campbell-Bannerman's experiments in Ministry making':

> To call upon him to preside over the sittings of the House of Lords seemed to the perturbed mind equivalent to wantonly loosening a bull upon a china shop … [But] the rugged, blunt-spoken Bob Reid has become the supple, accommodating Lord Loreburn. To see him beaming on the Woolsack, with a bishop on one side and a Tory duke on the other, the three engaged in friendliest conversation, is to invite the inquiry: 'Do we sleep, do we dream, and are visions about?'[37]

'To call upon him to preside over the sittings of the House of Lords seemed to the perturbed mind equivalent to wantonly loosening a bull upon a china shop … [But] the rugged, blunt-spoken Bob Reid has become the supple, accommodating Lord Loreburn.'

Though passions ran high in the Lords at this time, Loreburn succeeded in winning the respect of his political opponents. An article in the Unionist-supporting *Observer* in August 1907 pointed out that he now found himself

> in a position of authority and personal popularity exceeded by none of his predecessors. Naturally acceptable on his own side, he has won the confidence and esteem of stern, unbending Tories … Such a statesman deserves encouragement and it is graciously bestowed.[38]

Enjoying the respect of his opponents did not, however, mean that Loreburn shied away from the vigorous presentation of the government's case. The journalist Harold Spender penned a vivid description of the Lord Chancellor's response to the rejection of the 'People's Budget' of 1909 by Unionist peers:

> Lord Loreburn pushed aside the end of his wig, swung his robes away from him, and faced the crowded House. He spoke slowly and clearly, without a moment's hesitation. He went straight for the constitutional point. He brushed aside Lord Lansdowne's sophisms. Was this rejection of the Budget legal? Yes. Was it constitutional? No. Then, very simply and clearly, preaching like a St Augustine to the barbarians, he tried to set forth to these 'wild men' the elements of the British Constitution. First they laughed and sniggered, but in the end they listened. For it was with a touch of that old-world, noble enthusiasm that inspired Chatham and Edmund Burke that Lord Loreburn spoke of that strange mystic entity, the ancient 'Constitution' of these islands. The phrases fell like blows.[39]

If Loreburn could not expect to prevail in the division lobby against the massed ranks of his Unionist

opponents, this had nothing to do with his advocacy of his party's causes.

Ironically, it was the exercise of one of the Lord Chancellor's more routine duties that caused some consternation within the grass roots of the Liberal Party itself. Over the previous generation of almost uninterrupted Unionist domination, the venerable Lord Halsbury had come to regard the Woolsack almost as his own personal fiefdom. Lord Chancellor 1885–86, 1886–92 and 1895–1905, Halsbury appeared to be a permanent fixture in the Unionist hierarchy and, aged 88, was still attending meetings of the shadow cabinet as late as 1912. As Lord Chancellor, he had routinely and almost exclusively appointed known political supporters to the magistrates' bench. It was hardly surprising that, having watched this blatant abuse of the Lord Chancellor's powers, many Liberals now expected Loreburn to redress the balance, especially granted their party's overwhelming victory in the general election of 1906. As the clerk to the Privy Council put it, 'with the present majority in the House of Commons the great risk to which administration is exposed lies in the pressure upon Ministers to exercise their powers in obedience to preconceived ideas of political obligation'.[40] To his credit, however, Loreburn refused to make such appointments on the basis of political affiliation.

Reactions within his own party were predictable. 'The Lord Chancellor's refusal to make the Magistracy the reward of political activity, 'to hawk justice', as he calls it, in the purlieus of politics, has excited more prejudice in the Liberal ranks than any other single act of the administration, although Lord Loreburn is perhaps the most advanced Radical of the lot.'[41] Of around 7, 000 magistrates appointed between January 1906 and November 1909, less than half were known Liberals. The Liberal whip, whose duties at this date included the management of the party in the country, protested to Campbell-Bannerman that Loreburn was 'upsetting and most seriously damaging our Party'. Liberal activists were 'indignant beyond restraint, and I do not wonder at it'.[42] The Lord Chancellor, however, remained unmoved: 'all I can tell you is that this is an attempt to force upon me what I regard as a prostitution of my office and that I will resign the Great Seal sooner than do it'.[43] Only in 1910 was the problem resolved when a Royal Commission recommended the setting up of regional committees which would advise the Lord Chancellor on appropriate appointments.

Loreburn's opposition to 'political jobbery or corruption in appointments' extended also to the judiciary.[44] Here, he was determined to elevate the best candidates rather than seek to satisfy Liberal Party interests, frequently telling the prime minister that he was unaware of an appointee's politics. Loreburn was also responsible for some significant reforms, not least the setting up in 1907 of the Court of Criminal Appeal, which soon became an indispensable part of the constitution. In addition, it was partly owing to Loreburn that in 1913, after his own retirement from office, the government secured the passage of legislation to reverse the Osborne ruling of 1909, and thereby permit the use of trade union funds for political purposes.

The absence before December 1916 of a cabinet secretariat and the resulting lack of a set of cabinet minutes relating to the Edwardian era limits the historian's ability to evaluate Loreburn's contribution to the full agenda of government business. What is, however, clear is that the Lord Chancellor quickly emerged as a leading critic of the drift of British foreign policy as constructed and conducted by Sir Edward Grey. The divisions which arose within the private discussions of the cabinet in some ways mirrored those which had been on public view during the Boer War. The key element in British diplomacy in these years was the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale, concluded by Grey's Unionist predecessor, Lord Lansdowne, in 1904. But Loreburn became convinced that responsibility for transforming this agreement away from its original, limited and largely colonial intentions and towards a full-blown quasi-alliance lay firmly with Grey and his close colleagues in the Liberal government. Loreburn offered a succinct indictment of what had happened in his book, *How the War Came*, published in 1919:

> On the formation of the Liberal Government … three Ministers, Mr Asquith, Mr Haldane, and Sir Edward Grey, laid the foundation for a different policy, namely, a policy of British intervention if Germany should make an unprovoked attack on France. They did this within a month, probably within a few days of taking office, by means of communications with the French Ambassador and of military and naval conversations between the General Staffs of the two countries, who worked out plans for joint action in war if Great Britain should intervene. They did it behind the back of nearly all their Cabinet colleagues, and, what really matters, without Parliament being in any way made aware that a policy of active intervention … was being contemplated. As time went on our Entente with France was still further developed … and France was encouraged more and more to expect that Great Britain would stand by her in arms if she were attacked by Germany without giving provocation.[45]

It was hardly surprising that, having watched this blatant abuse of the Lord Chancellor's powers, many Liberals now expected Loreburn to redress the balance, especially granted their party's overwhelming victory in the general election of 1906.

Loreburn's fury was increased by the fact that he was one of those cabinet ministers who were kept in the dark about the new policy.

After 1906 Loreburn repeatedly pressed Grey not to turn his back on the idea of improved relations with Germany, without fully realising how difficult the Foreign Secretary's fundamental commitment to France rendered such advice. Moreover, the Lord Chancellor's relative power within the government diminished over time. Campbell-Bannerman's resignation on grounds of ill health in April 1908, and his replacement by Asquith, was a particular blow. 'It is a different Government today from what it was three years ago', complained the Lord Chancellor shortly afterwards, on the occasion of the inevitable retirement of the now aged Lord Ripon.[46] Remaining Radicals either lacked the necessary political clout or were too ineffectual inside the cabinet to provide Loreburn with the backing he needed. Relations between Lord Chancellor and Foreign Secretary were often tense. By 1911, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George,

who, notwithstanding his pedigree as a 'Pro-Boer' of earlier times, was himself now moving into the Grey camp on matters of foreign policy, confided that Loreburn was 'petulant' and 'unreasonable', always 'rubbing Grey the wrong way'.[47]

But Loreburn had good grounds to feel aggrieved. That August a special meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, from which Radical ministers had been purposely excluded, considered the immediate deployment of a British Expeditionary Force to France in the event of the outbreak of war. Yet the manner in which Loreburn learnt of this meeting, not from one of his own colleagues but via the Unionist frontbencher, Alfred Lyttelton, was 'guaranteed to injure his vanity and stoke the fires of his indignation and wrath against the "Liberal Leaguers"' (as he continued, with reference to the right-wing group founded by Lord Rosebery towards the end of the Boer War, to describe his opponents).[48] There were rumours of the Lord Chancellor's imminent resignation.[49] In fact, with some help from John Morley, Loreburn staged a showdown at two cabinet meetings on 1 and 15 November. Here the existence of the military conversations between Britain and France was finally revealed to the full cabinet. 'Asquith, Grey, Haldane, Lloyd George and Churchill thought they could boss the rest of us but were mistaken', recorded Jack Pease, the president of the Board of Education.[50] Loreburn found no logic in Grey's reasoning, telling C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian* that the Foreign Secretary's case rested 'on one or other of two really absurd propositions – either that our forming a close friendship with Germany would cause France to attack Germany – or that our remaining close friends with France would cause Germany not to attack France'. The once informal association with France had been 'perverted' into an alliance.[51]

Any advantage Loreburn may have derived within the internal power struggles of the Liberal government as a result of the cabinet meetings of November 1911 was, however, short-lived. The Lord Chancellor became seriously ill over the Whitsun recess of 1912 and, on doctor's orders, he immediately resigned his office. Haldane recalled receiving an early morning message which 'asked me to communicate this to the Sovereign as he was too ill to do so himself'.[52] These health problems were genuine, though Loreburn later admitted that he would certainly have resigned over the 'German business', but for his conviction that he should remain in office to try to 'get a sensible policy instead of what had been pursued'.[53] Once again, Loreburn recovered relatively quickly and he had returned to limited political activity by the start of 1913. But there could be no question of a resumption of the continuous grind of ministerial office. In any case, he felt increasingly alienated from his former colleagues and his subsequent political interventions often seemed designed to embarrass the government of which he had so recently been a leading member.

'Loreburn's initiative was not alone responsible for the opening of negotiations between the leaders, which were inevitable anyway, but it helped to create an atmosphere which allowed conversations to begin sooner than might otherwise have been the case.'

It was the apparently deadlocked situation over Ireland which brought Loreburn back to the centre of political controversy. With the Liberal government's Home Rule Bill facing implacable opposition, especially from the Unionists of Ulster, yet bound under the terms of the recently enacted Parliament Act to make its way on to the statute book, Loreburn used a Lords debate in July 1913 to appeal for a settlement by consent along federal lines. Visiting the former Lord Chancellor the following month, Sir Almeric Fitzroy found him surprisingly ready to make concessions on other government measures in order to secure Unionist assent to 'Home Rule in any shape'. 'He did not seem to have reflected very deeply on the attitude his late colleagues might take towards such a scheme of accommodation, but spoke with very great fervour upon his own sense of responsibility in the matter.'[54] Loreburn's next move was to send a lengthy letter to *The Times*, published on 11 September under the heading 'Lord Loreburn's Appeal to the Nation: A Liberal Plea for a Conference'. In it, he wrote that the time had come for Ulster to receive special treatment within a home rule settlement and he called for 'a Conference or direct communication between the leaders' of the opposing factions to reach agreement. The former Lord Chancellor's ideas were vaguely expressed, but they caught a growing mood. According to *The Observer*, the letter had 'profoundly altered the face of politics. Its manner of grappling with the verities has given the ordinary talk of Parliament and platform an air of mere cant and jargon.' Loreburn had 'made it infinitely more difficult for a vicious deadlock of constitutional elements to drag a paralysed nation to disaster'.[55]

Ministers, however, were less impressed, not least because, in the early stages of drafting the Home Rule Bill, the then Lord Chancellor had bitterly opposed the attempts of Lloyd George and Churchill to exclude Ulster from its provisions.[56] His intervention now, 'with a typical elder statesman's show of non-partisan wisdom', was bound to cause resentment.[57] Nor did it offer a clear path to a compromise settlement. At that time, in fact, the province of Ulster as a whole returned virtually the same number of Nationalist as Unionist MPs to the Westminster parliament. According to his daughter, Asquith regarded Loreburn's suggestions as 'quite unfeasible and absurd'.[58] Nonetheless, the prime minister wrote to his former colleague to press for further details. Loreburn responded with a confidential memorandum for the cabinet's consideration, arguing for a form of 'home rule within home rule' for the unequivocally Protestant counties within Ulster.[59] The importance of Loreburn's letter has sometimes been exaggerated, and the measured words of Patricia Jalland merit repetition: 'Loreburn's initiative was not alone responsible for the opening of negotiations between the leaders, which were inevitable anyway, but it helped to create an atmosphere which allowed conversations to begin sooner than might otherwise have been the case.'[60]

