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HISTORY



Legacy of the SDP

Dick Newby

What did the SDP bequeath to the Liberal Democrats?

Seth Thevoz

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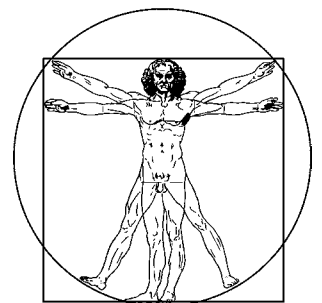
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David Lloyd George: A biography in cartoons Book review



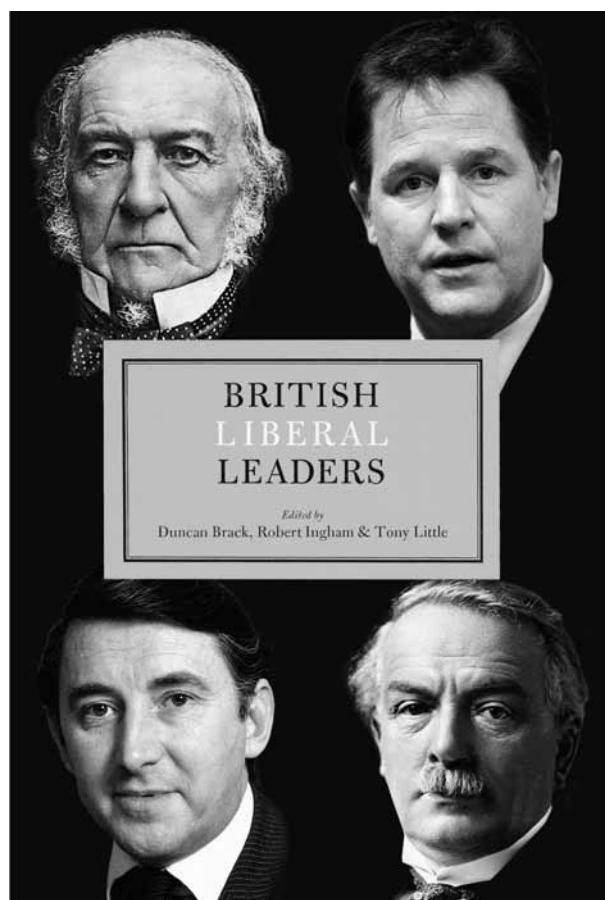
British Liberal Leaders

Leaders of the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats since 1828

Duncan Brack, Robert Ingham & Tony Little (eds.)

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Social Democratic Party

Dick Newby examines the legacy of the SDP to the modern-day Liberal Democrats, in terms of policies, procedures and people.

What did the SDP bequeath



IT IS A measure of the success of the Liberal Democrats in bringing together the SDP and the Liberal Party, that it has taken quite an effort of will for me to even begin to answer the question of what contribution the SDP made to the Liberal Democrats. Twenty-eight years after the merger and thirty-five years after the formation of the SDP is definitely a long enough period to enable one to attempt an answer to the question, but equally, it is also long enough to forget some of the salient characteristics of the pre-merger parties.

At the time of the merger, Sir Leslie Murphy, one of the SDP trustees and a former chairman of the National Enterprise Board, said bleakly 'There's no such thing as a merger. There are only takeovers.' And he was in no doubt that the SDP was being taken over. In their magisterial book about the SDP, published in 1995, Ivor Crewe and Tony King were equally stark: 'The Liberal Democratic Party differs very little from the old Liberal Party'. And in thinking about this article I asked Tony Greaves – a fierce critic of the merger

at the time – what he thought. 'We've got a liberal [or possibly Liberal] party', he said, 'with an SDP constitution'.

Where does the truth lie? I'd like to look at this under the three headings of procedures, policies and people.

Procedures

The predecessor parties were organised in quite different ways. The Liberal Party had grown organically over a long period. Its membership criteria were in places quite vague – the West Country, for example, boasted many 'seedcake' members, i.e. people whose contribution to the party's resources came not from paying a subscription, but in helping at social functions to raise funds. Membership records were kept only at constituency level and there was a deep suspicion of the national party getting anywhere near them. It had long-established and largely autonomous Scottish and Welsh parties and variably

to the Liberal Democrats?

strong regional parties in England. Its policy-making was undertaken by a large annual Assembly, attendance at which, though linked to local party membership, was effectively open to all members. In between, it had a quarterly Council, comprised of about two to three hundred members and having a somewhat ambiguous role in formulating and commenting upon policy and strategy. These structures were cherished by many of those who took part in their deliberations, but to outsiders often looked rather chaotic.

The SDP by contrast was a party formed by a national initiative whose first members were largely gleaned from a national newspaper ad (in *The Guardian* on 5 February 1981). It wanted to look dynamic, professional and modern, and a national computerised membership system with membership payments by credit card were seen as embodying this. Its leaders were used to ministerial power and a hierarchical manner of working. The SDP was a unitary GB-wide party and its Scottish, Welsh and English regional structures were relatively weak. Its policy-making body – the Council for Social Democracy (CSD) – was elected by local parties and was relatively small: some 400 members. It met three times a year. It determined policy in a deliberative way, with Green Papers produced by expert groups followed by White Papers, which became the basis for policy. It was keen to promote the role of women and had entrenched positions for women on its National Committee and on candidate shortlists. (A proposal to require equal male/female representation on the CSD was however lost following a tied vote at the CSD and its rejection in a subsequent all-members' ballot.) It was keen on all-member elections conducted by post.

Many of its features were a response to the perceived failings of the Labour Party constitution, which to the SDP leaders had enabled a combination of dedicated activists (often Trotskyite entryists) and union bosses to take decisions at the expense of ordinary members.

These different approaches formed the basis of the many and various disagreements which had to be resolved during the merger negotiations in the autumn and winter of 1987–8. It is noteworthy that the three conflicts which almost led to the collapse of the negotiations and certainly

took up most time and energy proved to be transitory. The first related to the name of the new party. The name finally chosen – Social and Liberal Democrats (witheringly described as 'Salads' by the media) – only lasted until 1989. The issue of whether there should be a reference to NATO in the preamble (on which the SDP negotiating team successfully dug in their heels) became largely irrelevant after the fall of the Berlin Wall and was duly dropped. And the initial policy statement – the so called 'dead parrot' document (see below) – didn't even survive the negotiating process. Its anodyne successor was soon superseded and even more quickly forgotten.

The constitution which emerged had a number of features which reflected previous Liberal Party practice. This is most noticeably seen in the provision for Scottish, Welsh and English parties, where provisions from the Liberal constitution were largely transposed. There was a row about the role of English regions, with some wanting them to have the same powers as the Scots and Welsh. In the end, this matter was resolved by allowing them to apply for state party status if they wished. To date none have done so. There was also strong Liberal resistance to positive provision for women and this was largely successful – with long-lasting results. And the constitution's preamble – a powerful if little read document – bore a strong relation to its Liberal Party predecessor.

The SDP did however leave its mark on the constitution in a number of crucial respects:

- The new party adopted the SDP's national computerised membership system. At the time this led to many of the informal Liberal Party members disappearing as members. The system has nonetheless proved its worth, enabling the party to communicate directly to members, however weak the local party might be, and to have an efficient method of collecting subscriptions and raising funds. It is noticeable that the surge in membership after the recent general election happened almost entirely online. Having a longstanding national membership system in place enabled the party to transition relatively smoothly to the digital age. If it hadn't been in place from the start it would have surely had to be introduced at some later stage

Left: platform at Council for Social Democracy meeting, Kensington Town Hall, May 1985; at right, Dick Newby

What did the SDP bequeath to the Liberal Democrats?

- All-member elections. The party's leader and president are elected via all-member postal ballot and lay members of the party's federal bodies are elected by postal ballot of conference representatives (now changed to all members). Although costly, there can be little doubt that this system leads to a higher level of participation than any plausible alternative and allows all members to (rightly) feel that they have a say in who runs the party.
- A clear and deliberative policy-making system. The party largely adopted the SDP's two-stage policy-making approach. Under it, a working group is typically set up to consider a policy area. It produces a consultative document which raises the key issues and sometimes offers suggested responses to them. This is discussed at a consultative session of conference. At the next conference, a final draft document is produced and voted upon. It differs from the SDP approach in that the first stage of the process typically raises the key issues for debate without offering a proposed answer whereas SDP drafts were more like government green papers which set out clear proposals and ask for comments. The current approach has the twin advantages of allowing the maximum number of party members to participate in the process – either by joining the working group or by taking part in the conference debates – and avoiding policy-making being undertaken without due deliberation. Its disadvantage is that it is slow and cumbersome. This problem has been partly overcome by allowing stand-alone and emergency policy motions to be debated by conference. Having chaired one of these groups which went through the full deliberative process – on tax policy – I am a firm supporter of the system.
- The old Liberal Council was not retained and the conference now meets twice a year, a durable compromise between former SDP and Liberal Party arrangements

Even Crewe and King acknowledged the SDP influence on the Lib Dem constitution, which, they state 'clearly resembles that of the SDP – David Steel's hated Liberal Council has gone – and their party organisation has acquired some of the SDP's high-tech professionalism. Compared to the old Liberal party, the new party's ethos is also altogether more managerial and disciplined, less eccentric and archaic, more geared to power and less to protest.'

This last point is very relevant to our experience of government. For all the cost to the party of being in coalition, the party's decision-making processes meant that it survived the experience in one, albeit smaller, piece. This was down to two main things. First, the initial decision to enter coalition was endorsed with an overwhelming majority at a special conference before the coalition formally began. And subsequent conferences

had unconstrained debate on the party's stance in government, which in the case of the Health and Social Care Bill of 2011 led to Lib Dem ministers securing major changes to the Bill. These processes cannot of course be simply ascribed to SDP influence – a stand-alone Liberal Party would have no doubt undertaken broadly similar steps. But the party did behave in an extremely sober and disciplined manner – which was exactly what the SDP negotiators were hoping for in 1987.

Policy

It could well be argued that the SDP's most distinctive contribution to the policy of the Liberal Democrats was via the changes it made to the Liberal Party's policy-making process, rather than to individual policies or to the overall policy stance of the party.