Not surprisingly, Loreburn greeted Britain's declaration of war against Germany on 4 August 1914 with dismay. Had he still been in government at this time, he would almost certainly have joined Morley and John Burns in resigning his office and he might well have led a more substantial opposition group within the cabinet than in fact emerged. He praised the *Manchester Guardian's* leading article of 31 July which argued that 'England

had been committed, behind her back, to the ruinous madness of a share in the wicked gamble of a war between two militant leagues on the Continent'.[61] When shown Morley's memorandum on the events leading to his resignation, he found 'indelible proof of the central fact that our duties to France and the Entente caused our entry into the war and that the case of Belgium might (but for that) have been dealt with and Belgium secured without war'.[62]

Loreburn's public appearances and speeches during the war were comparatively few, but he was active behind the scenes, working for an early and just peace. He was quick to recognise that the American president, Woodrow Wilson, could play a pivotal role in bringing about such a settlement and made contact with him via his special envoy, Colonel House.[63] He also collaborated with those MPs such as Percy Molteno, the Member for Dumfriesshire, who shared his analysis of the changes that would be needed in diplomatic practice if the tragedy of 1914 were not to be repeated.[64] Lloyd George suggested that he might have restored Loreburn to the Woolsack on the formation of his coalition government in December 1916, had the latter not been a '"pacifist" Radical'.[65] In reality, however, there was never a chance that Loreburn would have returned to office under a man now inextricably linked to the notion of the 'knockout blow'. In the latter stages of the war, he welcomed the first Russian Revolution of February/March 1917, hoping that it would 'sow freedom and security broadcast on a scale never approached heretofore', and he gave public support to his former antagonist in the upper chamber, the Unionist Lord Lansdowne, when the latter's celebrated letter to the *Daily Telegraph* called for a compromise peace as the only alternative to the destruction of civilisation itself.[66]

At a time when it has become normal to view politics and politicians with a cynical contempt, it is difficult not to see in Lord Loreburn a man of principle. He was 'one of those men in whom Liberalism burned like a flame'.

In the course of 1918, however, Germany crumbled in the face of a remorseless allied advance, giving rise to a renewed confidence in outright victory. Any possibility that Loreburn might be able to play a significant role in the conclusion of the conflict quickly passed. With the war over, he rejected the idea that he should return to public life: 'I should be in perpetual antagonism with the Old Gang, who have sold and deceived us.'[67] He despaired of the Liberal Party – indeed, he questioned the very existence of such a body 'of the real old kind' – hoped that the country would get rid of Lloyd George, but could not regard Asquith as a possible replacement.[68] It has even been suggested that 'once, if not twice', he voted for a Labour candidate 'as a protest against the foreign policy of Lord Grey'.[69] If true, this action can only refer to a local election, granted that Loreburn's position as a peer of the realm denied him the vote in general elections. His last significant task was to see his volume, *How the War Came,* through to publication. The book offered a powerful indictment of Grey's foreign policy. In it Loreburn was able to rehearse in public the critique of the Foreign Secretary's diplomacy which he had previously voiced in the privacy of the cabinet. His argument was that, in virtual secrecy, Grey had converted the entente of 1904 into a *de facto* alliance – a situation which left the latter with little room for manoeuvre in the crisis of 1914, even though the secrecy of the transformation prevented the Foreign Secretary from making Britain's commitment to France clear to Germany. This in turn ruled out any hope that Germany might be deterred and war averted. Loreburn's analysis of the consequences of secret diplomacy and the reality of Britain's position in 1914 continue to resonate within the still contested historiography of Britain's involvement in the Great War. With his book published, Loreburn remained in almost total retirement at Kingsdown House, Deal, where he died on 30 November 1923.

At a time when it has become normal to view politics and politicians with a cynical contempt, it is difficult not to see in Lord Loreburn a man of principle. He was 'one of those men in whom Liberalism burned like a flame'.[70] Asquith recalled 'a direct and virile robustness in his creed and his character which was singularly attractive'.[71] The *Manchester Guardian* wrote of one who 'loved justice and hated all the pettiness and meannesses which creep into politics as into every other great department of life'.[72] His greatest legacy lay in his determination, as far as he could, to exclude party politics from the administration of justice, thereby doing much to restore the Lord Chancellorship to its proper place in the British government. Yet, if his Liberalism was 'of the unflinching type', his radicalism still had its blind spots.[73] For example, he opposed the campaign for women's suffrage, trying unsuccessfully to delete from the Representation of the People Bill (1918) the section dealing with the female vote.[74] Though he justified his stance on the grounds that to enact such a measure without the clear sanction of the country would be 'a great outrage on the Constitution', he clearly accepted the traditional idea of 'separate spheres', asking an Anti-Suffrage meeting in 1912 whether 'the feminine point of view and temperament and mode of action [were] suitable for managing great affairs of State'.[75] Generally, however, there is an admirable consistency and integrity running through his long career. His contribution to British public life merits greater recognition than it has yet received.

David Dutton is co-author of a new A-level textbook, The Making of Modern Britain, 1951–2007 *(Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).*

1 J. Reid, *Some Dumfries and Galloway Men* (Dumfries, 1922), p. 200. No collection of Loreburn's papers is known to have survived. 'I have no papers', he wrote towards the end of his life. 'I never keep them.' C. Hazlehurst and C. Woodland, *A Guide to the Papers of British Cabinet Ministers 1900–1951* (London, 1974), p. 121.
2 Reid's first wife died in 1904. In December 1907 he married Violet Elizabeth Hicks-Beach, niece of the former Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer.
3 T. Watson, 'Sons of the South: Sir Robert Threshie Reid, MP', *The Gallovidian* 9, iii (1901), p. 4.
4 *Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser* (hereafter *Dumfries Standard*), 12 June 1886.
5 *Dumfries Standard*, 16 June 1886, address to Special General Meeting of Liberal Association.
6 *Dumfries Standard*, 13 Sep. 1922.
7 House of Commons Debates, vol. 277, cols 1399–1413.
8 D. Brooks (ed.), *The Destruction of Lord Rosebery: From the Diary of Sir Edward Hamilton, 1894–1895* (London, 1986), pp. 132–3.
9 Ibid., p. 148.
10 Ibid., p. 167.
11 Ibid., p. 93.
12 William Murray's election address, *Dumfries Standard*, 10 July 1895. The result was: R. T. Reid 1,785, W. Murray 1,185.
13 M. Bentley, *The Climax of Liberal Politics: British Liberalism in Theory and Practice 1868–1918* (London, 1987), p. 106.
14 R. Hattersley, *Campbell-Bannerman* (London, 2006), p. 65.
15 *Dumfries Standard*, 14 Mar. 1900.
16 For a more nuanced assessment of Chamberlain's role, see A. N. Porter, *The Origins of the South African War: Joseph Chamberlain and the Diplomacy of Imperialism 1895–99* (Manchester, 1980).
17 Letter to constituent, 24 Sep. 1899, published in *Dumfries Standard*, 27 Sep. 1899.
18 *Dumfries Standard*, 11 Oct. 1899. Reid's use of the phrase 'all residents in the Transvaal' might seem to imply concern for the indigenous African population. However, he interpreted the South African problem primarily as a clash between two competing European colonial traditions and his concern here is with the violation by the Boer republic of the civic rights of the so-called Uitlanders, mainly but by no means exclusively British migrants who had poured into the Transvaal following the discovery of the Witwatersrand Gold Field in 1886.
19 Meeting at Liberal Club, Westminster, 28 Nov. 1899, reported in *Dumfries Standard*, 2 Dec. 1899.
20 *Manchester Evening Times*, 1 Feb. 1900; *Dumfries Standard*, 3 Feb. 1900. The Jameson Raid of 1895–6 was an abortive coup designed to prompt the overthrow of the Kruger government in the Transvaal, in which the complicity of the Colonial Secretary, Chamberlain, was widely suspected.
21 Harold Spender in *Manchester Guardian*, 1 Feb. 1900.
22 *Dumfries Standard*, 3 Feb. 1900.
23 Speech to Dumfries Liberal Association, 13 Sep. 1900, reported in *Dumfries Standard*, 15 Sep. 1900.
24 Adoption meeting in Dumfries, 20 Sep. 1900, reported in *Dumfries Standard*, 22 Sep. 1900.
25 Speech in Birmingham, 22 Sep. 1900, reported in *Dumfries Standard*, 26 Sep. 1900.
26 In an important speech to the National Reform Union in June 1901, marking a distinct movement in his own position, Campbell-Bannerman asked, 'When is a war not a war?' He answered his own question: 'When it is carried on by methods of barbarism in South Africa.' J. Wilson, *CB: A Life of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London, 1973), p. 349.
27 *Dumfries Standard*, 1 Jan. 1902.
28 *Dumfries Standard*, 18 Dec. 1901.
29 See, for example, G. R. Searle, *A New England?* (Oxford, 2004), p. 351.
30 R. Jenkins, *Asquith* (London, 1986), p. 148, citing Margot Asquith's diary; M. Bonham Carter and M. Pottle (eds.), *Lantern Slides: The Diaries and Letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1904–1914* (London, 1996), p. 90; Bodleian Library, Oxford, Asquith MSS 41210, f. 247, Asquith to Campbell-Bannerman, 25 Nov. 1905.
31 'A Lore Burn': 'To the Lower Burn'. At the insistence of King George V, who greatly valued his counsel, Loreburn was raised to an earldom in 1911.
32 Lord Hailsham, *The Door Wherein I Went* (pb. edn., Glasgow, 1978), p. 250. See also Lord Hailsham, *A Sparrow's Flight* (London, 1990), p. 377.
33 C. Hazlehurst and C. Woodland (eds.), *A Liberal Chronicle: Journals and Papers of J. A. Pease, 1908–1910* (London, 1994), p. 69.
34 R. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill*, vol. 2, companion part 1 (London, 1969), p. 599.
35 Sir A. Fitzroy, *Memoirs*, vol. 1 (London, 1925), pp. 331–2.
36 Ibid., p. 332.
37 Diary of Sir Henry Lucy, quoted in *Dumfries Standard*, 13 Sep. 1922.
38 *The Observer*, 11 Aug. 1907.
39 *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Nov. 1909. See also A. C. Murray, *Master and Brother* (London, 1945), p. 29.
40 Fitzroy, *Memoirs*, 1, p. 334.
41 Ibid., pp. 334–5.
42 Whiteley to Campbell-Bannerman, 3 Dec. 1906, cited R. F. V. Heuston, *Lives of the Lord Chancellors 1885–1940* (Oxford, 1964), p. 155.
43 Loreburn to Whiteley, 10 Dec. 1906, cited ibid., p. 156.
44 Heuston, *Lord Chancellors*, p. 153.
45 Lord Loreburn, *How The War Came* (New York, 1920), p. 216.
46 Loreburn to Ripon, 30 Oct. 1908, cited P. Rowland, *The Last Liberal Governments 1905–1910* (London, 1968), p. 164.
47 T. Wilson (ed.), *The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott 1911–1928* (London, 1970), pp. 47–8.
48 A. J. A. Morris, *Radicalism Against War* (London, 1972), p. 296.
49 *Manchester Guardian*, 30 Oct. 1911.
50 Pease diary, 1 Nov. 1911, cited B. Gilbert, 'Pacifist to Interventionist: David Lloyd George in 1911 and 1914. Was Belgium an Issue?' *Historical Journal* 28, 4 (1985), p. 878.
51 Scott diary, 1 Dec. 1911, cited K. Wilson (ed.), *British Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Policy: From Crimean War to First World War* (London, 1987), p. 186.
52 R. Haldane, *An Autobiography* (London, 1929), p. 237.
53 Loreburn to Bryce, 3 Sep. 1912, cited Heuston, *Lord Chancellors*, p. 168.
54 Fitzroy, *Memoirs*, 2, p. 522.
55 *The Observer*, 14 Sep. 1913.
56 Lord Riddell, *More Pages from My Diary 1908–1914* (London, 1934), p. 186; A. Chamberlain, *Politics from Inside: An Epistolary Chronicle 1906–1914* (London, 1936), pp. 572–3.
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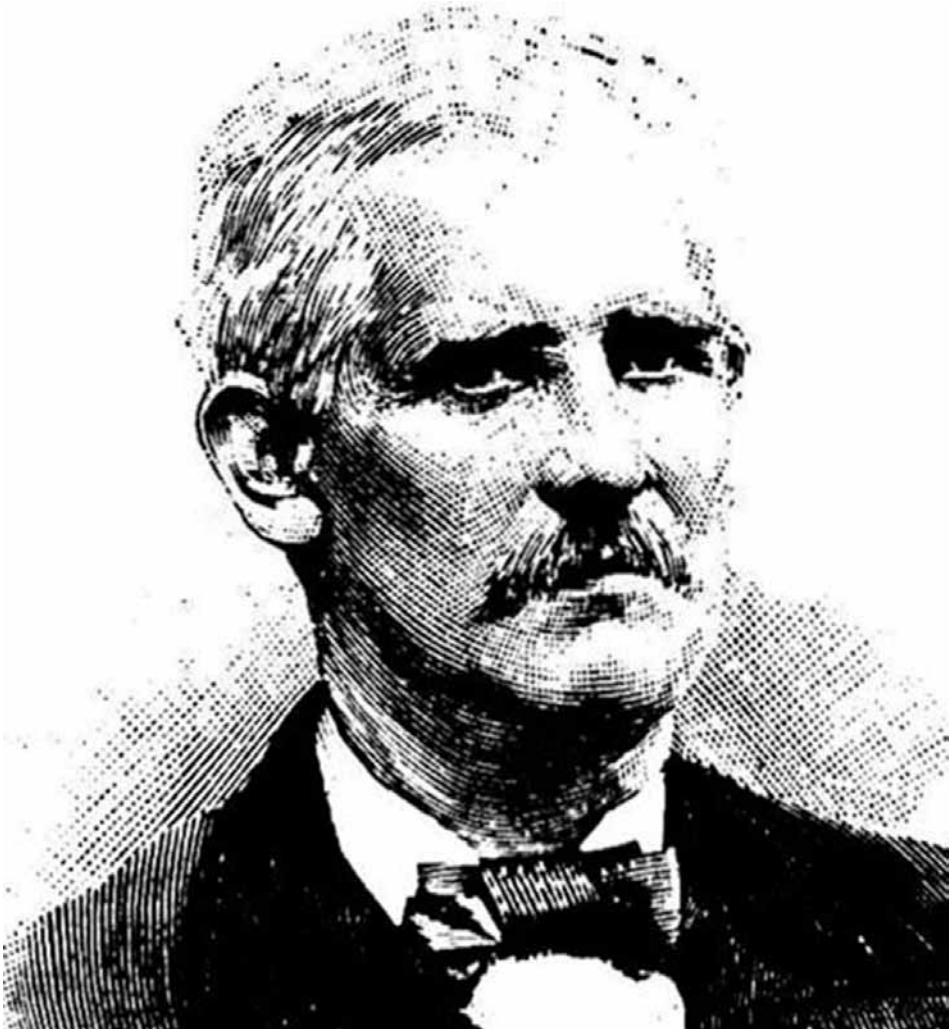
A LANCASHIRE MINE
SAM WOODS AND THE

The Walthamstow by-election of 3 February 1897 was the most remarkable result of over seventy parliamentary contests during the 1895–1900 parliament. Sam Woods, a white-haired miner in his early fifties, unexpectedly became the first Liberal-Labour Member for Walthamstow. The Liberal press hailed the result as 'the most astonishing political transformation of recent times'.[1] However, *The Times* declared: 'We had no notion that the crude, violent and subversive Radicalism of Mr Woods would find acceptance even in a working-class constituency'.[2] **John Shepherd** tells the story.



Around midnight on 3 February 1897 the result of the parliamentary election for the Walthamstow (South Western Division of Essex) constituency was announced at the old town hall in Orford Road. The dramatic election result was:

Sam Woods (Liberal-Labour)	6,518
Thomas Dewar (Cons.)	6,239
Lib-Lab majority	279

Previous general election results:

1892	
E. W. Byrne (Con)	6,115
W. B. Whittingham (Lib)	4,965
Con majority	1,150
1895	
E. W. Byrne (Con)	6,876
A. H. Pollen (Lib)	4,523
Con majority	2,353

From 1886 to 1895 Walthamstow returned Tory MPs, and the

R IN WALTHAMSTOW BY-ELECTION OF 1897

Liberal Party saw the constituency as a hopeless cause. The first workman to contest Walthamstow, Sam Woods, was a former hewer from Wigan and a complete stranger who had been adopted shortly before polling day. In the late nineteenth century miners' unions were the pioneers of labour representation, but their candidates stood only in mining constituencies.

In 1897 Sam Woods' campaign manager, Herbert Samuel, wrote to the former Prime Minister and Liberal leader William Gladstone for support. Samuel stressed 'the great importance at the present moment of a hearty alliance between the party and the more sober section of Labour politicians',[3] a well-directed reference to the long-established links in Victorian politics between the Gladstonian Liberal Party and prominent trade union and labour leaders. In this way, before the advent of the modern Labour Party, Sam Woods joined the small group of working-class MPs known as 'Lib-Labs' who represented labour interests but were Liberals in politics.

Nearly fifty years later, Herbert (then Viscount) Samuel recalled that 'Woods knew as little of Walthamstow as Walthamstow knew of coalmines'.[4] How Sam Woods became the Member for Walthamstow provides a fascinating insight into the politics and society of the town during its important period of urban development in the late nineteenth century.

The Walthamstow constituency

In 1897 the Essex county constituencies of Romford and Walthamstow contained the two largest electorates in the country. The South-Western Division with 19,846 adult male voters out of a total population of around 150,000 was a vast constituency which comprised Walthamstow, Leyton, Leytonstone, Harrow Green and Woodford and stretched from Tottenham in the west to Wanstead in the east, and Chingford in the north to Clapton in the south. Before 1850 there were fewer than 5,000 inhabitants in the rural parish of Walthamstow, but by 1883 the socialist writer, designer and craftsman William Morris described Walthamstow, his birthplace, as 'a suburban village on the edge of Epping Forest and once a pleasant place enough, but now terribly cocknified and choked up by the jerrybuilder'.[5]

In Walthamstow during 1871–1891 the population expanded dramatically from 11,092 to 95,131. The estate developers and the Great Eastern Railway Company created the new, predominantly working-class, suburb. The extension of the railway to Walthamstow in 1870 and the G.E.R. Company's promotion of workmen's tickets and half fares in 1872 and 1885 attracted the skilled artisans and clerks who settled in the town with their families, but commuted to London. Many worked in the City, the financial centre of the world at this time.[6]

The major estate developer in Walthamstow was Thomas Courtenay Theydon Warner, one of the largest landowners in the locality, whose Warner Estate Company built large parts of the town, starting in the 1880s in the St James Street district. The most important industry was the building trade, with many skilled workers, engaged mainly in house construction. Of the individual occupations represented in the local community, the most numerous were carpenters and joiners, printers, clerks and domestic servants. Outside their homes, women worked mainly in domestic service, dressmaking and the manufacture of books, paper and stationery. There were over 350 women schoolteachers and more than 250 female commercial clerks in the town. By the turn of the century, at least seventeen trade unions had been established in the district. While similar urban development took place in nearby Leyton, the villadom of Woodford, with four times as many domestic servants per head of population as Walthamstow, retained its middle-class character.[7]

From 1886 to 1895 the Walthamstow Liberal Party found great difficulties in persuading wealthy Liberals to contest the constituency. To obtain help, Walthamstow Liberals approached party headquarters in London, but with little success. Pressed by his local party, Courtenay Warner told Herbert Gladstone: 'I am afraid this division is a forlorn hope. I shall do what I can for the candidate they choose though I should not like to stand myself'.[8]

Prospective Liberal candidates were not encouraged by the bitter internal party feuding surrounding the political activities of J. J. McSheedy, an Irish Radical and schoolmaster, who had first earned his reputation as the stormy petrel of Walthamstow in his campaign to reform the Walthamstow Parochial Charities.[9] McSheedy became the leader of the local Radical and

Left: Sam Woods (10 May 1846 – 23 November 1915)

Progressive Association, an alliance of working men and small-scale businessmen, which gained increasing influence within the local Liberal Party. Elected to the new urban district council with five other Radicals in 1894, McSheedy's activities were publicised in his own newspaper, the *Walthamstow Reporter*. McSheedyism aroused demonstrations of great passion and hostility. But the Progressives enjoyed strong support in the new working-class areas, such as St James Street and High Street wards; and the changing social composition of the constituency was an important factor in the by-election of 1897.

The by-election of 1897

The vacancy at Walthamstow was caused by the appointment of the Tory MP, E. W. Byrne, QC, to the Bench of the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice. The local Conservative Association soon chose Thomas Dewar, a wealthy director of Dewar's Whisky, as their candidate; whereas the Liberal Party in Walthamstow received the demoralising reply from London that the party managers had committed their resources instead to another by-election in neighbouring Romford.[10] There the Conservatives had held the seat for eleven years. In Walthamstow, Arnold Hills, the millionaire owner of the Thames Iron Works and Shipbuilding Company, came forward briefly as an independent opponent in the Temperance cause.[11] The situation altered unexpectedly when, at the City Liberal Club on 23 January, Sam Woods, Secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, was finally persuaded to accept the Liberal nomination. However, Woods did not owe his last-minute selection to the Liberal Whips in London, nor to his Lancashire miners. A twenty-six-year-old party worker, Herbert (later Viscount) Samuel, after visiting the constituency, took a different view from his Liberal chiefs and decided to fight the by-election. He secured Woods as the candidate and arranged the finance and election workers.[12]

The Liberals in Walthamstow had always sought rich, middle-class local men as their candidates, whereas Sam Woods had made his reputation as a pioneer in trade union and labour politics in Lancashire, becoming the respected local miners' agent at Ashton-in-Makerfield, and then the first president of the Lancashire Miners Federation and vice-president of the Miners Federation of Great Britain. From 1892 to 1895 Woods was the MP for the Ince Division of Lancashire and had held his part-time TUC post since 1894. In politics, he was a loyal Gladstonian Liberal, as the Liberal Chief Whip had informed Gladstone:

> Mr Woods is the agent for the Lancashire Miners Association and has the support of the Liberal Party in the division. He has found it necessary to declare on Home Rule and I have a written assurance that on all questions other than those specifically affecting labour he will support the Liberal Party'.[13]

At this time many local Liberal associations, dominated by middle-class elites, were hostile to working-class candidates. The Walthamstow Liberal Party included amongst its leadership two local magnates, Edward North Buxton, who had been the local MP briefly in 1885 and was a director of the East London brewers, Truman Hanbury and Buxton, and Thomas Courtenay Theydon Warner MP. Both men lived in the constituency, were active in Victorian politics and took a progressive line on labour matters. In these circumstances, with an increased working-class electorate, the local political climate was favourable for a labour candidate in Walthamstow.[14]

Woods's election costs (nearly £1,400) had to be met entirely from Liberal sources including help from a local businessman, John (later Sir John) Roberts of Salway House, the benefactor of the Jubilee Hospital in Woodford and a stalwart of the local Liberal Party.[15] Once the Liberal Chief Whip's office in London endorsed Woods's candidature, Herbert Samuel remained in the constituency to manage the campaign.

The candidates and the election campaign

Samuel found that the Walthamstow Liberals lacked an effective electoral organisation. He quickly prepared a short biography of Sam Woods for distribution in the constituency.[16] Woods had entered the mine at the age of seven and had worked at every mining occupation for twenty years. Largely self-educated, he had gained a first-class certificate in mining management. A Baptist convert, he had been a student for the ministry, but was unable to take up his place. Instead, Woods' direct experience of the hazardous conditions of mining life formed the basis of his long trade union and political career. In terms of background, social position and political views, the two candidates made a striking contrast. Woods was a labour leader of humble origins, deep religious convictions and strong temperance beliefs. The wealthy Thomas (later Baron) Dewar was twenty years younger, owned a string of thoroughbred racehorses (including the Derby favourite) and his own Rocket coach. On the 'Drink *v* Temperance' issue, the Director of Dewar's Whisky had publicly denounced prohibition systems and in the election enjoyed the support of his business rivals.