It has to be remembered that the single biggest impetus for the creation of the SDP was not over what is conventionally described as policy. It was over the decision of the Labour Party at its January 1983 conference to give the biggest share of votes for the leader of the Labour Party – some 40 per cent – to the unions. This was thought to be anti-democratic by the putative leaders of the SDP, who saw it as being the means by which the unions could effectively decide who any Labour prime minister was going to be. This was obviously an issue which was unique to the Labour Party. There was of course also much in Michael Foot's policy agenda with which the SDP founders disagreed – notably defence, Europe and state intervention in the economy. As far as the policy content of the Limehouse Declaration is concerned, much of it was already in line with Liberal Party policy. There was reference to an open and classless society, to promoting cooperatives and profit-sharing, to greater decentralisation of government and to the EU. There was also reference to a more equal society as a key policy goal of the new party and to the UK's active participation in NATO. The issue of NATO membership as a key plank of the party's policy was challenged in the merger negotiations (see above), but was never seriously disputed by a Liberal assembly. As for equality, this was not a word as often used by Liberals as social democrats, but as a principle it did not jar – and was included into the preamble of the new party's constitution as one of three key values, on a par with liberty and community.

The various joint policy statements and manifestos which were issued during the Alliance years were generally relatively easy to craft. There was a major row over nuclear weapons in 1986, but this was caused as much by David Steel giving a pre-emptive interview about the proposed policy to *The Scotsman* as by the policy differences themselves.

David Owen, as SDP leader, was keen to strike a distinctive and forward-looking tone on economic policy and at the party's 1983

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autumn conference he advocated a 'social market economy' – which was seen as a break from the corporatist approach of the past. He proposed jettisoning a number of such corporatist approaches: he opposed incomes policies, argued in favour of trade union reform and reduced state involvement in the economy. He saw this as the best way of boosting economic growth, which in turn would allow more expenditure on social policies. He was greatly influenced by businessman David Sainsbury, then an SDP trustee and subsequently a Labour minister in the Blair government, who had advocated this 'tough and tender' approach to the economy. This was a distinctive new approach and fed through to Lib Dem economic thinking.

The policy issues which nearly wrecked the merger negotiations themselves were bizarre. They sprang not from a difference between the parties but the fact that the offending document was written by researchers to Bob Maclennan (who had insisted on a new policy statement to form part of the merger package) with no effective consultation with anyone (and certainly not the negotiating teams). They were produced in haste and included a number of measures – for example the extension of VAT to food and children's clothing – which neither party would ever have voted for. The whole document was disowned in the most humiliating of circumstances by the Parliamentary Liberal Party, amidst a widespread chorus of disapproval. An anodyne replacement document was hastily drafted to take its place, which simply drew on previous policy.

Once the new party was established, its worthy policy-making procedure swung into action. Though ex-Liberals were numerically dominant in the Commons parliamentary party (only two former SDP MPs, Bob Maclennan and Charles Kennedy survived), Paddy Ashdown's inclusive style of leadership did not show bias towards policy ideas coming from Liberals as opposed to former SDP members. The most distinctive single policy innovation of these years – the proposal for an extra 1p on the rate of income tax – though sounding impeccably social democratic, was actually first proposed by Matthew Taylor and adopted with the support of Alan Beith (the then Treasury spokesman). David Owen's advocacy of the social market economy was not carried forward by former members of the SDP during the Ashdown years, partly because there was no senior ex-SDP figure in parliament who had a particular interest in the subject. And in the early post-merger years many former SDP members who had joined the new party were rebuilding careers outside national politics.

When Charles Kennedy succeeded Paddy Ashdown as Lib Dem leader, the first and last former member of the SDP to hold that position (except for Robert Maclennan's brief period as joint leader before Ashdown's election), he did not do so with a detailed innovative policy programme. Charles believed in a small number of big things

The acid test of the legacy of the SDP to Liberal Democrat policy-making is to be found in the actions of the coalition government. What, if anything, did the coalition do which bore a distinctly SDP imprint? In most areas, it can be argued that the policy stances of Lib Dem ministers bore neither a Liberal nor an SDP stamp.

passionately – fairness and internationalism principally – but he was not temperamentally a policy wonk. Ironically, the policy for which he will be best remembered – his opposition to the Iraq war – might more easily be expected to come from a former Liberal than a strongly Atlanticist member of the SDP.

During Charles' time as leader, policy debate in the party was shaken up by the publication of *The Orange Book* (in 2004). *The Orange Book* sought to update liberal thinking on social and economic issues and included contributions by a number of senior former SDP members including Vince Cable and Chris Huhne. Charles Kennedy wrote a preface which endorsed the book – though not all its specific ideas – by saying that it drew on Liberal (rather than social democratic) traditions. Indeed the book was portrayed – unduly crudely – as being right-wing and somehow against the traditions of the party. Vince Cable's contribution was a particular challenge to many traditionalists, calling for a reduced role for the state in supporting business and 'a mixture of public sector, private and mutually owned enterprises [competing] to provide mainstream [public] services.'

The leadership election between Chris Huhne and Nick Clegg was, more than its predecessors, one of fundamental policy stance. Nick stood as a centrist who wanted greater equality of opportunity and worried less about equality of outcomes. Chris Huhne stood more firmly on the centre left and eschewed the word 'centre'. The difference between them was partly about language – people who came from the SDP would rarely if ever say that they belonged to the political centre (even if they did) – but also about redistributive substance.

The acid test of the legacy of the SDP to Liberal Democrat policy-making is to be found in the actions of the coalition government. What, if anything, did the coalition do which bore a distinctly SDP imprint? In most areas, it can be argued that the policy stances of Lib Dem ministers bore neither a Liberal nor an SDP stamp. One, however stands out. The industrial strategy pursued by Vince Cable I think follows a line of thought which stretches certainly from Owen's 1983 'tough and tender' speech and to Vince's own views expressed in *The Orange Book* (although he was somewhat more statist as minister than as pamphleteer). The strategy accepted that the state had no role in running industrial sectors or picking winners within them, but equally, it established a number of areas of state intervention which were thought necessary to enable to private sector to develop and compete internationally. There were a number of components. It began with an analysis of the growth potential for those sectors of the economy – from advanced engineering to biosciences – where the UK had a strong starting position. It then identified specific measures which were needed to support growth in these sectors. These included innovative (in the UK) ideas such as the 'catapult' centres which

What did the SDP bequeath to the Liberal Democrats?

brought together university research and private sector development skills. But it also included more traditional areas of support, such as the packages needed to ensure that the large motor manufacturers increased their investment in the UK and improvements in skills, led by the great expansion of apprenticeships. There was also a big push to increase the proportion of women on the boards of the largest companies and to introduce joint parental leave. There was little if anything in this which a traditional Liberal would object – and indeed the comprehensive package of measures designed to strengthen employee share ownership which was also introduced under the guidance of Lib Dem BIS Ministers, was very much a core Liberal policy. But the mindset which lay behind it, of using all the levers of state to support competitive, innovative private sector initiative represented a distinctive SDP approach.

People

It is easiest to see the contribution of the SDP to the Lib Dems by reference to people. When the merged party was formed, some two-fifths of the members of the SDP joined. I do not know how many of them remain members to day, but as I travel round the country, I rarely make a visit without someone identifying themselves as a former SDP member.

At the national level, it is easy to spot the key people. Of the two SDP MPs who joined the merged party, Charles Kennedy went on to be president (1991–4) and leader (1999–2006), presiding over the largest number of Lib Dem MPs in the party's history (sixty-two at the 2005 general election). Robert Maclennan was also president (1995–8), and became a peer and a leading party spokesman on constitutional reform. Indeed, his leadership, from the Lib Dem side, of the Cook–Maclennan talks, in the run-up to the 1997 general election, played a major part in the Blair government adopting such a large raft of constitutional reform measures, despite the lack of interest in the subject by Blair himself.

In addition to Kennedy and Maclennan, Ian Wrigglesworth also served as party president (its first, from 1988–90). He subsequently became party treasurer and is now a peer. A number of prominent SDP members were elected to the Commons after 1988, most notably Vince Cable and Chris Huhne.

Of the SDP negotiating team which drew up the merger with the Liberal Party, all those who remained active in the party (with the exception of Charles Kennedy) were appointed at some stage to the House of Lords – namely Lindsay Northover, Tom McNally, Ben Stoneham, Shirley Williams, Ian Wrigglesworth, Willie Goodhart, Bob Maclennan and myself. (Being a Liberal negotiator was almost as effective a route to the Lords, with eight negotiators subsequently getting peerages, although some high-profile figures, such as Adrian

David Owen was completely correct when he realised that the merged party would be less bid-dable than the SDP and would challenge its leaders more. He was wrong in thinking that this was a bad thing.

Slade and Des Wilson did not.) And indeed, because only two of the initial Liberal Democrat MPs were from the SDP, members of the former party were more prominent in the Lords. The first four leaders of the Lib Dems in the Lords were from the SDP – Jenkins, Rodgers, Williams and McNally – and John Harris and John Roper were the first two Lib Dem Lords whips.

The SDP provided a number of the members of the coalition government: in the Commons, Paul Burstow, Vince Cable, Ed Davey and Chris Huhne; in the Lords, Tom McNally, Lindsay Northover and myself.

In local government, former SDP members also made a significant contribution, although local government was always an area where the Liberals were stronger. In Leeds, Mark Harris led the Lib Dem group in the period during which we jointly ran the council with the Conservatives. In Liverpool, Flo Clucas was deputy leader of the council, and Serge Lourie was leader in Richmond.

The wider political legacy

The SDP didn't just leave its mark on the Lib Dems. Both in terms of constitution and economic policy, it influenced Blairite New Labour. But its main broader legacy was in providing the training ground for politicians of other parties.

Three members of the current cabinet – Greg Clark, Chris Grayling and David Mundell – were members of the SDP (a fourth, Liz Truss, is a former Lib Dem) and in the Lords, Tory peers Andrew Cooper, Danny Finkelstein and John Horam were SDP members (John Horam being one of the party's founding MPs). SDP-ers on the Labour benches include Roger Liddle and Parry Mitchell. Andrew Adonis is now, as chair of the Infrastructure Commission, an independent peer.

Many more SDP members never joined the Lib Dems and were lost to politics, but from anecdotal experience and chance meetings, they seem to have frequently prospered in their subsequent careers, many in the public services.

A personal perspective

When I joined the SDP as secretary to the parliamentary party in April 1981 (a few weeks after the party's launch), I would have been appalled at the thought that the new party would at some stage merge with the Liberals. I naively thought that we could fundamentally change British politics ourselves and, whilst we were happy to work with the Liberals, those of us from a Labour Party background tended to view them as rather woolly and chaotic (particularly if you were brought up in an area, as I was, where the Liberals had virtually no local presence).