During his campaign, Woods advocated a broad Lib-Lab programme. He told the electors:

> I strongly favour such democratic proposals as the abolition of the power of the House of Lords to veto legislation, the Payment of Members, One Man One Vote, a thorough Registration reform, and the control by the Irish people of their own domestic affairs. I also heartily support the taxation of Ground values, a radical reform of the Land Laws as affecting both urban and rural land, the establishment of a complete system of Secondary Education open to all classes, and any measures which would improve the housing of the people.[17]

Nearly fifty years later, Herbert (then Viscount) Samuel recalled that 'Woods knew as little of Walthamstow as Walthamstow knew of coalmines'.

In particular, Woods attacked the Tory government's controversial grant proposals of 1897 to assist the Church schools rather than the Board schools since, in Walthamstow, nearly twenty thousand children attended twenty-six local Board schools compared to fewer than two thousand pupils in the four denominational schools. He

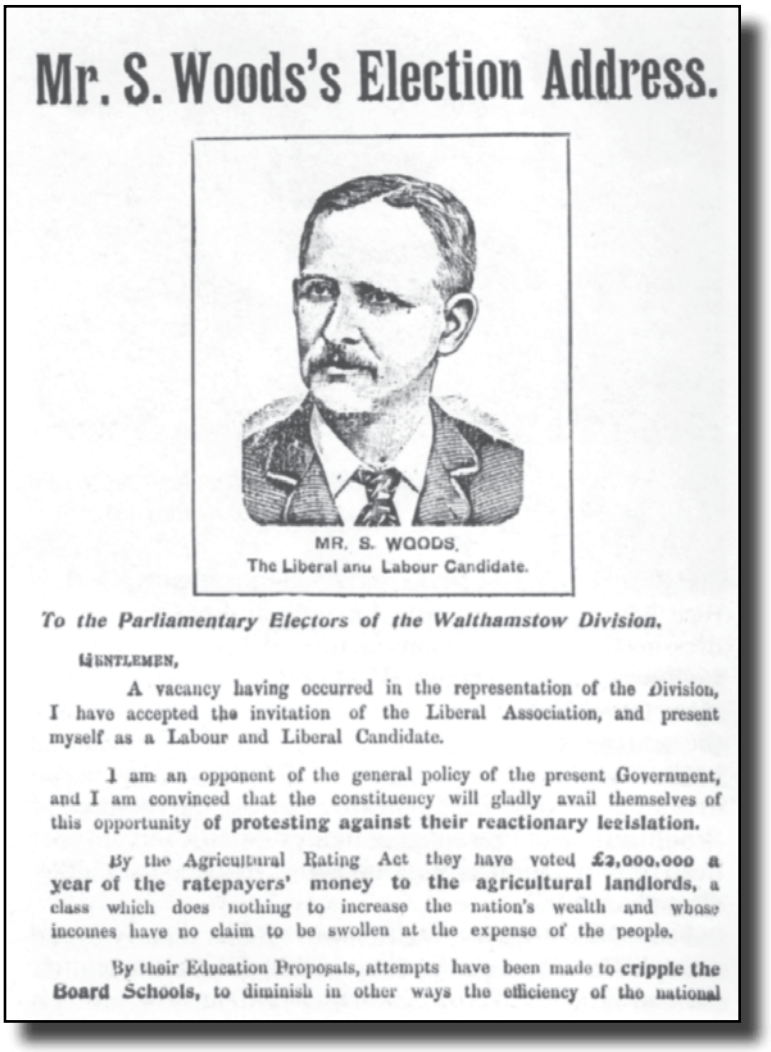
was well known as an advocate of the legal eight-hour day and had campaigned steadily in parliament for the miners on this issue, as well as the nationalisation of mining royalties, land and railways. These were radical proposals, rather than socialist measures, which would have then won sympathy with some advanced Liberals. However, Samuel completely suppressed these references to nationalisation in Woods' manifesto to assuage any fears which middle-class voters in the constituency might possess about a workman candidate.[18]

Thomas Dewar appealed to the electorate on the Tory government's policies, especially in imperial and foreign affairs, advocating increases in military expenditure to protect British colonies and shipping. In domestic politics, he was in favour of conciliation courts in industrial relations, opposed alien immigration and cautiously defended the Tory education proposals.

Though the Walthamstow by-election took place in mid-winter, with a similar Conservative versus Liberal contest in neighbouring Romford, the two largest constituencies in the country attracted a great deal of attention in the national and local press. The London Radical newspaper, *The Star*, vigorously championed the Liberal cause with waspish attacks on the Tory candidates in Romford and Walthamstow. In Walthamstow the Liberal Party hurriedly organised a vigorous campaign lasting just over a week during which Sam Woods addressed over forty meetings.

On Tuesday 25 January, he officially opened his campaign with meetings in Leyton and at the Workmen's Hall in the High Street, Walthamstow. There, in a forthright speech, the Liberal candidate announced his programme of trade union and labour reforms. Besides attacking the government's Education Bill, Woods declared in favour of votes for women, the nationalisation of railways and the municipalisation of water supplies, though he opposed compulsory vaccination. Three days before, Dewar commenced campaigning with a splendid drive through the constituency in a four-in-hand. At his first meeting at Leyton Town Hall he presented himself as a commercial man and patriot who approved of

Sam Woods' electon address for the by-election



Mr. S. Woods's Election Address.

MR. S. WOODS,
The Liberal and Labour Candidate.

To the Parliamentary Electors of the Walthamstow Division.

GENTLEMEN,

A vacancy having occurred in the representation of the Division, I have accepted the invitation of the Liberal Association, and present myself as a Labour and Liberal Candidate.

I am an opponent of the general policy of the present Government, and I am convinced that the constituency will gladly avail themselves of this opportunity **of protesting against their reactionary legislation.**

By the Agricultural Rating Act they have voted **£2,000,000 a year of the ratepayers' money to the agricultural landlords,** a class which does nothing to increase the nation's wealth and whose incomes have no claim to be swollen at the expense of the people.

By their Education Proposals, attempts have been made to **cripple the Board Schools,** to diminish in other ways the efficiency of the national

the government's foreign policy in Egypt. He concluded: 'I am going very much for the Government, because although in power only a short time, they have brought back the prestige of the empire, a prestige it enjoys only when a Conservative government is in power.'

Electioneering started each morning with the distribution of literature outside the railway stations as early as five o'clock. The wintry weather, sometimes including blizzards, did not deter large crowds at the outdoor gatherings and packed audiences at the indoor evening meetings. The Walthamstow Liberal Party received help from organisations such as the Essex United Temperance Council, the Poplar Labour League and local women's groups. The very few references in the local press do not give a full and accurate picture of the part women played in local politics. A bevy of Labour MPs and prominent trade union leaders joined local Liberal politicians to speak in support of Sam Woods. Most active was the Battersea MP, John Burns, popularly known as the 'Battersea Bruiser', owing to his rumbustious political style, and as the most famous working-class leader in London in the late Victorian period.[19]

On the Saturday, three days before polling, Burns who had 'lungs of leather and throat of brass' addressed an immense crowd on Markhouse Common, a traditional gathering-place for election hustings and open-air meetings in Walthamstow. In all, Sam Woods spoke at thirteen meetings that day, including a visit to the Great Eastern Railway Company's works at Stratford. In the evening, the former miner ventured into upper-class, Tory Woodford to address a meeting at the Wilfred Lawson Temperance Hotel.

On Monday 1 February polling took place in Romford, which was regarded as a safe Tory seat, though *The Star* had revealed that the Conservative candidate, Louis Sinclair, had only recently become a naturalised British citizen. In Walthamstow, despite awful weather, a

large Liberal meeting at the Victoria Hall in Hoe Street heard John Burns challenge Dewar's support for home industries by demonstrating, to the amusement of the audience, that ashtrays advertising Dewar's whisky were 'made in Japan'. The next day in the Victoria Hall Dewar responded to Burns's taunts by stating that he had placed far more contracts for ashtrays and similar goods with British firms than with those abroad. In ending his campaign, the Tory candidate revealed that he was against the payment of MPs, a popular demand in working-class politics. In what was regarded as a strong Tory seat, the Conservatives had undertaken little canvassing and organised fewer meetings. Dewar was not considered a good public speaker and was on weak ground in defending unpopular Tory measures.

Polling day

Polling in Walthamstow took place on Wednesday 3 February. Heavy snowfall the previous evening turned every street into a quagmire and most workers left the town before the polling booths opened at 8 a.m. Consequently polling was slow until the early evening, though in the afternoon the Romford result, where the Conservative majority was reduced to only 125, became known in the town. In the evening the Great Eastern Railway Company brought the voters home to Walthamstow, in some cases very near to the close of polling at 8 p.m. The correspondent of the Manchester Guardian described what happened:

> The scene at St. James Street station as eight o'clock drew near beggars description. Here the arrivals were principally working men and this ward and adjoining High Street were great strongholds of Mr Woods. Wagonette, cart, pony carriage, vans; everything that could run on wheels was there to await the supporters of Mr Woods and a willing crowd of helpers – all shouting at the top of their voices – directed the voters as they came out to the vehicles for the different polling stations …'[20]

John Burns had noted in his diary 'victory doubtful', a view shared by the Liberal camp in general.[21] Instead Sam Woods' resounding win, achieved with a 64 per cent turnout of the electorate, was attributed in part to the weakness of Dewar's campaign, which alienated the temperance vote, and the voters' dislike of the Tory education proposals. Herbert Samuel believed that the popular enthusiasm for the workman candidate was a decisive factor. As a labour leader of notable religious and temperance beliefs, Sam Woods was able to unite the Liberal and Labour vote in Walthamstow at the time of general hostility to the Conservative government. While the Liberal Party in the country was in turmoil in the 1890s, the new MP's unexpected victory owed much to the success of the local Progressive alliance in the constituency. A few weeks later in the local elections, the Progressives, led by the firebrand McSheedy, gained control of the district council.

In 1897 Sam Woods' impressive triumph represented a swing of over 11 per cent, but he was defeated in the 'khaki' election of 1900 and retired a few years later. The Labour Party did not contest a parliamentary election in Walthamstow until after the First World War. From 1897 to 1900 Sam Woods had the unusual distinction of being the town's first Labour MP, many years before the celebrated figures of Valentine (later Baron) McEntee and Clement (later Earl) Attlee.

Professor John Shepherd is now Visiting Professor of Modern British History at the University of Huddersfield. Sam Woods is also mentioned in his article 'Labour and parliament: the Lib-Labs as the first working-class MPs, 1885–1906', in Eugenio F. Biagini and Alastair Reid (eds) Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, organised labour and party politics in Britain, 1850–1914 *(Cambridge University Press, 1991).*

The author would like to thank Mr Reg Jones (Sam Woods' great-nephew) and his family in Wigan, and the staff of the Vestry House Museum, Walthamstow Public Library, British Library and House of Lords Record Office for their assistance during the research.

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As a labour leader of notable religious and temperance beliefs, Sam Woods was able to unite the Liberal and Labour vote in Walthamstow at the time of general hostility to the Conservative government.

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ERIC LUBBOCK AND THE ORPINGTON MOMENT

by **Michael Meadowcroft**

The declaration of the result at Orpington; left, Peter Goldman, centre, Eric Lubbock

The death of Eric, Lord Avebury, on 14 February 2016, at the age of 87, ended the direct link with a remarkable moment in political history. Eric, even though he had been 'Avebury' for forty-five years, was always better known, particularly by Liberals, as 'Lubbock'.

From time to time, by demonstrating vividly the public mood, by-elections have had a political importance well beyond their immediate notoriety. The Newport by-election of October 1922 brought down Lloyd George's coalition government and precipitated an immediate general election; the East Fulham by-election of October 1933 saw a Labour gain on a huge swing and is often put forward as demonstrating a pacific mood amongst the voters and thus delaying rearmament; and the Oxford and Bridgwater by-elections of October and November 1938 respectively, soon after the Munich settlement, in which opposition to Neville Chamberlain's Conservative government coalesced around 'Progressive Independent' candidates who achieved significant increases in the anti-government vote, suggested that the electorate was disillusioned with appeasement. Individual by-elections post-Orpington did not have the same immediate effect, but Dick Taverne's March 1973 victory in Lincoln as 'Democratic Labour' indicated the latent support for the political position taken up a decade later by the SDP, just as the by-elections in Warrington, Crosby and Glasgow Hillhead in 1981 and 1982 breathed life into that latter cause, albeit only temporarily.

Orpington, on 14 March 1962, was a remarkable and highly influential by-election.[1] It was a contributory cause of Harold MacMillan's 'night of the long knives' four months later, when he sacked seven members of his Cabinet. There were a number of reasons for its contemporary impact. First, was the scale of the switch of votes – the Liberals went from third place and 21 per cent at the previous general election, in 1959, to first place and 53 per cent at the by-election. Second, it was the Liberals, a party with just six MPs at the time, who won, rather than Labour, the official opposition (Labour in fact lost 10 per cent of its 1959 vote). Third, Orpington was a solid and traditional Tory fief which that party believed it could regard as a seat it would never lose and whose electors could therefore be permanently relied upon to send whichever candidate the party chose. This attitude proved fatal.

The embedded traditionalism of the constituency was epitomised by its long-serving Member Sir Waldron Smithers, a typical 'knight of the shires', who represented Orpington from 1924 until his death in 1954, in effect following his father who had been the MP from 1918 to 1922. On Sir Waldron's death in 1955 a local lawyer, Donald Sumner, was easily returned at the by-election (with no Liberal candidate). Sumner sat until October 1961 when he was appointed a County Court Judge. Fatally, the Conservatives left the seat vacant for four

months – a decision exploited by the Liberal Party who declared it as a typically arrogant decision from a party which believed it owned the seat.

It was also a mistake to believe that the demographic makeup of the constituency was the same as in Sir Waldron Smithers' heyday. With the increase in commuting and the arrival of a new young professional class it had gradually become a much more mixed community. One aspect of this which helped in the media coverage was that many journalists had bought homes in the district because there were trains from Waterloo, Charing Cross and London Bridge almost up to midnight. This newer type of resident was tailor-made for the Grimond-led Liberal Party whose opinion poll rating had almost trebled, from 6 per cent to 16 per cent, in the three years from March 1959 to March 1962, and the influx of sharp, bright younger men and women into the party provided a professional and ambitious set of officers and candidates, underpinned by a number of older and more experienced organisers. The local party had gone down the route of fighting, and winning, council seats and the Conservatives should have been alarmed by the fact that at the May 1961 Orpington Urban District Council elections – the last before the by-election – the Liberals had topped the aggregate vote (on a turnout around half that of parliamentary elections.)

Liberal Party headquarters had planned closely with the constituency party and were determined to import its best agents and to ensure all necessary finance was available. There was, however, an immediate and delicate problem. The adopted candidate was Jack Galloway. He was an excellent speaker and campaigner and had polled relatively well at the 1959 election, but he was not only known as a womaniser but – the rumours had it – he had contracted a bigamous marriage. The press were on to the story and on one occasion two reporters burst into Jack's hotel bedroom and he fled via the window. Understandably Jack was keen to fight the by-election but the party realised that it would be too much of a risk. Eventually Galloway agreed to 'retire' and, at short notice, a new candidate had to be found. Orpington Liberals had always been very shrewd and pragmatic and had chosen local election candidates on the basis of who was likely to win, rather than who had seniority, and the same considerations were applied to the by-election, with the selection of Eric Lubbock. As it happened, the delay in calling the by-election was now helpful to the Liberals in enabling Eric to get up to speed and refocusing the organisation for a rather different campaign.

Eric Lubbock had exactly the right background: he was by profession an engineer and had historic Liberal and even aristocratic connections. This was a mixture that appealed to both the new professionals and the older Kentish folk. He had only been a member of the Liberal Party for three years and had been elected almost immediately for his home village of Downe – electorally a tiny ward with only one councillor. Although determined to carry out all the promotional tasks that are part and parcel of being a candidate, he was rather shy and far from being the capable and shrewd politician that he later became. Eric was never a charismatic speaker and in 1962 he was hesitant rather than articulate. The decision was made by the party managers to keep Eric off all three-party television programmes and a variety of excuses were used to explain this. It had no noticeable effect on the result.

The decision to keep Eric away from debating directly with the other candidates was also determined by the fact that the Conservatives had selected precisely the wrong kind of candidate. Believing that the electors of Orpington would vote for any Conservative candidate they had chosen a Central Office high flyer, Peter Goldman. A brilliant intellectual and writer, he had no local connections and came over as rather cold and remote. For instance, he didn't knock on doors but sat in a large car which cruised along a street whilst his canvassers asked voters whether they would like to come out and meet Mr Goldman! It is possible that, quite illegitimately, he lost some support on the twin grounds of being Jewish but having converted to the Church of England. Goldman himself, probably wisely, confronted this openly himself at the beginning of the campaign.

The by-election was an immense psychological and electoral boost to the party. The national opinion polls for a brief moment showed the Liberals top and at the local elections two months later, Liberal candidates around the country gained seats never before won, often with minimal effort.

The Liberal Party had agreed to second its Local Government Officer, Pratap Chitnis, to Orpington to act as agent. I arrived at HQ in February 1962 as his assistant, whereupon he decamped forthwith to Orpington and never returned to his old job! Pratap was a superb organiser and had built on the excellent local voluntary organisation with a highly professional team, bringing in three full-time agents: Michael Key from North Dorset, Dennis Minnis from Birmingham and Noel Penstone from Torrington. Excellent professionally designed literature poured into the constituency and party workers arrived in their hundreds to ensure that all the delivering and canvassing was completed on time. On the afternoon of the eve-of-poll the *Daily Mail* called Pratap and informed him that an opinion poll would be appearing in the following morning's paper showing the Liberals narrowly ahead. Pratap immediately ordered 9,000 copies and these were delivered on the council estates and given out to commuters as they arrived to catch their morning trains at local stations. The cost of the campaign was immense, and Pratap told me that he overspent the legal limit by three times! The opinion poll and the flood of Liberal workers on the doorstep ensured a major tactical vote away from Labour. It was this that gave Eric Lubbock his huge majority as opposed to a comfortable win.

The by-election was an immense psychological and electoral boost to the party. The national opinion polls for a brief moment showed the Liberals top and at the local elections two months later, Liberal candidates around the country gained seats never before won, often with minimal effort. Later parliamentary by-elections, however, were not in seats with sufficient organisational or representational basis to enable another startling success – although in the light of later techniques which, for instance, enabled Sutton & Cheam to be gained in December 1972, some of them could and should have been won. The one that should have been won in any case was Colne Valley in March 1963; had there been a more aggressive campaign a gain might well have been possible. Such a victory would then have catalysed the

May 1963 local elections and the party would have stayed in three-party contention. As it was, the Orpington effect slowly dissipated and by 1970 the party was in deep electoral trouble. Even Orpington was narrowly lost, although Eric Lubbock slightly increased his vote. His cousin, the 3rd Baron Avebury, died in 1971 and, as his heir, Eric had to make the difficult choice of accepting a role in a House of Lords whose basis he strongly disagreed with or disclaiming the peerage and hoping to come back into the Commons at some indefinite future date. He decided that it was better to continue with his parliamentary work and he used his seat in the Lords for forty-five years to espouse many civil rights and human rights causes.

On his election for Orpington Eric Lubbock immediately dropped into the parliamentary routine and was appointed Chief Whip in 1963. He was a superb 'fixer' and did the job exceptionally well for seven long years. In January 1967, when Jo Grimond retired, Lubbock made a quixotic bid for the leadership, on the basis of 'anyone but Jeremy Thorpe', but he did not have the personality for such a task and he only secured the support of two of the nine MPs who were not candidates – Richard Wainwright and Michael Winstanley.

Eric increasingly demonstrated that he was an instinctive Liberal and took on many unfashionable causes, such as gypsies' rights, even when his health began to decline in later years. At one time it seemed that whatever country I turned up in on a pro-democracy mission he would be there making forceful representations on behalf of some ill-treated minority. Thrust into the limelight by the chance of a historic election, he carved out a political career and earned the respect of colleagues on all sides of the political spectrum.

Michael Meadowcroft was Liberal MP for Leeds West, 1983–87.

1 The two key published essays on the by-election are: Donald Newby, 'The Orpington Story', *New Outlook*, March 1963, and, Ken Young, 'Orpington and the "Liberal Revival"', in Chris Cook and John Ramsden (eds), *By-elections in British Politics* (UCL Press, 1997).

REPORTS

Liberal leaders and leadership

Conference fringe meeting, 20 September 2015, with Simon Hughes and Paul Tyler; chair: Lynne Featherstone

Report by **Douglas Oliver**

The Liberal Democrat History Group convened for its fringe event at the autumn Federal Conference in Bournemouth to launch and discuss its new book, *British Liberal Leaders: Leaders of the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats since 1828*. With the party at its lowest ebb for many years, following the disastrous electoral showing in May 2015, and with Tim Farron's narrow leadership win in July, the question of effective political leadership and positioning was at the forefront of most delegates' minds. As well as hoping that the book might offer the new leader tips on the effective performance of his difficult role, the History Group felt that the principles of Farron's forebears might act as signposts for the party's future philosophical direction.

Lynne Featherstone, former MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, as well as former head of Norman Lamb and Chris Huhne's unsuccessful leadership campaigns, chaired the discussion and opened by musing upon the 'madness' of any one person actively seeking the role. After a decade in Westminster, the former coalition minister (in both DfID and the Home Office) reflected on the immense personal commitment that any leading political role demands – and all the more so for the person tasked with leading a party in the centre ground of British politics.

She was joined on the panel by two former Liberal parliamentary veterans who had first come to the party before merger with the SDP, and had met and worked with a wide range of party leaders from Jo Grimond right through to Nick Clegg and now Tim Farron. Simon Hughes was famously elected in the Bermondsey by-election in the spring of 1983 – benefitting from the largest-ever political swing in a Westminster election, as the Labour vote collapsed in association with the hard left – and first served alongside David Steel. Paul Tyler was first elected for Bodmin in 1974, during the colourful period of Jeremy Thorpe's leadership, serving for only a few months before losing during that year's second general election, but subsequently returning to parliament in 1992 as Tory fortunes faded in Cornwall.

Simon began his discussion with praise for a 'fantastic book which had lots of insights, and would provide a competitive edge for any internal party quiz!' Organising his limited time, Hughes chose to focus on the three leaders who were before his era but had shaped him the most politically, as well as on those contemporaries he had worked directly with, and by examining the parallels he sought to draw lessons for the present.

His first lesson was that Liberal leaders had a strong tendency to be resilient and energetic. From Gladstone onward, it was notable that party leaders had great staying power in parliament, and not merely as leader.

His first lesson was that Liberal leaders had a strong tendency to be resilient and energetic. From Gladstone onward, it was notable that party leaders had great staying power in parliament, and not merely as leader. The Grand Old Man was an MP for an epic sixty-three years, and David Lloyd George for his own half century in different eras; but even more-recent leaders like Kennedy and Ashdown were in Westminster for relatively long stints before and after they were leader. Despite variable personalities, outlooks and political contexts, there was, Hughes argued, a hidden steel that linked these leaders – and that was a tendency for hard work and stringency.

Hughes went on to conclude that a strong sense of political positioning and direction was critical to any party leader. Hughes said that in his view – which he accepted not all in the party shared – the party had 'performed best' when it stood from the centre-left, rather than the centre-right. Furthermore, Hughes

argued, the greatest dangers for the party have come when it has sought to represent the 'centre ground', which he felt was too indistinct to hold significant political strength.

Looking back to the towering giant of Victorian politics, William Gladstone, Hughes said that three core lessons could be drawn from his incredibly wide and long career: radical policy, social commitment, and an ability to 'wow the crowds, in an effective and innovative way'. Lloyd George who was distinctive in many ways, had a similar breakdown of capabilities: progressive ideas, such as a decent budget, state pension, etc.; strong social commitments and values; and his own charismatic sense of how to wow the crowds. Hughes' fellow Welshman Clement Davies – who led the Liberals during its 1945–56 nadir – had a different kind of set of strengths which enabled him, critically, to hold the party together during the bleakly polarised period immediately following the Second World War.