From 1983, however, I have had no doubt that a merged party was the best way forward. I discovered, somewhat to my surprise, that I had a tremendous amount in common with my Liberal

colleagues. I think also that I myself have become more liberal over the years. As a young man, I had great faith that the state could solve all society's ills and this is why I joined the Labour Party. I supported the idea of a hierarchical approach to managing public policy and shared the Fabian view that an elite of public-spirited men and women running Westminster and Whitehall really did know best.

The SDP approach was one in which strong leadership and a disciplined party would drive forward social and economic change. As we discovered in the coalition government, you do need strong leadership and discipline in parliament if you are to achieve anything. But the attitude of mind which I associate with Liberals and liberals – of questioning everything, of putting the individual rather than the group or class at the centre of everything, and the recognition that public servants are sometimes the most determined opponents of change rather than its willing agents – is one which I now almost completely share. David Owen was completely correct when he realised that the merged party would be less biddable than the SDP and would challenge its leaders more. He was wrong in thinking that this was a bad thing. Having been a party manager in various guises for my whole political career, the argumentative, rumbustious democracy of the Lib Dems has often been frustrating. But it is the quality which has kept the party alive during its most difficult periods. And it is undoubtedly one of the things which attracts new members to the party today.

Conclusion

Having set out the contribution made by the SDP to the procedures, policies and people of the Lib Dems, how do I rate their significance?

On procedures, the imprint is clearest. The two key things bequeathed to the new party by the SDP were a more disciplined policy-making process and a more modern and efficient system of membership and fundraising. It is hard to believe that these changes would have been introduced as early – if at all – by the Liberal Party on its own. And both, I believe, have been crucial.

On policies, the impact has been less decisive across the piece, but in one respect critical. With the exception of economic policy, the Lib Dems' current policy platform is little different from that which the Liberal Party would have adopted on

its own, and the party's trademark priorities – on Europe, human rights, devolution and decentralisation for example – bear an essentially Liberal stamp. However, as I argue above, the party's economic policy does reflect SDP thinking to a greater extent. It was the rigour of thinking in this area – led by Vince Cable – which provided the basis of our ability to agree an economic strategy with the Conservatives in government. Given that this was the most important single plank of the coalition programme – and despite the fact that Vince increasingly chafed against it as the coalition wore on – this was a decisive contribution.

On people, SDP-ers have played a large part in the leadership of the party at national and local level. Neither they – nor their Liberal opposite numbers – sought to gain a partisan advantage within the new party. Perhaps the party's weakness immediately after merger facilitated this – when you are in survival mode, you cannot afford the luxury of factions. But from my perspective, I do not believe that this was the principal reason. I think that members of the SDP had, by 1988, realised that they were also liberals and that their outlook on politics was extremely close to their Liberal colleagues. Not all of them would necessarily have wanted to admit as much at the time – we hadn't altogether shed our tribal attitudes – but I believe it was essentially the case.

In February 2016 Shirley Williams retired from the House of Lords. It was an important watershed. Shirley had started her political life in the aftermath of the Second World War and had indeed attended the founding conference of the German SPD in 1948. She has pursued the goals of equality, liberty and community with a striking consistency in over sixty-five years of political activity. She realised early on in the life of the Alliance that she was working with fellow spirits in the Liberal Party and she steadfastly supported the merger and the new party. She embodied all that is good about liberalism – tolerance, open-mindedness, generosity and an unquenchable reforming zeal. She undoubtedly enriched the new party.

Shirley is of course unique. But I believe that she reflected attitudes which others from the SDP tried to bring to the Liberal Democrats. They did not conflict with the attitudes of Liberals but complimented them and so strengthened the party. That was what we sought to do at the point of the merger – and have continued to do ever since.

Dick Newby joined the SDP shortly after its formation in 1981; he was the party's chief executive from 1983 and was secretary to the merger negotiations. He was the English party's first treasurer, Paddy Ashdown's press officer during the 1992 general election and deputy chairman of the 1997 general election campaign before being made a peer in 1997. He was subsequently the party's Lords Treasury spokesman (1998–2012), Charles Kennedy's chief of staff (1999–2006) and government deputy chief whip and Treasury spokesman in the Lords (2012–15). He is now the Lords group's chief whip.

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University Liberals

Seth Thevoz traces the development of a university Liberal club in the three decades before the First World War.

Cambridge University Liberal Club A study in early university



THE GROWTH OF political clubs in universities was a feature of the Edwardian boom in associations and societies, and in the 1900s universities such as Edinburgh, Glasgow, London and Oxford first sprouted active Conservative and Liberal associations. Prior to that, political activity in Victorian universities had been focused around dining rather than campaigning. Cambridge University Liberal Club (CULC) was thus unusually early in its 1886 foundation, and a study of its first thirty years – up to its suspension during the First World War – offers numerous insights into the changing dynamic of

Victorian and Edwardian politics in a university constituency. As a membership society meeting in private rooms, it also stood in contrast to the more spatially defined Liberal clubs of Victorian Britain that were centred around fixed premises like clubhouses.¹

Cambridge already had the Union as a debating society, and two Conservative dining societies: the short-lived Cambridge University Conservative Association of 1882, and its more durable successor launched the following year, the Cambridge University Carlton Club (CUCC), which endured until 1907.² In the mid 1880s,

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CUCC was a sizeable body, and caused sufficient concern to Cambridge's Liberals that the Liberal Club was founded in response. In the words of the *Daily News*, 'The want of such a club has been for some time greatly felt by the undergraduates and it is intended to counteract the efforts of the C.U. Carlton Club.'³ By contrast, Oxford had a thriving political dining culture: its Tories had the OU Carlton Club, the Canning Club, and the Chatham Club, whilst the Oxford Liberals had two radical dining societies of their own, the Russell Club and the Palmerston Club, which would not merge to form the more campaigns-oriented Oxford University Liberal Club until 1913.⁴ *The Times* observed in 1885 of the existing Oxford organisations that 'the purpose of these clubs is part social and part educational, and they take no part in elections other than the occasional supply of election speakers for election platforms, in the performance of which duty they are not encouraged by the University authorities';⁵ a sentiment shared by the young Charles Trevelyan, who told CULC in 1891 that Oxford 'have no organisation, and no centre of Liberalism'.⁶ If Cambridge's Liberal Club had any parallel, it was with the Peel Club formed in 1836 at Glasgow University, which focused its attention on campaigns for the distinctively Scottish office of Rector, and most of whose activists were dons rather than students.⁷ In this respect, it resembled CULC for the latter's first ten years.

A meeting in March 1886 appointed a provisional committee and passed a constitution, but the national political situation intervened, and nothing more was done until after the July general election, with the first meeting of the society on 22 November 1886.⁸ An influential figure in early years was Leopold Maxse (subsequently editor of the Conservative *National Review*), whom Oscar Browning recalled 'was at that time as staunch a Liberal as he is now a Tory'.⁹ The November meeting confirmed the organisation's distinctive shape. It was open to fellows and

students alike at the university, but fellows initially dominated the committee. The brunt of the organisational workload was borne by the Secretaries, who resigned with alarming frequency. Gladstone was elected as the first President, but declined to turn up for his inaugural address, and was substituted by Earl Spencer.¹⁰

By 1887, the society already had a network of College Secretaries in place in most of the university's constituent colleges, and numbered 194 members, although its Treasurer Browning complained 'only 100 have paid their subscriptions', despite broadly healthy finances.¹¹ CULC was sufficiently well-endowed by January 1888 to be able to employ a Clerk of the Club, paying them an annual stipend of £5.¹² By the end of the year, the society was holding eight meetings a year, but pledged future ones 'to be of a less formal and a more social nature'.¹³ However, the classic problem of societies with student members persisted: high turnover, leading to rapid rises and falls in fortune. R. Shilleto Dower of St John's College complained to CULC's Secretary Charles Trevelyan in 1895, 'I cannot help think of *any* keen Liberal in John's at present. Liberalism has fallen on evil days, I'm afraid in what was formerly the head-quarters of Cambridge Radicalism!'¹⁴

In the society's early years, Cambridge University was an overwhelmingly male environment: all but two of Cambridge's twenty colleges admitted men only, and women were not awarded degrees until 1897; and in line with most other university societies, CULC did not admit women. Yet membership for women was an issue which was frequently raised. A committee meeting on 11 May 1887 discussed the society's first talk by Professor A. V. Dicey, and 'it was decided that ladies from Newnham and Girton should be admitted to the gallery', segregating the audience.¹⁵ By 1894, 'The Senior Secretary [Bertrand Russell] was empowered to proceed with negotiations for the admission to membership of the Club of women of Newnham

Left: Horse cabs at the Senate House (left) and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge University, 1880 (photo courtesy Swedish National Heritage Board Flickr Commons)

Cambridge University Liberal Club, 1886–1916: A study in early university political organisation

College.¹⁶ The society was confronted by opposition from an unexpected quarter – fellows of the women’s colleges themselves. Helen Gladstone (daughter of the Grand Old Man), a fellow of Newnham College, who had herself previously spoken on a CULC platform,¹⁷ wrote to the society’s Secretary Maurice Sheldon Amos on 10 May 1894 that ‘we have come to our conclusion, on no political grounds, & with no sort of intention of disturbing students too much’ of refusing to allow the women of Newnham to join. She cited ‘various reasons, which would take too long to detail, & some of which you will no doubt imagine for yourself’, and she enlisted eminent classicist Henry Sidgwick (then a Liberal Unionist) to confirm her position. She did, however, make the concession that the ‘informal arrangement’ of ‘paying some subscription towards the expenses of your meetings ... might acquire our right to regular information as to the meetings & speakers, & to admission to a certain number? ... I should be glad to be responsible for conveying the subscription, & we should continue to have the pleasure (as so often before) of attending the meetings.’¹⁸ Six days later Alice Robinson, a Liberal at Newnham, wrote to Trevelyan ‘the present position of Newnham College in the University does not warrant so pronounced a departure. We therefore regret that under the circumstances we feel bound to ask you to take no further steps in the matter.’¹⁹ In short, the women of Newnham were to continue to be active in Liberal politics, but only if they could occupy a segregated gallery. Such sentiments were not uncommon, bringing to mind the 1890s hysteria for gender segregation in London theatres, derided by the young Winston Churchill as ‘the prowling of the prudes.’²⁰ Women were finally admitted to CULC as full members in 1909; however, the society would not elect its first women president, Sally Randall, until 1953.