Hughes identified Davies' successor, Jo Grimond, as one of his key political lodestars when he was himself emerging in politics as a young man. The man who led the party as Britain left the straightjacket of 50s conformity, and entered the more hopeful 1960s, inspired young people to join the party with charismatic communication skills, a clear liberal intellectual lead and organisational reform. Hughes felt that Davies' grasp of both an international and a national agenda allowed the party to pick itself up, but that the Old Etonian was also helped by his 'establishment aura and credentials' which meant that he could provide a broader appeal than the alternatives in the Labour Party. In this sense he was redolent of Menzies Campbell, who once joked that there is no reason for Liberals not to 'dress right, but think left'.

Later on, Hughes felt, Grimond's successor Thorpe was also charismatic but with an even more immediate style, as Britain came ever closer to politicians through the media. Though best remembered now for his unseemly demise, as well as mishaps involving overambitious excursions on a hovercraft, Thorpe was able to empathise with and hence unpeel many of Britain's latent liberal instincts neglected by the big two parties. Furthermore, Thorpe was shrewd, and Hughes felt he was correct to turn down Edward Heath's overtures to share power in 1974.

Despite policy agreements with the last leader of the original Liberal Party, David Steel – such as over nuclear disarmament – Hughes felt that the Scottish Borders MP was able to get the big message across to the voters. Steel was also helped by a calm diplomatic approach which enabled him to manage party disagreements and to reach out to promote allegiances with members of other parties. Hughes remarked that Steel and Clement Freud had worked carefully together to help his own selection in Bermondsey in 1983. Despite his relatively quiet approach, Steel was a brave politician and gave loyal support to parliamentarians.

Hughes said that Paddy Ashdown was unlike any other leader he had worked with, and would start work at 5 am and continue with meetings and stringent targets until 9 pm or even later. He was the most hardworking and diplomatic leader we ever had. Ashdown also garnered respect from having been in the services before he went in to politics. Hughes went on to speak fondly of Kennedy, Campbell and Clegg. In their own ways, whether it was Kennedy on 'Have I Got News For You' or Clegg's stellar debate performance in 2010, they opened up the party's appeal to new parts of the electorate.

In conclusion Hughes felt that the book made it clear that it was important for the party's leader to grasp priorities, to understand the party, and, finally, to communicate with the public. For Hughes, understanding the minutiae of policy was useful but inessential: energy and resilience were the most important thing. Whilst he acknowledged that it was impossible to read the future, he saw these characteristics as identifiable in Tim Farron and therefore auspicious for his future as leader.

Paul Tyler built upon the analysis that Simon Hughes had outlined, and commenced his own discussion with an encouragement to the audience to 'read the book, it is amazing, fascinating and fact-packed.' He remarked that he had gained a wide-ranging historical perspective, and noted whimsically how much had changed as campaigning methods had changed. Early Liberal Prime Minister Lord Palmerston had been told never to visit his own constituency, the Isle of Wight, by his wealthy local patron, for fear of disturbing the locals – an amazing contrast to the contemporary campaigning standards epitomised by Simon Hughes' commitment to Bermondsey.

Nick Clegg was one of three surviving Liberal leaders interviewed and included in the book and it was his remarks that Tyler sought to echo for the structure of his own remarks. Clegg remarked that 'resilience, principled patience and perspective' were key themes necessary for party leadership, and it was these characteristics that Tyler identified in his original political hero, Jo Grimond, during the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956.

Within his first year of leading the party, the MP for Orkney and Shetland had robustly intervened to describe the conflict as 'unprincipled, illegal, counterproductive and a throwback to gunboat diplomacy' within days of its commencement. Whilst the Conservatives were responsible for a foreign affairs shambles that was in many ways the last spasm of the Empire, and the Labour Party under Hugh Gaitskell uselessly vacillated for months and weeks, Grimond effectively used the circumstance to seize the moment and hold Anthony Eden to account, and prove that only Liberalism offered a positive message of where Britain might otherwise stand in the world. To Tyler the rhyme of history remains clear, 'Suez was the Iraq of our generation: and it was left to Liberals like Grimond and Kennedy in both periods to rise to both challenges.'

During the 1990s, Paddy Ashdown had pursued his own principled areas of public interest, such as his demand for humanitarian intervention in Bosnia, and the granting of passports to Hong Kong citizens, as the colony prepared to be returned to Chinese administration in 1997. With these thoughts in mind, Tyler said that he felt Farron's demand for a more generous reception for Syrian refugees might well be the kind of issue that would prove the enduring need for the representation of liberal values in Westminster.

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Tyler said that, whilst campaigning had always been an important aspect of the party's identity, it was not always a defining feature of certain leading individuals. Grimond and Jenkins were, for instance, not the most 'hands on' when it came to doorstep campaigning. However, Thorpe, by contrast, was very involved and was good at ensuring that the party focused its resources on the key by-election wins that shaped the 'revival' stage of his own of leadership. All of these individuals were known, though, to maintain an intimate knowledge of and curiosity about local campaigners and their families, and would as assiduously seek updates on the health and well-being of local party members' families as on salient matters of state. Tyler concluded that this was another important aspect of leadership.

Tyler wryly critiqued the tendency within the party to be less zealous in its embrace of power as it should be, remarking that this was not a new characteristic. In the early twentieth century, the great Liberal MP Isaac Foot remarked that he was met with hostility by party members when he went in to government as part of the National Coalition in 1931, and a shower of gifts when he was removed from parliament a short period later. This characteristic was evidenced on a number of occasions by the party with regards to its attitude to the coalition.

Building on the theme of patient persistence which Hughes had explored, Tyler mentioned that whilst hard work is key for a third-party leader, the reality of the position, with the media often apathetic, meant the position of Liberal Democrat leader often had to deal with 'boredom', as you would have to continue to quote the liberal position time and time again, with little means of easily transmitting it to the wider electorate.

With this in mind, Tyler said he felt that a knowledge of the tight details of policy are not always essential, but that it was critical to have a strong vision. In Ken Clarke's Westminster office during the coalition years there was a Punch cartoon which showed Gladstone running to deliver his budget, and not taking his 'policy' bag with him, and that this holds some truth for all politicians, who often have to think nimbly, and to adapt according to rapidly changing events.

Nonetheless, Tyler concluded that the party would need to be careful that it did not rush too quickly into 'fight-back' mode without taking the time to decide exactly what it was it was fighting for – and that although the lack of attention being paid to the party in the short term was troubling, it did provide a useful opportunity to reflect upon the party's raison d'etre.

Tyler's final remark of the main discussion was to chide the authors for the use of an analytical league table which ranked the quality of their leadership. In his view, leadership was a more subtle, subjective and heterodox skill that was difficult to record in such a way. Instead, he urged readers to focus on the portraits of the different leaders offered by their respective chapters.

When it came to questions from the floor, David Williams reflected that image was an increasingly significant issue for politicians, which restricted their activities, and that politicians like Palmerston, who had fathered an illegitimate child, would have struggled in the modern age. Simon Hughes responded that giants like Gladstone – who could be considered as Britain's Lincoln – still are manifesting in society as a whole, but that nowadays they are often less attracted to politics because of its high risks and exposure, so instead they seek reward from other things. For Hughes, this was a big danger for public service. As a response, he felt 'we [in all parties] have got to carry on recruiting people from outside politics'.

Tyler concluded that the party must not just rely on the leader to exhibit the virtues evidenced by previous leaders, but should also seek to exercise them itself. The Liberal Democrats will need to be patient and reflective in order to continue the long march back to political recovery, and that will involve careful thought about what it means to be Liberal, as well as the self-discipline in order to achieve that end.

Douglas Oliver is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Targeting

Michael Meadowcroft is mistaken (*Journal of Liberal History* 89, Winter 2015–16) when he writes of 'twenty years of targeting under which, hear by year, the party's financial and campaigning resources were concentrated on fewer and fewer constituencies'. In fact, the exact opposite happened. The introduction of serious targeting for Parliamentary elections ahead of 1997 certainly resulted in a concentration of resources, but then through the 2001, 2005 and 2010 general elections the number of seats targeted grew steadily. Far from the party's resources being concentrated on 'fewer and fewer' constituencies, the resources went on more and more at each of those subsequent elections. If anything, a criticism of targeting by 2010 was that it was too widespread, not too narrow.

I wrote more about this in the special 25th anniversary edition of the *Journal* (issue 83, Summer 2014) and that piece too set out the evidence that it was indeed targeting which produced the big increase in seats in 1997 (an election at which the Liberal Democrat vote fell whilst the number of seats won by the party leapt upwards). Far from being, to use Michael Meadowcroft's word, 'assumed' that targeting produced the increase in seats, there is strong statistical evidence – including several different analyses by non-Liberal Democrat political scientists – which shows that targeting did indeed cause the increase.

As for the impact of targeting on seats that were neither initial targets nor part of the very large growth in the number of seats which were targets, there could be an argument to make based on what happened in membership, councillor numbers, local party income and other such evidence comparing target seats with non-target seats. Alas, Michael Meadowcroft's piece does not provide such evidence. My reading of those numbers is that the turning points for both membership and councillor numbers at different points over the years have been unconnected with the rise of targeting, as they happened at significantly different times. That reading is, I concede, not based on rigorous analysis of the numbers but rather eyeballing the graphs, but it is certainly stronger evidence for what happened overall than the one council that Michael Meadowcroft refers to.

Targeting did not stop the party increasing its national share of the vote – it went up for three general elections in a row between 2001 and 2010. Nor, however, could it rescue the

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

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 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.

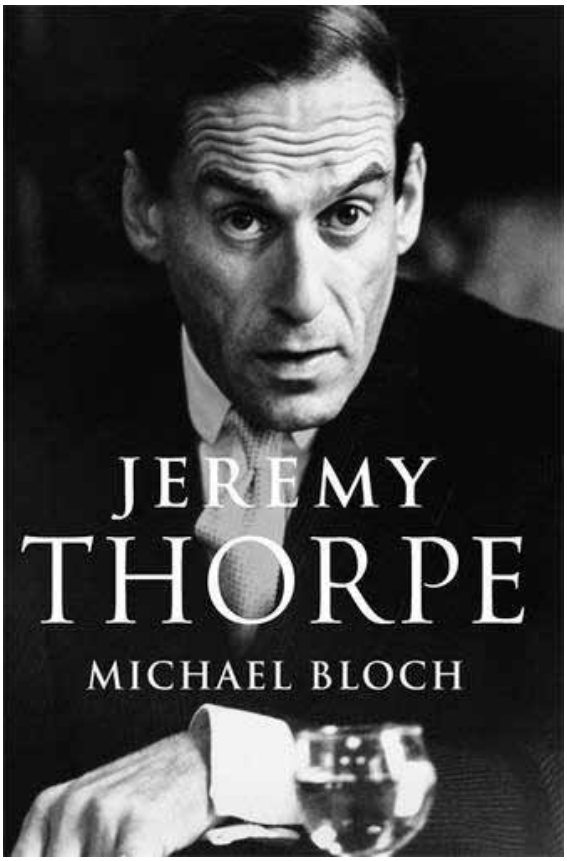
His later establishment of the winnable seats strategy during Jo Grimond's leadership was the first real attempt at national priority targeting which eventually paid off and without which the party would have remained floundering.

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.

But Jeremy was not, nor did he pretend to be, an ideas man. He was less interested in party policy than in the theatre of the political process. The famous hovercraft tour is well described. I was not involved

Jeremy was not, nor did he pretend to be, an ideas man. He was less interested in party policy than in the theatre of the political process.



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

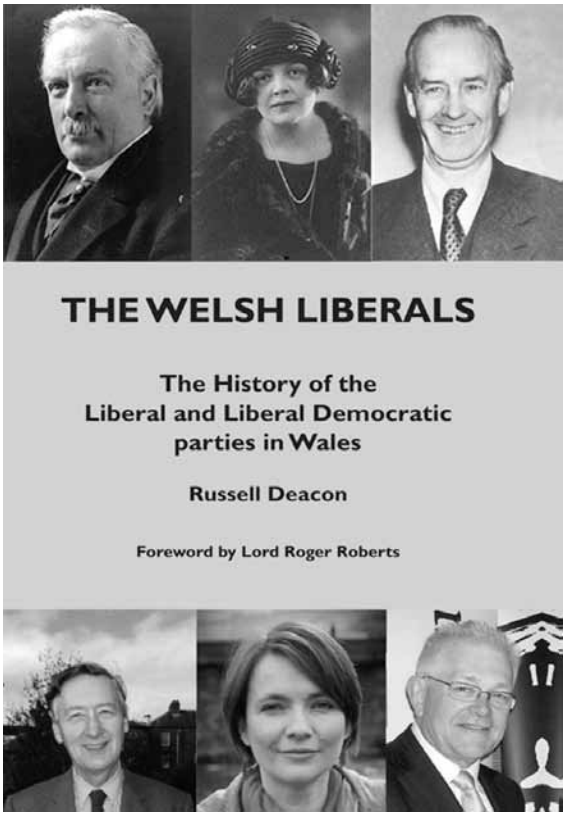
Russell Deacon, *The Welsh Liberals: the History of the Liberal and Liberal Democratic Parties in Wales* (Welsh Academic Press, 2014)

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

from the ground-breaking 'cracking of the ice' general elections of 1859 and 1868 right through until the fourth elections to the National Assembly for Wales held in 2011. The author, Professor Russell Deacon, an established academic teacher, has published widely on Welsh political and administrative history in the twentieth century, is an expert on devolution, and is the author of the important, pioneering volume *The Governance of Wales: the Welsh Office and the Policy Process, 1966–1999* (Welsh Academic Press, 2002).

Russell Deacon has spent close to a full decade immersed in this major scholarly enterprise. He has certainly mastered the extensive scholarly literature in the field. He has also displayed considerable initiative and tenacity by holding some fifty personal interviews with the party's most prominent leading lights in Wales, its local activists and many of its organisers over the last sixty years. The work is also much strengthened by the author's personal interest and active involvement in Welsh Liberal politics over many years, a commitment which has informed and supported his scholarly work. Somewhat disappointing, however, is the relative lack of use in the study of archival and documentary source materials – with the notable exception of the extensive records of the Welsh Liberal Party set up, primarily by Emlyn Hooson, back in 1967. It is a shame that much more extensive use was not made of the records of local and constituency Liberal associations in Wales (of which many exist) and the rich personal archives of politicians like Lloyd George, his politician children Gwilym and Megan, T. E. Ellis, D. A. Thomas, Clement Davies, Roderic Bowen, Emlyn Hooson and Alex Carlile. Their use would have enriched considerably the quality and depth of the author's analysis.



The text is divided into eight discrete chapters. These are considerably fuller and more informative from 1945 onwards, a period in which, it is clear, the author feels much more comfortable and in control. (For the years up to 1922, we have, however, the still authoritative, major work by Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics, 1868–1922*, first published in 1963, and now in its fourth edition [1991].) A major asset of the present work is that the text is divided throughout into short, digestible sections, easily read and appreciated by different categories of readers, scholarly and lay alike. The study excels when the author analyses different elections in Wales and their campaigns. Especially gripping are the large number of lively, well-researched pen portraits of so many Liberal politicians and local party activists which appear throughout the volume. Their contribution and influence throughout the years are thus easily appreciated by the readership.

A major theme of the early chapters is the formation of the South Wales Liberal Federation and the North Wales Liberal Federation, and the (ultimately futile) attempt to merge them together, primarily by the stalwarts of the enterprising *Cymru Fydd* movement from 1886. There is much valuable material here on the leading Welsh Liberal politicians of this period, among them T. E. Ellis, D. A. Thomas, Stuart Rendel, A. C. Humphreys-Owen, Samuel T. Evans, J. Herbert Lewis and the youthful David Lloyd George, the last-named elected to parliament (by a wafer-thin eighteen votes) at just 27 years of age following a hotly contested by-election campaign in the Carnarvon Boroughs in April 1890. Due attention is devoted, too, to a trenchant analysis of the key political themes of this period – the campaign for the disestablishment and disendowment of the Welsh church, educational reforms, the land question, temperance, and an element of administrative devolution for Wales.

As Deacon clearly demonstrates, Liberal dominance of Welsh political life was nigh on monolithic by the time of the general election of January 1906 when only one division in the whole of the principality – the second Merthyr Tydfil seat captured by Keir Hardie for the Labour Representation Committee – was held by a non-Liberal MP. There was not a single Conservative MP in all of Wales, a result later repeated in the general election of 1997. This overwhelming dominance was also exercised over local government in Wales. Of considerable interest, too, is the coverage given to Welsh Liberal women during this period, among them Margaret Haig Thomas (the daughter of D. A. Thomas MP, and his successor as Lady Rhondda in 1918) and Winifred Combe Tennant, a Neath-based party stalwart and one of many Liberal women wholly entranced by slavish devotion to Lloyd George.

This pattern had been wholly transformed by the time of the general election of 1924 when no more than forty Liberal MPs were returned in the whole of the UK, and in Wales the party had dramatically very quickly retreated to its rural bastions in the north and west. No Liberal MPs remained in the industrial and mercantile south of the country. But Wales still remained a Liberal stronghold especially post-1945 when, of the twelve party MPs re-elected, seven represented Welsh constituencies. The Welsh Liberal casualties in the general election of 1951 were the left-wing, near Socialistic radicals Lady Megan Lloyd George (Anglesey) and Emrys O. Roberts (Merioneth). Just three Liberal MPs remained in Wales – the party leader Clement Davies (Montgomeryshire), Roderic Bowen (Cardiganshire) and Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris (Carmarthenshire) – all with marked right-wing, middle-of-the-road tendencies. Russell Deacon evaluates competently the political leanings and

the contributions of each of these important political figures.

Seminal themes analysed in the later chapters of the book include the formation of the Welsh Liberal Party in 1966, the marked revival of party fortunes in the 1980s in the wake of the 'Alliance' and subsequent merger in 1987 with the SDP. The author rightly focuses on the performances of Gwynoro Jones for the SDP at the Gower by-election of 1982 and Felix Aubel for the Liberals in the Cynon Valley by-election of 1984. In the new dawn of devolution, the party won six seats in the first elections to the National Assembly for Wales in 1999. Among the victors were Jenny Randerson (now a distinguished Liberal peer), Peter Black and Mike German. The party was given the groundbreaking opportunity to participate in a coalition government with the Labour Party at Cardiff Bay in October 2000. When Jenny Willot rather sensationally captured Cardiff Central by a wide margin in the general election of 2005, it gave the party an opportunity to extend its influence outside its key rural core areas of Ceredigion, Montgomeryshire and Brecon and Radnor.

All of these themes are well analysed by Professor Deacon in a composite volume which will certainly prove of great interest to a wide range of disparate readers. But, somehow, the over-arching key question – why the Liberal Party so dramatically lost ground in Wales, as elsewhere, after the First World War – is not really tackled head-on, and the various contributing factors have, in consequence, to be teased out of a largely factual and descriptive account.

The book contains a large number of well-chosen photographs which complement admirably the main text, and the volume has, as ever, been produced to the highest standards by the Welsh Academic Press (although, unfortunately, there are rather too many printing errors). But it is undoubtedly a major contribution to the history of the Liberal Party during the modern period and will complement several other recent works in the same field of study. It is also highly likely to encourage and stimulate further academic research in this area for which it will serve as a solid and durable foundation. This book will surely stand the test of time for a long while. One can but, however, quibble, as so often, at the substantial cover price of £60. Is a more reasonable paperback edition in prospect? I do hope so, and soon.

Dr J. Graham Jones was formerly Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

The economic policies and initiatives of the Liberal Party

Peter Sloman, *The Liberal Party and the Economy, 1929–1964*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford University Press, 2014)

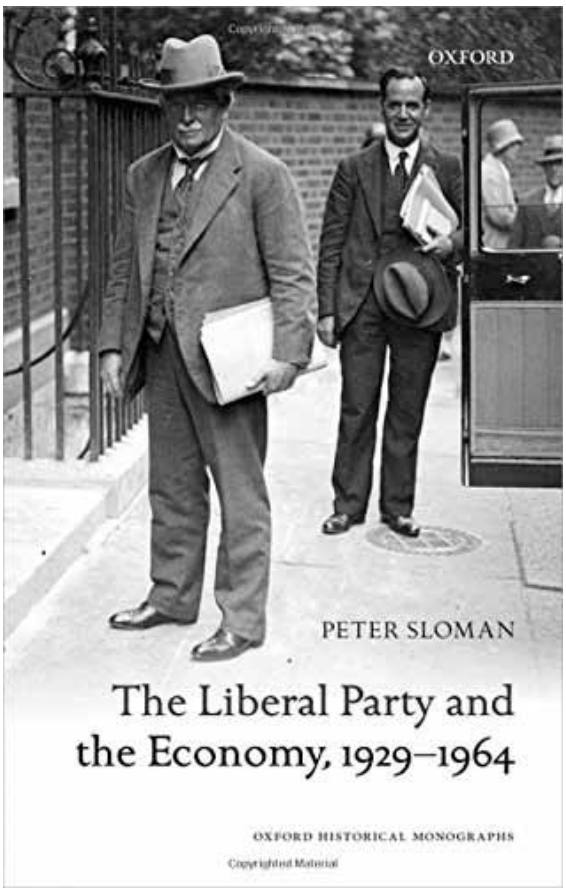
Review by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Following a positively brilliant carer as an undergraduate and postgraduate student at Oxford University, Dr Peter Sloman is currently Herbert Nicholas Junior Research Fellow in Modern British History at New College, Oxford where he teaches British history since 1815 and supervises numerous undergraduate dissertations in this field of study. He also contributes extensively to the teaching of the first-year 'Approaches to History' and second- and third-year 'Disciplines of History' papers. His other main research interests include electoral sociology and the politics of the welfare state.

His journal publications include 'Rethinking a progressive moment: the Liberal and Labour parties in the 1945 general election', *Historical Research*, 84 (2011), pp. 722–44. This article argues that the Liberal Party's poor performance in the 1945 election, and the low incidence of tactical voting against Conservative candidates, suggest that 1945 was more than just a reaction against Conservative rule. Instead, many voters appear to have been positively attracted to the identity which the Labour Party projected, as the only party which grounded its promises of social reform in a vision of a planned economy. Dr Sloman is also the author of 'Can we conquer unemployment?: the Liberal Party, public works, and the 1931 political crisis', *Historical Research*, vol. 88, issue 239 (February 2015), pp. 161–84.

Dr Sloman's impeccably scholarly and lucid study in the present volume considers the formulation and application of economic policy within the British Liberal Party from the all-important 'We Can Conquer Unemployment' general election of 30 May 1929 until the party's steady revival under Jo Grimond in the mid-1960s. As befits a study which began its life as a groundbreaking University of Oxford DPhil thesis, it is certainly exhaustive, encompassing full use of Liberal Party records and publications, the personal papers of a large number of Liberal politicians, newspapers and journals, parliamentary papers, and the vast secondary literature on the subject. All these highly disparate sources have been welded into a coherent, highly stimulating analysis. This volume analyses with much competence the diverse intellectual influences which shaped British Liberals' economic thought up to the mid-twentieth century, and highlights the ways in which the party sought to reconcile its progressive identity with its long-standing commitment to free trade and competitive markets.

From about 1990 onwards, the Liberal Party has attracted a considerable scholarly literature, both substantial published monographs and unpublished dissertations, after its sad relegation to third-party status, really since the general election of October 1924. Dr Sloman's monograph is a major contribution to the literature because of its focus on the response of Liberal politicians to economic questions and their policy making. The attention is unquestionably valid. Although the



Liberals were the third party in the British state, Liberal politicians – from Lloyd George (and his emphasis on practical Keynesianism) in 1929 until Jo Grimond after 1956 – could still be highly influential.

Moreover, many prominent economists – Keynes, Sir William Beveridge, Walter Layton, Sir Roy Harrod and Alan Peacock and many others – were keen Liberals. Sloman's pioneering work casts valuable light on the history of the Liberal Party more generally during this period, especially on the crucial question of its relationship to the British state. A concise introductory survey focuses on the role of the Liberal Party in the British political system from 1929 onwards, with an emphasis on the party's political and economic ideas – their formulation and their transmission, notably Keynesianism and Neoliberalism. Due regard is paid to the capacity of Liberal politicians to tackle economic theory and what the author describes as 'the intermittent nature of economists' involvement in the Liberal Party' (p. 13).