An important connection in the society’s early years was the Eighty Club. Named after the year of its foundation, 1880, it was a group dedicated to improving links between the Liberal Party and the universities. Never a club in the nineteenth-century sense of possessing a clubhouse, it initially formed an influential network for Liberal thinkers. CULC first considered hosting joint events with the Eighty Club in November 1887,²¹ and an inaugural joint meeting a year later was such a success that CULC rapidly formally affiliated with the Eighty Club.²² The arrangement was, at first, highly beneficial to both. The Eighty Club offered eminent speakers, larger audiences, and (in the 1890s) the facilities to publish addresses to CULC as pamphlets. CULC in return provided an opportunity for dozens of London Liberals to enjoy an annual outing to Cambridge. The affiliation with the Eighty Club also brought out a more social side in CULC, with the introduction of ‘at home’ events to entertain the visiting Londoners. The minutes provide the following vignette

Women were finally admitted to CULC as full members in 1909; however, the society would not elect its first women president, Sally Randall, until 1953.

of a typical ‘at home’ in Oscar Browning’s rooms at King’s:

Mr. Symes played the violin, Mr. Wyatt sang, Mr. [Anton] Bertram [subsequently Chief Justice of Ceylon] recited, and Mr. R. C. Lehmann [then the Liberal candidate for Cambridge city] made a short speech reviewing very briefly the political situation. About 50 members of the club were present.²³

Browning’s ‘at home’ evenings also provided one of the few opportunities available to Cambridge’s nineteenth-century undergraduates for mixed-sex socialising, with the society’s minutes stressing ‘the ladies of the [Cambridge city] Women’s Liberal Club should be invited’, and after 40–50 women from the club were asked to attend, noted ‘the invitation was warmly responded to.’²⁴

Additionally, the Eighty Club also seems to have provided a way of maintaining contact with alumni. Shilleto Dower, upon leaving St John’s in 1895, wrote to Charles Trevelyan, ‘I am very sorry to sever my connections with the CU Liberal Club in which I have great interest, but hope sometime to join the Eighty.’²⁵

What cannot be emphasised enough is the role played in the society’s formative years by its erstwhile Treasurer, Oscar Browning. Browning was a controversial historian, dismissed from his post at Eton in 1875 over allegations of pederasty involving the young George Nathaniel Curzon. He was a Fellow of King’s for over forty years, and combined an enthusiasm for Ancient Rome with a strong, bullish manner, and notoriously sloppy scholarship. He was omnipresent in Cambridge societies, his biographer Ian Anstruther writing he was ‘President, Treasurer, Chairman or Secretary of more than a dozen organisations and hardly a student club existed whether for sport or psychical research, for music, drama or social converse, of which he was not at least patron’,²⁶ including the Apostles, the Epicureans debating society, the Political Union, the Dante group, and the Cambridge Union – of which he was Treasurer for twenty-one years. Richard Davenport-Hines notes ‘He became detested by dons, if not undergraduates, as a bore “all coated and scaled with egotism, and covered with prickles” ... Homosexuality and snobbery were entrenched for life’,²⁷ while Anstruther went on to write ‘He was good, bad, a fool, a genius; every adjective seemed to fit him.’²⁸ His ubiquitousness in Cambridge life was accentuated by his considerable weight, a well-known Cambridge rhyme of the early 1900s being:

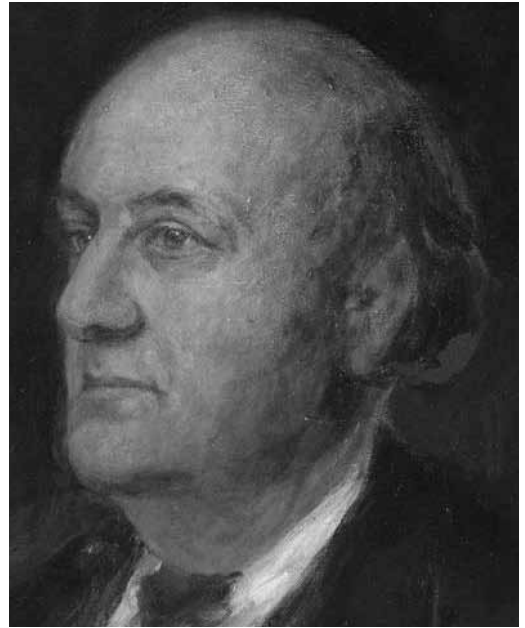
O.B., Oh be obedient
To Nature’s stern decrees,
For though you be but one O.B.
You may be too obese.²⁹

Of his politics, H. E. Wortham notes he ‘was a lifelong Liberal. More indeed, for he belonged

to that left wing of the Party which, led by John Morley, went to the root of things and gloried in the name of Radical.³⁰ Although a thrice-unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, Browning's main outlet for his political interests was the university Liberal Club. Browning took his CULC responsibilities sufficiently seriously that he offered his resignation as Treasurer in 1890 on the grounds of having missed one solitary meeting (even though he had been one of the committee's most regular attendees until then).³¹ Browning came to dominate the society in the 1890s, hosting a series of events in his rooms at King's, including committee meetings, sherry parties and the larger 'at home' evenings.³² When the committee chairman was absent, Browning would stand in.³³

His final, controversial dismissal as Treasurer in November 1896 was a direct reflection of how he had come to dominate the society, and a widespread feeling that for too long he had exerted an almost tyrannical influence, and it is worth relating in full the following account from W. E. Crook, then Secretary of the Eighty Club:

Whether it was due to his 'imperial headpiece', or to his profound knowledge of the Roman Empire, or to an uncanny insight into future political developments, 'O.B.' had gradually absorbed into his own person all the offices in the Cambridge University Liberal Club. He was Treasurer, Secretary, Committee, as well as President, all rolled into one, under the forms of democratic government, following faithfully in the footsteps of the Emperor Augustus, and anticipating with equal fidelity the twentieth-century evolution of Signor Mussolini. [Browning was technically only the society's Treasurer, but this account underlines his centrality to the organisation.] When the university Liberal Club was in debt, he paid its debts; when it required a speaker of distinction, he chose and invited them; in fact, he *was* the university Liberal Club. This state of things produced a revolt, led by [Dr] Verrall, of Trinity, among the Liberal dons, and among the undergraduates by Charles Trevelyan, likewise of Trinity, backed by most of the young university Liberals. The King's men, however led by H. C. Gutteridge, with college patriotism, supported 'O.B.' Trevelyan persuaded the Eighty Club Committee (the university Liberal Club was affiliated to the Eighty Club) that Liberalism in Cambridge would be killed unless 'O.B.' could be dethroned – an operation which they had unsuccessfully tried to accomplish. The Eighty Club assigned me to the duty of going down to Cambridge to dethrone the uncrowned king, as painful but necessary a duty as I had ever been called upon to perform. 'O.B.', whom I had known fairly well, as soon as he heard of my coming, invited me to be his guest, and proved, as always, a delightful host, though he must have suspected the object of my mission. After a long and painful interview, Oscar Browning, then in tears,



From top:

Oscar Browning, 1890s

Helen Gladstone, 1880

Cambridge students demonstrating against the proposed admission of women to degrees, 1897

promised he would resign. The Cambridge University Liberal Club was the darling of his heart, and in spite of his very ‘imperial’ conduct, he had served it well. I imagine few people ever saw this most genial and masterful of dons in tears.³⁴

The tensions around Browning’s resignation were reflected in the minute book, which conspicuously lacked the customary vote of thanks that invariably accompanied every other resignation of the period, simply reading: ‘A committee meeting was held in Mr Browning’s rooms on Nov. 17th ... The Treasurer handed in his resignation which was accepted by the committee.’³⁵ Browning remained an active fellow of King’s until his enforced retirement in 1909, continuing to attend CULC meetings up until then, usually to promote King’s College members in internal elections. At the Annual General Meeting of 1899, Oscar Browning attempted to delay fresh committee elections for one term, ‘objecting to the preponderance of Trinity [College] influence in the proposed Committee’, but was voted down.³⁶

The dismissal of Browning was the most dramatic phase of a quiet revolution which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, as students slowly began to prise leadership of the society from the fellows. In 1889, the committee of six that was dominated by fellows was broadened to a committee of ten, of which at least five members had to have not yet taken their MA. Next, Browning’s 1896 dismissal precipitated a change in the balance of power in the society. Instead of the President being elected as a figurehead (who, as often as not, would fail to turn up, following Gladstone’s example), the society began electing senior members of the university as more ‘hands-on’ presidents. During the five years of this system, it is unsurprising that the names involved were the classicists Henry Jackson and Matthew Pattison Muir, and mathematician Donald MacAlister, each of whom had been long-serving committee members. Further steps were taken in 1899, when it was deemed that the society’s president and treasurer should always be ‘of MA standing’ (i.e. a graduate of the university), and that ‘at least one Secretary’ should be ‘below MA standing’ (i.e. still a student).³⁷ Finally, in 1902, the young Edwin Samuel Montagu moved an amendment at the AGM which allowed those who had not yet taken their Cambridge MAs to take up the presidency of the society. Once the motion was passed, he was subsequently elected at the same meeting as the society’s first ‘student’ president.³⁸

A shorter-lived transformation occurred at the same time as the students gradually took more control over the society. Between 1897 and 1902, CULC flirted with focusing its activities around its newly created Political Circle. This was simultaneously chaired by Matthew Pattison Muir whilst he was also president of CULC. Its remit ‘for the discussion of political subjects’ indicated a lack of recent activity in that area, and the circle

alternated between external speakers, and pressing its own members to give papers.³⁹ It should be seen in the context of other contemporary discussion groups amongst liberal intellectuals of the era, such as the Bloomsbury-based Rainbow Circle, which had considerable overlap with CULC alumni.⁴⁰ Election to the Political Circle was conducted along the lines of a traditional gentlemen’s club of the day, with existing members being able to wield a blackball – although only one unfortunate candidate found himself so repeatedly blackballed as to have never been admitted.⁴¹ The circle could be a difficult audience, often responding to papers with sharp criticisms.⁴² The group was small, being limited to no more than twenty-four members *in statu pupillari*, and with attendance at meetings invariably being smaller. Although over sixty people were members over the circle’s five-year existence, the rapidity of turnover as students turned into finalists ensured that typical attendance at meetings varied from anything between five and fifteen, which contrasted with the hundred-plus attendance found at CULC’s annual dinners. The Political Circle provided an exceptional concentration of interesting figures, including nine future Members of Parliament, nine presidents of the Cambridge Union, and numerous academics.⁴³ It thus functioned as an ‘inner sanctum’ of CULC during these years, meeting far more regularly than the whole society, and incorporating all of its senior officeholders.