The first, introductory chapter surveys the primary economic traditions within the Liberal Party of the early twentieth century and traces their progress up until 1929. These include classical economics, the influential ideas of Henry George, the dramatic 'new Liberalism' of the twentieth century, and the so called 'constructive', interventionist Liberalism which came to fruition in the interventionist policies of the pre-war Asquith government, driven by a concern for efficiency and a heartfelt wish to reduce unemployment and poverty and reflected, for example, in the setting up of labour exchanges and trade boards. The 1920s saw continued support for the cardinal tenet of free trade and a marked departure from laissez faire. A startling departure was the setting up of esteemed committees of enquiry whose lengthy deliberations led to the publication of *Coal and Power* (1924) and *The Land and the Nation* (1926) and, above all, *Britain's Industrial Future* (1928), the vaunted 'Yellow Book', whose endorsement by the National Liberal Federation in March 1928 marked a high point of a much more interventionist approach to economic policy by the party.

The contents of chapters 2 to 7 are arranged strictly in chronological order. During the second minority Labour government of 1929–31 (which Liberals generally supported with some conviction), party mandarins tended to back away from loan-financed public works and embraced a much more traditional approach to the formidable economic problems faced by the country. Liberals now tended to back down from advocacy of a major programme of public works largely because of the deteriorating economic situation. Moreover the economic experts who had advised Lloyd George were no longer a unified group acting in unison. While generally in Britain the ongoing severe economic dislocation of the 1930s saw continued advocacy of increased state intervention and planning, the fragmented segments of the British Liberal Party departed from the constructive, interventionist Liberal thinking of the late 1920s, while, more generally, 'the Liberals' problems lay in a lack of definition, unity and purpose', enhanced still further by 'the tripartite division within Liberalism' from August 1931 onwards (p. 107). Generally, Sloman argues, the mainstream Samuelite Liberal grouping was perceived as too close to Baldwin's Conservative Party, even during the 1935 general election campaign. These trends continued largely during the run-up to the outbreak of the Second World War, years marked by a new libertarian approach, free-market industrial policies and advocacy of 'ownership for all'.

The 1939–45 war saw a marked change: senior Liberal politicians, now led by Sir Archibald Sinclair (whose devotion to party leadership duties was consequently much reduced), served in the new coalition government under Chamberlain and Churchill, the war effort dominated everything, and there was a mega swing to the left in the Liberal Party in parliament and in the country. Policy formulation within the Liberal Party became much more 'formal and committee based' (p. 135), there was a general emphasis on planning and egalitarian ideas, while there was a newfound, energetic debate on the nature of Liberalism – 'a moment of ideological radicalism, when the party shed its reservations about state intervention' (p. 163). The heady days of 1945 proved especially alluring to left-wing Liberals, some of whom came close to advocating advanced socialist initiatives.

During the period of Clement Davies's leadership, 1945–56, the Liberal Party's true nadir (with a drop to just six Liberal MPs by 1955), saw severe splits and disputes within the party, including over economic policies. Generally it was 'a drift to the right', but, as Dr Sloman demonstrates here, this took place within a broadly Keynesian policy framework, with a firm commitment to demand-management policies, with support for the growing welfare state and most of the nationalised industries.

Then, under Jo Grimond as party leader from 1956 onwards, some marked revival was experienced. As far as economic policy was concerned, this embraced support for historic Liberal principles like internationalism and citizen participation, but with a much increased growth in the role of the state to nurture growth, provide public goods and services, and attempt to remedy the shortcomings of the market. At the core

of Grimond's economic policies were support for Common Market membership, increased public investment, improved educational and training facilities, and a more competitive private sector.

A short conclusion gathering together the main themes and findings of the research is appended. Dr Sloman's overarching conclusion is 'that it was ideological and generational changes in the early 1960s that cut the party's links with the New Right, opened up common ground with revisionist social democrats, and re-established its progressive credentials' (back cover). A full, clearly set out bibliography of the sources used is most helpful and a pleasure to read. It will prove of great value for future research. The book is not always an easy read, but it is unfailingly scholarly, contains a wealth of most valuable and informative material which will repay detailed study and stimulate the interested reader to research further. It is a most valuable contribution to this field of study.

Dr J. Graham Jones was formerly Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

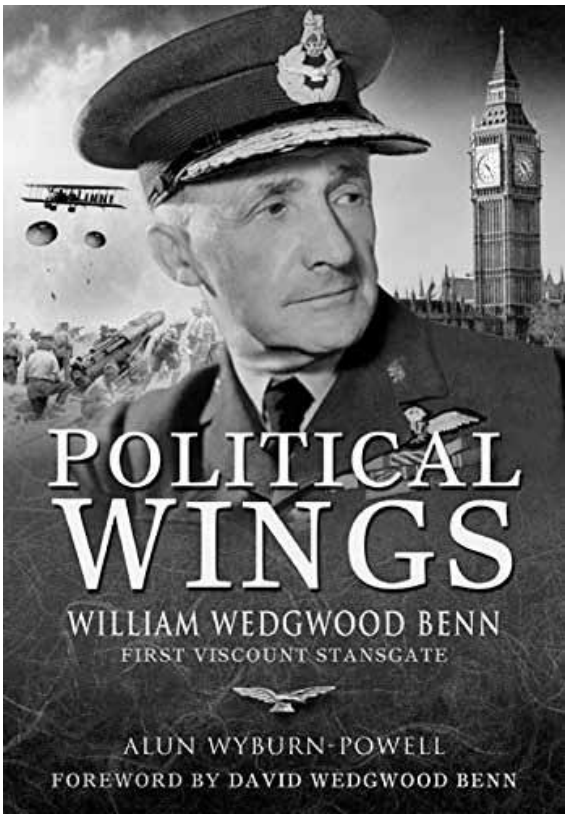
Tony Benn's father

Alun Wyburn-Powell, *Political Wings: William Wedgwood Benn, First Viscount Stansgate* (Pen & Sword Aviation, 2015)
Review by **David Dutton**

It is a curious fact that two of the most prominent post-war figures on the Labour Left – Michael Foot and Tony Benn – had fathers who sat in parliament as Liberal MPs. The two fathers were almost exact contemporaries. Born three years apart, they both died in 1960. But whereas Isaac Foot served out his political career within the Liberal ranks, William Wedgwood Benn, the subject of this very readable biography by Alun Wyburn-Powell, was among the many prominent Liberals of his generation who defected to Labour. Wedgwood Benn, ennobled in 1941 as Viscount Stansgate in order to enhance Labour's ranks in the House of Lords – though he privately likened the debates of the upper chamber to 'old gentlemen's political croquet' – served as Liberal MP for Tower Hamlets, St George's (1906–18) and for Leith (1918–27). Rather than represent his constituency under false political colours, he resigned his parliamentary seat upon his conversion to Labour, but then secured election for Aberdeen North (1928–31) and Manchester, Gorton (1937–41). As a Labour politician, Benn enjoyed two periods of cabinet office, as Secretary of State for India throughout Ramsay MacDonald's second government (1929–31) and as Secretary of State for Air under Clement Attlee (1945–6).

Benefitting from the reminiscences of members of the Benn family, including the late Tony Benn, Wyburn-Powell draws a convincing picture of this, in some ways, rather eccentric individual. His life followed a repeated pattern of overwork resulting in spells of near-exhaustion. Benn did not marry until he was 43 and must have thrilled his bride by deciding that their honeymoon should be spent attending the first session of the League of Nations in Geneva! His quest for an appropriate work/life balance was much influenced by Arnold Bennett's book *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*. Benn's time was not to be wasted and, to chart his use of it, he divided his day into half-hour units. For almost half a century, he kept a record of how each day had been spent, drawing up a daily graph of his activities. Born into a family of Congregationalist radicals whose circumstances were comfortable rather than genuinely wealthy, he was constantly, if usually needlessly, worried about his personal finances. When he managed in the summer of 1933 to purchase the house at Stansgate which his father had bought, but soon sold, thirty years earlier, he installed a payphone in order not to waste money. That home, incidentally, once described by the political journalist Michael Crick as the family's 'ancestral home', was in fact a prefabricated building, chosen from a catalogue and built largely of wood. Benn's parsimony later cost him dear. In October 1940 his London home on Grosvenor Road, later the site of Labour's Millbank Tower, caught fire during an air raid. The blaze seems to have resulted from an electrical fault, the consequence of employing the inadequate DIY skills of his son, Michael, in a further attempt at economy.

Wyburn-Powell is less convincing in his efforts to establish the intrinsic significance of his subject. In his foreword, Benn's surviving son, David, concedes that his father was 'never a key player' (p. ix). Wyburn-Powell agrees. Benn was 'a natural deputy managing director, an adjutant, the second in command' (p. 14). Furthermore, 'he never really developed the intermediate skill of detailed policy-making', though 'he thoroughly enjoyed debating and political intrigue' (p. 33). Not much scope here then for a 'Great Man' approach to history. The conclusion that he was 'a good administrator and a good party manager'



A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

THE LEGACY OF ROY JENKINS

Roy Jenkins is best remembered in Liberal Democrat circles as one of the 'Gang of Four' who established the Social Democratic Party, as the SDP's first leader, and then as a staunch supporter of merger with the Liberal Party.

But even as a Labour politician he had a liberal record. In his first two years as Home Secretary (which began just over fifty years ago), he abolished theatre censorship, passed the first effective legislation to outlaw racial discrimination and delivered government support for private members' bills on the legalisation of homosexuality and on abortion. In 1972 he led the major Labour rebellion that saved the Conservative government's legislation to take Britain into the European Community.

John Campbell (author of *Roy Jenkins: A Well-Rounded Life*) and **Lord David Steel** (Leader of the Liberal Party 1976-88) discuss how much liberalism in Britain owes to Roy Jenkins.

6.30pm Monday 27 June
Committee Room 4A, House of Lords, Westminster, SW1 (*please allow 20 minutes to get through security*)

scarcely makes the reader's pulse race (p. 205). That same reader will sometimes sense that Wyburn-Powell is having to pad out his narrative. This is most obvious in a fifteen-page chapter entitled 'Summer of 1931'. Benn's name is largely absent from the chapter itself and, indeed, from the dramatic events it describes. In reality, he was no more than a bit-player in the fall of MacDonald's government and its replacement by an all-party National administration. Elsewhere, the impression is that Wyburn-Powell strains too hard to establish Benn's impact. The suggestion that his decision to decline the offer of the position of chief whip on the death of Percy Illingworth in January 1915 'changed the course of Liberal Party history' is interesting but ultimately entirely speculative (p. 50). The statement that Benn 'has a significance beyond his own achievements' because of 'the influence he ended up having on the legislation on peerages' may be technically correct (p. 201). But, almost by definition, that influence could only become apparent with his own death and would have meant nothing without the determined campaign of his son Tony to renounce his inherited title. Even less compelling is the argument that Benn's failure to renegotiate the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1946 led indirectly to the 'festering problems between the two countries which ultimately ended in the Suez Crisis and Eden's downfall' (p. 199). These contrived points aside, Wyburn-Powell generally does as well as he can with the material available. At the end of the day, however, a cabinet career totaling three years, four months and eighteen days (Wyburn-Powell provides this degree of exactitude) offers the author somewhat limited fare.

Perhaps the most interesting section of this book for readers of the *JLH* is the section dealing with Benn's transition from Liberalism to Labour. Here the author calls upon his earlier research into Liberal defectors to place Benn's move into a wider context. His conclusion is that Benn left the Liberal Party primarily because of 'personality clashes' (p. 95). He was a loyal supporter of Asquith, but his commitment to the party waned once the latter gave up its leadership. By contrast, he declared that Lloyd George did 'not possess the qualifications required as leader of the Liberal Party' (p. 88). Granted the positions occupied by these two Liberal heavyweights in the mid-1920s, most of those Asquithians who chose to leave the party's ranks drifted to the political right. (Wyburn-Powell's statistical analysis should, however, be viewed with caution; only those readers familiar with his earlier work will know that he has taken the illogical methodological decision to exclude from his calculations the majority of defectors to Liberal Nationalism.) Benn, however, made a relatively painless transition to Labour. It 'did not involve him in a significant abandonment of old policies, nor the adoption of many new ones' (p. 99). He found 'an acceptable home' at the centre of Labour politics, 'or if anything even slightly to the left of centre' (p. 100). These interesting points might have been developed further.

This life of William Wedgwood Benn will be read with pleasure, not least by those interested in the formative influences shaping the more significant figure of Tony Benn. The author's problems derive more from his subject and the loss to fire of much of the Stansgate archive than from any shortcomings in his skills as a biographer.

David Dutton is co-author of a new A-level textbook, The Making of Modern Britain, 1951–2007 *(Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).*