The emphasis on the Political Circle’s discussions also helped to conceal the scale of Liberal decline at a time when Lord Salisbury’s Unionist government enjoyed considerable popularity, and the Political Circle resolved ‘to use the utmost endeavours to ... augment as far as possible the size of the Club.’⁴⁴ Certainly, the club had shrunk since 1886, and a Michaelmas 1900 membership list showed just seventy-four members, twenty-four of whom were life members, i.e. mostly dons.⁴⁵ The situation grew worse during the ‘Khaki election’ of 1900, held amidst a patriotic frenzy in the immediate aftermath of British victories in the Boer War.⁴⁶ Cambridge’s Liberals felt distinctly at a loss as to how to respond to this, with Pattison Muir urging members to ‘forget the vulgarities of a khaki election ... they needed reminding of the great issues of politics’ – a cry which fell on deaf ears, as the Liberals did not contest the Cambridge constituency, giving the Conservatives a free run of the constituency for first time since 1831.⁴⁷ In the face of such organisational shortcomings, Dr Donald MacAlister of the society tried to give an alternative (and unconvincing) explanation of its function, arguing:

The University Liberal Club ... [is] not a mere party organisation. It [is] an educational institution, and one of the things they were most proud of was that Liberals desired to ascertain the reason for which was to be done, and having ascertained the reason to educate others.⁴⁸

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The Boer War presented a particularly awkward problem for the society, as Liberals were seriously divided over the nature and objectives of the war, yet this did not deter CULC from making it the most common theme of their speaker meetings, with Alfred Ravenscroft Kennedy (later a Conservative MP and judge) delivering five talks on such related topics as ‘The Peace Conference’ and ‘Imperial Defence’, and other speakers on the topic included Whig historian G. M. Trevelyan, and a guest from South Africa, H. S. Van Zyl.

Instead of campaigning in Cambridge, the society focused its attention on the nearby Cambridgeshire constituency of Chesterton, with efforts being coordinated by Edwin Samuel Montagu, who subsequently gave a talk on ‘Electioneering in 1900’. Montagu’s interest in the division was not purely philanthropic, as he became its candidate for the 1906 general election, and was then returned as its MP until 1922. Montagu made little attempt to conceal how ambitious he was, with a revealing Freudian slip in CULC minutes in his hand (in an entry signed by him), noting that ‘The first meeting of term was held on February 5 in the President’s Secretary’s Room at Trinity’.⁴⁹

Throughout its earlier years, the society had already begun to use its unique position to attract numerous speakers whose appeal could be decidedly apolitical – the society’s second speaker meeting comprised a lecture on constitutionalism by Professor A. V. Dicey; while Oscar Wilde spoke in 1889, sharing a platform with Lord Monkswell. Especially remarkable was when Sir Charles Dilke spoke in favour of reductions to the army and navy in Easter 1895, it being a rare public engagement after he was cited in the divorce scandal which ruined his political career a decade earlier. The *Daily News* noted that, ‘Although no public announcement of the meeting had been made, there was a large attendance, there being more undergraduates present than is generally the case at such gatherings under the auspices of this club.’⁵⁰ The event had not been without controversy, with CULC members complaining about the invitation having been issued, and the membership being balloted on whether to withdraw the invitation. In the end, the society voted by sixty-three members to thirty-six against its withdrawal.⁵¹ Despite the evident curiosity aroused by this recently disgraced politician, contemporary press reports indicated a sympathetic audience. Yet unsurprisingly, attendance at the more run-of-the-mill meetings could be derisory, with a ‘lamentably small’ turnout to hear Herbert Samuel on ‘the New Liberalism’ in February 1896, and turnout was merely ‘fair’ when Bertrand Russell spoke on ‘independent labour politics in Germany’ the following month.⁵²

Until the Boer War, the dominant topic of speaker meetings was Irish Home Rule. By 1900, the society had held at least thirteen speaker meetings on either Ireland or Home Rule. Strong feelings on Ireland were also in evidence from

From around 1903 to 1914, CULC enjoyed its greatest period of political dominance, with no Conservative organisation at all after the collapse of the CU Carlton Club around 1907, and only a weak CU Fabian Society after 1905.

the society’s 1889 deliberations over the latest imprisonment of Irish Nationalist MP William O’Brien. O’Brien was a controversial figure, in and out of prison on several public order offences, and previous protests over his imprisonment had included the November 1887 Bloody Sunday riots in Trafalgar Square. On 2 February 1889, Pattison Muir called a meeting of CULC’s committee, ‘to consider whether the Club should take any action to protest against the prison treatment of Mr. W. O’Brien MP.’ In the event, ‘It was thought that for the Club to hold an indignation meeting would be exceeding its functions, but it was decided to assist the Town Association to organise a meeting, the club members of the C.U.L.C. taking part not as a club but as individuals’, with the club donating two pounds for this purpose, and deputing Pattison Muir to speak.⁵³

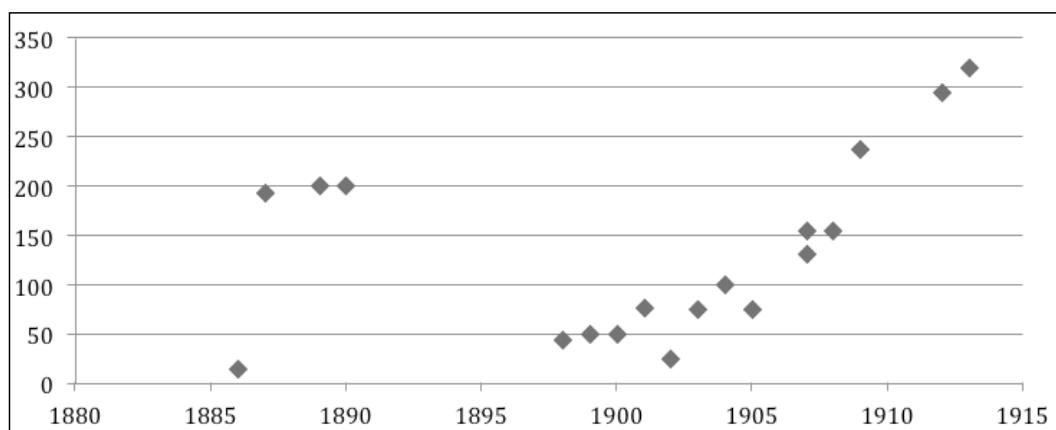
Whilst the society went through lean years in the early 1900s, its membership declining at one point to twenty-four, its fortunes revived considerably in the wake of the Tariff Reform controversy. The post-1903 boom in Liberal fortunes would remain strong in the university until the First World War, and after a small wobble, the society’s membership would grow exponentially until the outbreak of war (see Fig. 1). From around 1903 to 1914, CULC enjoyed its greatest period of political dominance, with no Conservative organisation at all after the collapse of the CU Carlton Club around 1907, and only a weak CU Fabian Society after 1905.

CULC’s rising political dominance in Edwardian Cambridge also coincided with the involvement of John Maynard Keynes, first as Secretary and then as CULC’s second student president after Montagu. Peter Clarke argues ‘Keynes was a political animal, to an extent that has rarely been given its due. The big Bloomsbury biographies that have flourished during recent decades have illuminated many passages in his life but have generally played down the politics’,⁵⁴ although Keynes’ most comprehensive biographer, Robert Skidelsky, asserts that Keynes ‘joined the University Liberal Club, because the Liberals were the party of intelligence, not because he had any enthusiasm for reform.’⁵⁵ Keynes was president at a transformative phase in the society when it was increasing its level of campaigning activity, although he cannot be singlehandedly credited with its revival, as the society experienced a blip in membership during his term of office. He would remain involved with the society for decades, intermittently serving as a committee member until the First World War, regularly attending dinners, and occasionally stepping in as a speaker.⁵⁶ Looking back over Keynes’ 1904–5 presidency, CULC Secretary James H. Bowes asked, ‘whether the time has not come to replace our somewhat inactive policy – suitable to the conditions of the last five years – by a more aggressive one.’⁵⁷ Accordingly, at the 1905 AGM, Keynes reintroduced the ‘College Secretary’

Cambridge University Liberal Club, 1886–1916: A study in early university political organisation

Fig. 1 Membership of CULC, 1886–1916

Source: references to membership figures reported intermittently in *Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97*, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge; *Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, October 1897–June 1915*, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales.



system which the society had been lacking for over a decade.⁵⁸

The only reference to the 1906 general election in the minutes was by A. L. Hobhouse (later a Liberal MP and founder of the National Parks) noting, ‘the stimulus given to the Club by the events of January 1906’, which seemed by the end of that year to have been short-lived, with the Secretary’s report citing a stabilised membership.⁵⁹ However, if one projects the society’s known membership onto a scattergraph (see Figure 1), it becomes apparent that 1906 was simply a transitional phase in the Edwardian expansion of the society.

The 1906 general election was also significant as the only time the society would see a Liberal Member of Parliament elected for the city constituency. This was prominent King’s Counsel Stanley Buckmaster, who subsequently served as Asquith’s Lord Chancellor. The society was evidently attached to Buckmaster, judging by the warmth of the speeches at a ceremony in May 1911, in which they paid their respects to him for his time as Cambridge’s MP. The society maintained a strong interest in Buckmaster’s career even after this, congratulating him in 1913 when he was appointed Solicitor-General.⁶⁰

Cambridge was by no means the most unexpected Liberal gain of the 1906 landslide, having long been a Conservative-leaning marginal. In the last two Liberal general election victories of 1885 and 1892, the Conservative margins of victory in Cambridge had been just 107 and 255 votes respectively. Buckmaster won the seat by 308 votes. In the two hung parliaments of 1910, Buckmaster would lose the seat in the January election by 587 votes, and would fail to retake it in December by 343 votes (having been unseated by Almeric Paget, a Conservative now best remembered for the somewhat improbable creation of a national massage service for troops in the First World War).

It was against the backdrop of these electoral contests that the society resumed its active campaigning role, something which had fallen into abeyance in the 1890s. Amidst the campaigning activity of this period, the society took steps to maximise its press publicity, inviting reporters to attend speaker meetings.⁶¹ In June 1910, the midpoint between the two general elections of

that year, CULC Secretary Geoffrey Marchand reported on the club’s ambitious speaking schedule, ‘The policy of sending members of the Club out into the neighbouring constituency has been continued this year with marked success’, which was true insofar as neighbouring Chesterton was concerned, but overlooked the defeat in Cambridge itself. The influence of Montagu and his persistent appeals for help in Chesterton were apparent in the remainder of Marchand’s report:

In view of an approaching General Election an appeal for speakers was made early in the Michaelmas Term. Some twenty-five members responded to the appeal, and these speakers addressed nearly 100 meetings before Christmas. During the vacation a further appeal was issued for help during the actual campaign. This also met with a ready response, members of the Club, and especially the Ladies doing much canvassing on behalf of Mr. Montagu. Mr. Montagu, and his agent, Mr. Guyalt, have both expressed their appreciation of the work done in the constituency by members of the Club, and it is desirable that this work should continue, if possible on an extended scale.⁶²

Marchand’s successor as Secretary William Brooke (younger brother of the poet Rupert Brooke, who was himself President of the CU Fabian Society) reported that the society continued its campaigning efforts in the December 1910 election, holding nearly 150 meetings in the two Conservative-held seats of Cambridge and Newmarket, whilst,

As is usual the club gave most of its assistance to Mr. Montagu in West Cambs [Chesterton], sending on one night as many as twenty speakers into the division. Mr. Montagu wrote after his election to say that if it had not been for the help of the Club he would not have succeeded in holding the seat.⁶³

Montagu’s claim may not have been an exaggeration. Having been elected in 1906 by just 513 votes, he held on in the two 1910 elections by 505 and 371 votes respectively. By the time of the next

general election, in 1918, the society had been suspended; but in the aftermath of the two 1910 elections, CULC was keen to remain active in this sphere. CULC Secretary Hubert Douglas Henderson (subsequently a noted economist and magazine editor) reported in 1912 there had been:

no general election during the past year & no great political activity in the constituencies around Cambridge. There has thus been no considerable call upon the Club for speakers to address meetings in the neighbouring villages. But this is a side of the Club's activities which should not be altogether neglected & the Secretary accordingly appeals to those members willing to take part in this kind of work to intimate for him their readiness to do so.⁶⁴

Until the outbreak of war, there was a strong desire for the club to continue playing a central role in Cambridgeshire politics, with Barclay Nihill (later Chief Justice of Kenya) recording in October 1913 that, 'Speakers are constantly being applied for', in neighbouring constituencies, and a year later William McNair wrote, 'the value of such work can hardly be over-estimated.'⁶⁵ This is consistent with the argument laid out by Trevor Wilson fifty years ago, that contrary to the conclusions drawn by George Dangerfield's polemic, *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, Liberal electoral organisation in the country at large was strong at least until the First World War, with CULC's emphasis on electoral campaigning being a case in point.⁶⁶

Internally, the main controversy which engulfed the society was the battle over admitting women. This was not heavily contested within the society, for by 1908 a clear consensus in favour of women members had emerged. In the interim, the society had continued to invite students from the two women's colleges, Newnham and Girton, to speaker meetings, but they continued to be segregated in upper gallery seating, and were not permitted to stay for drinks afterwards. It was the society's link with the Eighty Club which caused problems in fully admitting women members. The Eighty Club not only refused to admit women members, but also barred women as dinner guests, and they feared that if women should ever be elected as CULC officers (who were invited *ex officio* to the joint annual dinners), embarrassment would result. The question of going ahead with admission was raised at the 1908 AGM, where it was decided 'that the meeting was in favour of the step', but that in view of the value of the link with the Eighty Club, CULC would put the issue to a vote of members. The minutes made it clear that this vote was primarily aimed at strengthening the society's hand in renewing its demands for women's members: 'it was decided that no mention of the Eighty Club should be made in the questions put to members. The reason for this step was a desire to obtain an unprejudiced

opinion on the principle, in order that Mr. Shepard & Mr. McNair, when they approached the Eighty Club should have a dead mandate from the club for such actions.' [strikethrough preserved from the original]⁶⁷

The poll of members went ahead in December 1908, presenting three options. The results were declared at a Special General Meeting:

In favour of unconditional admission	54 [59.3%]
~~~~~ limited ~~~~~	24 [26.4%]
Opposed under any conditions	13 [14.3%]

(At the time, the society had around 190 members, so it seems around half of them did not vote.)

The meeting promptly passed a motion granting students from Newnham and Girton the right to full membership. However, an attempt by CULC's former President John Tresidder Shepard to ensure women members were 'without disability of office' was defeated by an amendment from former Secretary Arnold McNair. McNair further secured the meeting's agreement that a committee of no more than four members (including CULC President Ernest Evans, later Liberal MP for the University of Wales) should form a committee that would announce CULC's decision at the forthcoming Eighty Club AGM, and negotiate any necessary compromises.⁶⁸

This was finally ratified on 10 February 1909, after the Eighty Club had reluctantly consented, following a stormy AGM in which the Eighty Club committee initially refused to recognise the CULC decision, but was eventually voted down by its own membership.⁶⁹ The Eighty Club insisted, as a concession, that a new rule should be inserted into the CULC constitution:

Whenever a member of Girton or Newnham College is elected to the office of Secretary, that office shall become duplicated, and a member of the University shall also be elected to the office of Secretary, to exercise the privileges of the affiliation with the Eighty Club, and generally to act as Secretary in all dealings with the Eighty Club.⁷⁰

However, no woman was elected to any of the senior offices of the society before the disbandment of the society under these rules in 1916, and so this curious compromise was never exercised. Having accepted this, the society formally admitted women members to join, also amending its constitution to state that it was 'open only to members of the University or of Girton or Newnham College, who are in general sympathy with the objects of the Liberal Party.'⁷¹ The decision was a helpful one, for the club's Secretary George Toulmin observed later in the year that 'The meetings, the dinner, the finances of the club have all benefitted by the reinforcement the club has had', noting that membership had risen in one year from 155 (plus thirty-five life members) to 238 (plus thirty-nine life members), although it recognised, 'the increase is

**'As is usual the club gave most of its assistance to Mr. Montagu in West Cambs [Ches-terton], sending on one night as many as twenty speakers into the division. Mr. Montagu wrote after his election to say that if it had not been for the help of the Club he would not have succeeded in holding the seat.'**

## Cambridge University Liberal Club, 1886–1916: A study in early university political organisation



From top:

Front of the menu of the 1906 joint dinner between CULC and the Eighty Club, with guest speaker Rufus Isaacs

John Tresidder Sheppard, 1911

Stanley Buckmaster, MP for Cambridge 1906–10 (*Vanity Fair* cartoon, 1913)

by no means wholly due to the new members from Girton and Newnham.⁷²

A symptom of the club's expansion in the Edwardian era was its need to create extra roles. In 1903, after a period of membership contraction, the society had ceased electing a committee beyond the four basic senior officers, but by 1910 there was a sufficient pool of competing candidates for the full committee of ten to be revived.⁷³

The club's growing near-monopoly of Cambridge student politics brought other challenges. In the absence of any official Conservative association, CULC began to attract members whose sympathies were not particularly Liberal. Future Conservative cabinet minister J. C. C. Davidson recalled:

My political interests developed early, but it was not until I went up to Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1907 to read Law that I joined a political club. It was the Liberal Club. I must confess that the reasons for adhering myself to the Liberals were not wholly political, and that financial considerations came into the matter. It was not only because I had been born in Aberdeen that I thought that five shillings for the Liberal Club was a better bargain, considering the sort of speeches that were delivered there, than a guinea for the ultra-Conservative Pitt Club.⁷⁴ I didn't believe in the Liberals' politics, but thought that five shillings was a very reasonable price. I heard Augustine Birrell and other excellent Liberal speakers, who did not affect my politics in the slightest, but gave very good value for money!⁷⁵

F. M. Cornford, a fellow of Trinity and a member of the CU Fabian Society's committee, mocked this overlap between university Liberals and Conservatives in his classic 1908 satire on university politics, *Microcosmographia Academica*, offering some telling insights into how the Edwardian Fabians viewed the Cambridge Liberals as blurring with Conservatives:

*A Conservative Liberal* is a broad-minded man, who thinks that something ought to be done, only not anything that anyone now desires, but something which was not done in 1881–2.

*A Liberal Conservative* is a broad-minded man, who thinks that something ought to be done, only not anything that anyone now desires; and that most things which were done in 1881–2 ought to be undone ...

No-one can tell the difference between a *Liberal Conservative* Caucus and *Conservative Liberal* one ... At election times each of these two Caucuses meets to select for nomination those members of its own party who are most likely to be mistaken ... for members of the other party.⁷⁶

Another symptom of the society's prominence was its success in elections to the Cambridge Union, the university's debating society,



particularly in securing the presidency. This success in Union elections predated the expansion of CULC's membership, and it seems fair to attribute it as much to the calibre of candidates and their electoral tactics as to the development of any Liberal voting bloc. Nonetheless, between 1900 and 1916, no less than 26 Union presidents were active Liberals, with an uninterrupted run of six Liberal presidents over five terms between Easter 1904 and Michaelmas 1905, and several more runs of three Liberal presidents in a row. For the only time in their history, the Liberals were the dominant force in Cambridge Union politics.

This heavy involvement in Union politics naturally attracted the attention of the student press. *The Gownsmen* offered short, acerbic observations on the dominant speakers of the day, including several CULC notables. Hubert Douglas Henderson, 'though very partisan, was extremely sound.'⁷⁷ Philip Vos was, 'an inexhaustible mine of historical justifications, political erudition, and Herculean energy.'⁷⁸ Keynes, having long since graduated, but still participating in debates as a fellow of King's, 'was delightfully humorous.'⁷⁹ Looking back on this period, CULC member Wilson Harris, who had been president of the Union in 1905, wrote: 'I retain still the impression made on me by the majestic Edwin Montagu, of Trinity, in the [Union] chair in my first term. Montagu was a politician – Liberal – to his backbone.'⁸⁰ At greater length, Wilson recalled,

On oratorical merits the day was with the Liberals. Trinity, it is true, throughout the period, produced a number of Conservative Presidents ... but they did not outweigh J. T. Sheppard, the two Irishmen from St. John's, J. C. Arnold and M. F. J. McDonnell, and in my own year Maynard Keynes and Kenneth Mozley (with myself, as the last of that year, tagging laboriously behind). Keynes and Mozley were a notable combination. Constant speakers, they were almost invariably on the same side (except when Keynes once surprisingly came out as a defender of Imperialism) vigorously upholding Liberal doctrines in their quite different ways.⁸¹

A further price of the society's prominence and expansion was to be found in the discontent that began to be expressed by the increasing membership, over both the club's direction and its organisation. William Brooke looked back over his time as Secretary on the committee of Dennis Holme Robertson (later an eminent economist) in 1911, and cattily noted:

The many suggestions made for the improvement of the Club seem to divide themselves into three departments:

- 1) Those which attack the incompetence of the Secretary
- 2) Those which say that 'something' undefined ought to be done

**The one potential challenge to CULC's political supremacy came late in 1905 with the formation of Cambridge University Fabian Society, the forerunner of what would eventually become the Labour Club.**

- 3) Those which give some practical suggestion. If the Secretary may be permitted to give his opinion, the most hopeful blame is in the work of the college secretaries, and in the commandeering by the club of one day in the week for definite meetings.⁸²

The society responded to the transformation in its scale by experimenting with new meeting formats, with Secretary Hubert Douglas Henderson remarking that the highest attendances were at meetings where afternoon tea was served.⁸³ It also continued to draw in unconventional speakers, including Gandhi's mentor, the Indian nationalist Gopal Krishna Gokhale in November 1904, novelist G. K. Chesterton in February 1905, and CULC alumnus Bertrand Russell, who spoke on women's suffrage in November 1907.

The one potential challenge to CULC's political supremacy came late in 1905 with the formation of Cambridge University Fabian Society, the forerunner of what would eventually become the Labour Club. It was not until 1934 that one of many fracturings of the left would result in a splinter CU Labour Club being set up. Until then, CU Fabian Society frequently served as a *de facto* Labour Club, drawing support from socialists in the absence of a more formal Labour organisation. Given that nationally, the Fabian Society still drew links with the liberal as well as the socialist tradition, and the prevalence of Edwardian 'Lib-Labbery', there was no immediate need to see the creation of CU Fabian Society as a threat to the Liberal hegemony. Indeed, several of CULC's best-known members from Maynard Keynes to Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson were simultaneously members of the Fabians. Accordingly, CULC hosted a well-attended joint meeting with the CU Fabian Society in Michaelmas 1908, which 'aroused great interest.'⁸⁴

Yet there were also signs of antagonism. Several members of CU Fabian Society displayed a marked antipathy to the Liberals. The Fabians rapidly built up their membership, with sixty members in their first year, and 100 in 1910.⁸⁵ By 1915, the Fabian Society sufficiently identified with the socialist (and not liberal) strand of Fabianism to rechristen itself Cambridge University Socialist Society. The Liberals were acquiring a rival; albeit a weaker one.

The arrival of the First World War presented a new set of challenges for CULC. Despite widespread assumptions that the war would be 'over by Christmas', already by October 1914 outgoing Secretary William McNair wrote that he hoped 'the Club will be able to carry on its activities even if somewhat reduced at the present critical time.'⁸⁶ The rapid mobilisation of new recruits heavily affected the society, and at the beginning of Michaelmas 1914 it was 'without its President or Secretary, who were engaged in military duties', and at one point, 'there was left only one member of the committee.'⁸⁷ On 11 November,

CULC called a special meeting of its members to discuss the club's role in wartime. A consensus was reached that the society ought to hold 'as many meetings as possible, which were to be of a non-political nature, &, further, political work in the town & country were to be temporarily suspended', but that the society should keep going, 'with a view to resuming normal activities as soon as possible after the war'.⁸⁸ The following letter was then circulated to members:

On all hands it has been thought desirable that, in spite of the present emergency, the organization of the C.U. Liberal Club should at any rate be kept alive. It is of course not proposed that we should engage in active propaganda or discussion of a politically controversial nature; but it is felt that the life of the Club should be maintained until it can resume its normal activities.⁸⁹

Amidst such upheavals, the society failed to organise a single speaker meeting for the whole of Michaelmas 1914, but it showed some signs of returning to normal in 1915, holding five meetings across Lent and Easter terms. Unsurprisingly, the topics all related to the war in some way: 'Belgium during the war', 'the democratic control of foreign policy', 'Europe after the war', 'European diplomacy in the Near East', and 'nationality and empire'. The calibre of speakers noticeably declined, with most being Cambridge fellows – although a notable exception was the last talk, when the society attracted former Cape Colony Prime Minister W. P. Schreiner.

Simmering beneath the surface were numerous tensions brought about by the war. The Edwardian Liberal Party constituted a diverse coalition, encompassing a breadth of opinion from moderates through Nonconformists to socialists. Conscription caused particular controversy, with sharply dissenting opinions over Lloyd George's proposals to introduce a draft.⁹⁰ In Cambridge, the conscription dimension could be seen through the resignation of one of CULC's most supportive dons, an active pacifist who had been Secretary of the society in the 1890s. Bertrand Russell wrote to the City Liberal Association:

I am sorry to say that I cannot renew my subscription to the Cambridge Liberal Association, and I do not wish any longer to be a member of it. One of my chief reasons for supporting the Liberal Party was that I thought them less likely than the Unionists to engage in a European war. It turns out that ever since they have been in office they have engaged in deceiving their supporters, and in secretly pursuing a policy of which the outcome is abhorrent to me. Under these circumstances I can do nothing directly or indirectly to support the present Government.⁹¹

Within a year, Russell was dismissed from his post at Cambridge under the Defence of the

**The first thirty years of Cambridge University Liberal Club thus offer numerous reflections on the evolving state of politics in the late Victorian and Edwardian universities. The society's development foreshadowed the wider evolution of university politics in the Edwardian era. It represents a transformation from the more limited politics focused around the activities of dons, to the more participatory politics which embraced young people in the political sphere.**

Realm Act, and was later to be interned by the British government for urging against American intervention on Britain's side of the war.

By Michaelmas 1915, Cambridge was increasingly deserted as ever more young men went away to fight. What was left of the society resolved to plough on with 'at least one meeting a term'.⁹² It made good on this pledge, holding several events over the next two terms, some of which were on relatively contentious issues – there was a meeting on 'voluntarism vs. conscription', and a closed (ticketed) meeting on 'the influence of German education on the war.' Yet discussion at such talks was reportedly growing less animated, and the scarcity of students made the First World War a difficult time for political societies, with no recorded wartime activity from the CU Fabian Society, while the Cambridge Union suspended its debates and elections between Easter 1916 and Easter 1919.

The final nail in the coffin was the death on 8 February 1916 of Professor John Edwin Nixon. Nixon had served as the society's treasurer since 1903, filling a seven-year vacuum created by Browning's dismissal. After two unsuccessful, largely absent interim treasurers, Nixon had transformed the society's finances from a deficit to a healthy balance, and had maintained a strong interest in its wellbeing throughout the Edwardian era. Without his sympathetic influence, and with many other CULC fellows such as Keynes called away from Cambridge for war work, there was no driving force left. The society held its last wartime meeting on 23 February 1916, with former government minister Earl Beauchamp speaking on 'Liberalism during the war and afterwards', before announcing on 1 March 1916 the suspension of the society for the remainder of the war.⁹³

The first thirty years of Cambridge University Liberal Club thus offer numerous reflections on the evolving state of politics in the late Victorian and Edwardian universities. The society's development foreshadowed the wider evolution of university politics in the Edwardian era. It represents a transformation from the more limited politics focused around the activities of dons, to the more participatory politics which embraced young people in the political sphere. In stretching these boundaries, it is perhaps unsurprising that we find so many among this first generation of 'student' politicians to have gone on to exceptional careers, including Keynes, Maxse, Montagu and Russell. Broader issues such as the precise role of women, and the appropriate degree of politicisation in the war years, were all reflected in the society. It carved out a distinctive role in its electioneering for the constituencies of Cambridge city and Chesterton. A sign of its prominence can be found in the degree to which it was subject to satire by Cornford and others. Yet there were also shortcomings in its organisation, including the rapid turnover of personnel peculiar to any student organisation – a development which became increasingly apparent – with the move to

a student-dominated society after the marginalisation of Browning. Its gentlemen's-club-style organisation – particularly among its short-lived inner circle in the Political Circle – could be counter-productive. It was prone to the petty adolescent feuds and finger-pointing which are familiar to anyone who has ever been involved in student politics. And whilst its fortunes broadly ebbed and flowed with those of the Liberals nationally, it can be seen in the mid-Edwardian period to have been representative of one of the Liberal Party's renewed areas of strength, securing support from hitherto-untapped quarters.

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- 1 For the expanding literature on Victorian political clubs, see Matt Cole, 'The Liberal Echo Chamber', *Journal of Liberal History*, 90 (Spring 2016), pp. 6–13; Seth Alexander Thévoz, *Club Government* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).
- 2 *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, 15 May 1882, p. 4.
- 3 *Daily News*, 25 Nov. 1886, p. 5.
- 4 James Rattue, *Kissing Your Sister: A History of the Oxford University Liberal Club, 1913–93* (Oxford: Umbra, 1993), pp. 1–4. Contemporary newspapers suggest that the Palmerston Club was already in existence by 1878, and that the Russell Club was a later offshoot society founded c.1880. A merged 'Russell and Palmerston Club' was refounded by Jeremy Thorpe as a Liberal dining society in the early 1950s, but this was a separate foundation.
- 5 *The Times*, 1 Dec. 1885, p. 5; the comment was made in the context of an article on 'Political organisations: the university towns', which offered an overview and comparisons of the pre-CULC political dining societies.
- 6 *Eighty Club, Social Problems: Speech by R.B. Haldane Q.C. M.P. at Cambridge on Saturday May 30th 1891, Sir Charles Russell Q.C. M.P. in the Chair* (London: Eighty Club, 1891), p. 39.
- 7 From 1852, the Peel Club was renamed the Glasgow University Conservative Club.
- 8 I refer to CULC as a society rather than a club throughout this article, as although it styled itself a 'club', Victorian clubs were largely defined by their premises, and as CULC possessed no permanent premises, it was more in the nature of a society.
- 9 Oscar Browning, *Memories of Sixty Years at Eton, Cambridge & Elsewhere* (London: Bodley Head, 1910), p. 253. Browning incorrectly recalls in the same passage 'I was to be the only "Don" belonging to the club', so the assertion that he was 'invited' may be treated with some scepticism.
- 10 This was a considerable snub, given that W. E. Gladstone came to Cambridge in 1887 anyway, to plant a tree in Newnham College, where his daughter was a fellow – see Sheila Fletcher, 'Helen Gladstone (1849–1925)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 11 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Edwin Montagu papers, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 10 June 1887; A list from 29 Apr. 1889 shows College Secretaries in place for Peterhouse, Pembroke, Caius, King's, Queens', St John's, Emmanuel, Sidney, and Downing colleges; meaning the society was not organised in Clare, Trinity Hall, Corpus, Christ's, Trinity, Jesus, St Catharine's, or Selwyn – although there were members and committee members at several of the latter colleges. At that meeting, an £8, 10s, 11d balance reported (and an accompanying balance sheet actually showing £12, 10s, 0d in surplus).
- 12 *Ibid.*, entry for 23 Jan. 1888.
- 13 *Ibid.*, entry for 12 Nov. 1888.
- 14 Edwin Montagu papers, Montagu MSS AS4/1/13, letter to Charles Trevelyan dated 21 Oct. 1895
- 15 *Ibid.*, entry for 11 May 1887.
- 16 *Ibid.*, entry for 26 Apr. 1894.
- 17 *The Times*, 27 Feb. 1890, p. 6, report of a speaker meeting with Sir Charles Russell.
- 18 Montagu MSS AS4/1/19 669 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, letter dated 10 May 1894.
- 19 Montagu MSS AS4/1/17 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, letter dated 16 May (no year cited, but it is fairly clear from the context that it is 1894).
- 20 Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: Youth, 1874–1900* (London: Heinemann, 1966), p. 233.
- 21 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 19 Nov. 1887.
- 22 *Ibid.*, entries for 12 and 16 Nov. 1888.
- 23 *Ibid.*, entry for 16 Nov. 1890.
- 24 *Ibid.*, entries for 16 Oct. 1890 and 16 Nov. 1890.
- 25 Montagu MSS AS4/1/13 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge, letter to Charles Trevelyan dated 21 Oct. 1895.
- 26 Ian Anstruther, *Oscar Browning: A Biography* (London: John Murray, 1983), p. 115.
- 27 Richard Davenport-Hines, 'Oscar Browning (1837–1923)', *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 28 Anstruther, *Browning*, p. 171.
- 29 Percy Cradock, *Recollections of the Cambridge Union, 1815–1939* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1953) p. 89.
- 30 H. E. Wortham, *Victorian Eton and Cambridge; Being the Life and Times of Oscar Browning* (London: Arthur Baker, 1956 [second edition]), p. 254.
- 31 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – Entry for 5 Nov. 1890.
- 32 *Ibid.*, entries for 30 Jan. 1889, 29 Apr. 1889, 15 Oct. 1889, 5 Nov. 1889, 16 Nov. 1889, [undated] Mar. 1890, 21 Apr. 1890, 12 May 1890, 2 June 1890, 9 June 1890, 16 Nov. 1890, 22 Jan. 1891, (the minute book was lost for much of 1892) 6 Feb. 1893, 8 June 1893, 21 Oct. 1893, 16 Nov. 1893, 4 Dec. 1893, 20 Feb. 1894, 13 Mar. 1894, 26 Apr. 1894, 6 Dec. 1894, 19 Feb. 1895, 23 Jan. 1896, 5 May 1896, 26 May 1896, 26 Oct. 1896, 17 Nov. 1896.
- 33 *Ibid.*, entry for 16 Nov. 1888.
- 34 Letter from W. M. Crook to the *Daily Telegraph*, 18 Jan. [year undated, but apparently c.1960–2]. I am much indebted to Professor Peter Calvert for copying out the entire letter in longhand and keeping it all these years in his notes on CULC's history, and for his lending me these notes.
- 35 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 16 Nov. 1896.
- 36 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, f. 46. National Library of Wales, entry for 6 June 1899.
- 37 *Ibid.*, entry for 6 June 1899, f. 44.
- 38 It should be noted that as Montagu was just about to graduate, and stayed on in Cambridge for a year to meet the society's residency requirement, he was not a student during his time in office – the distinction of first 'real' student president belonged to Michael McDonnell the following year.
- 39 *Ibid.*, entry for 31 Oct. 1897, f. 1.
- 40 See Michael Freedon (ed.), *Minutes of the Rainbow Circle, 1894–1924*: Camden Fourth Series, Volume 38 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1989). CULC alumni who became members of the Rainbow Circle included two Liberal (later Labour) MPs Charles Phillips Trevelyan and Noel Buxton, Liberal MP and journalist George Peabody Gooch, and Ramsey Macdonald's future private secretary Herbert Brough Usher.
- 41 See the intermittent use of the blackball throughout Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales.
- 42 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, October 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, entry for

- 23 Feb. 1901, f. 78.
- 43 See Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, *passim*.
- 44 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, f.48 National Library of Wales, entry for 13 Oct. 1897.
- 45 Ibid., Cambridge University Liberal Club, list of members – Michaelmas 1900, pasted into f. 69.
- 46 See Paul Readman, ‘The Conservative Party, Patriotism, and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900’, *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), pp. 107–145, particularly for instances of patriotic campaigning in Cambridgeshire in 1900.
- 47 *Cambridge Evening News* report of an ‘At Home’ meeting of the society with Augustine Birrell MP, 24 Nov. 1900 (report undated), pasted into Cambridge University Liberal Club, list of members – Michaelmas 1900, in turn pasted into f. 71 of Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, f. 91, National Library of Wales, entry for 5 Feb. 1902.
- 50 *Daily News*, 2 May 1895, p. 6.
- 51 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1, Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 12 Mar. 1895
- 52 Ibid., entries for 26 Feb. and 4 Mar. 1896.
- 53 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book 1886–97, Montagu MSS AS4/1/1 Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge – entry for 2 Feb. 1889.
- 54 Peter Clarke, *Keynes: The Rise, Fall, and Return of the 20th Century’s Most Important Economist* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009) p. 35.
- 55 Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes, Volume One – Hopes Betrayed, 1883–1920* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 114.
- 56 Ibid., p. 264.
- 57 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales – report for 1904–5. Please note that there are no folio numbers in the minute book after 1903.
- 58 Ibid., minutes of 1905 AGM. Undated, but c. May/June 1905 from the minutes’ position in the book.
- 59 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1906–7, signed by A. L. Hobhouse, c. June 1907.
- 60 Ibid., Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 24 Oct. 1913.
- 61 *Cambridge Daily News*, 3 Feb. 1908, p. 2.
- 62 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, Secretary’s report for 1909–10.
- 63 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1910–11.
- 64 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1911–12.
- 65 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1912–13 and 1913–4.
- 66 See George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (London: Constable, 1936); Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–1935* (London: Constable, 1966), especially pp. 15–134.
- 67 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales – minutes of the Annual General Meeting, Friday 23 Oct. 1908.
- 68 Ibid., minutes of the Special General Meeting, Monday 7 Dec. 1908.
- 69 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1908–9.
- 70 Ibid., minutes of Wednesday 10 Feb. 1909.
- 71 Ibid., minutes of Wednesday 10 Feb. 1909.
- 72 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1908–9.
- 73 Ibid., minutes of committee meeting on 4 Feb. 1910.
- 74 Cambridge University Pitt Club, founded in 1835. Although strictly speaking a social club, it has long had a conservative reputation, and in the Edwardian era was the closest thing to a social organisation for Conservative in Cambridge. Its political role, however, was nonexistent.
- 75 Robert Rhodes James (ed.), *Memoirs of a Conservative: J. C. C. Davidson’s Memoirs and Papers, 1910–37* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969), p. 7.
- 76 Gordon Johnson (ed.), *University Politics: F. M. Cornford’s Cambridge and his Advice to the Young Academic Politician* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008 [critical edition]), pp. 95, 97.
- 77 Gilbert E. Jackson and Philip Vos (eds.), *The Cambridge Union Society Debates, April 1910–March 1911, reprinted from the ‘Gownsmen’* (London: J.M. Dent, 1911), p. 5.
- 78 Ibid., p. 17.
- 79 Ibid., p. 49.
- 80 Cradock, *Recollections of the Cambridge Union*, p. 83.
- 81 Ibid., p. 85.
- 82 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, Secretary’s report for 1910–1.
- 83 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1911–2.
- 84 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1908–9.
- 85 ‘E.T.’ (ed.), *Keeling Letters and Recollections* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1918), pp. 8–15.
- 86 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales, Secretary’s report for 1913–4.
- 87 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1914–5.
- 88 Ibid., Secretary’s report for 1914–5..
- 89 Ibid., CULC letter to all members, 11 Nov. 1914.
- 90 This issue is best dealt with in R. J. Q. Adams, *The Conscriptio Controversy in Great Britain 1900–18* (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1987).
- 91 Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell – Volume II, 1914–1944* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968), p. 47.
- 92 Cambridge University Liberal Club minute book, Oct. 1897–June 1915, Papers of J. Conway Davies, GB 0210 JAMIES, box 1, item 4, National Library of Wales – minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 4 Dec. 1915.
- 93 For the date of this last meeting, and the date of CULC’s suspension, I am grateful to Peter Calvert for the loan of his notebook for his own history of CULC, which he began working on in the late 1950s, but which was never completed.

# Letters to the Editor

## Targeting

I am grateful for Mark Pack’s elucidation of national decision-making on targeting (*Journal of Liberal History* 90, Spring 2016). The table accompanying my article in the previous issue of the *Journal* showed the increases in the party’s national vote and seats won at general elections subsequent to 1997 but my

point was that targeting brought diminishing returns, as was clearly shown.

My main argument is that targeting in effect hollows out the party and prevents it profiting from a national move to the party, such as followed the ‘I agree with Nick’ moment and, indeed, the increase in membership following the

last general election and, more recently, the referendum. The lack of organisation, and even activity, in many constituencies denies the possibility of capitalising on national events. I believe that the voting figures demonstrate that.

Mark's final point, that 'When there is only 8 per cent of the vote to go round, with or without targeting, the results are necessarily grim', presupposes that the base vote in May 2015 would have been no higher without twenty years of targeting. I would certainly challenge that. At the 1950 election, with the Liberal Party in desperate straits, and with 150 seats unfought, the party still polled 9.1 per cent. More vividly, in 1950 only 29 of the 475 candidates polled less than the current lost deposit level of 5 per cent, whereas there were 340 such in May 2015. Even accepting that the 150 unfought seats would probably have produced a high ratio of votes below 5 per cent, the comparison is stark, as is the lesson.

*Michael Meadowcroft*

### Liberal clubs (1)

Your interesting piece on Liberal Clubs ('The Liberal Echo Chamber', *Journal of Liberal History* 90, Spring 2016) made no mention of the three working men's clubs in the Borders which were instrumental in my by-election in 1965.

The Jedburgh Club was the smallest, but as the late-night declaration was in that town hall, I was carried shoulder-high down the High Street to that Liberal Club for celebratory refreshments. There was an amusing sequel some years later when I was pressing the case for an A68 bypass for the town. The road planners originally proposed that demolitions would include the Club, but mistakenly were told to redraw the plans for fear of the wrath of the local MP. In fact it was in dire straits financially, and the MP would have been only too happy to see it demolished at a good price. It later had to close and is now a pub.

Galashiels had the largest club, where I used to call the bingo at packed Friday night sessions. Galashiels had in the 1959 housing report the highest proportion of unfit houses of any town in Scotland, and the top floor contained five bathrooms so that members had access to what was missing from their homes. The club in Hawick occupied the most prominent position in the High Street. Sadly, the days of these clubs have long since gone and they all had to close eventually.

*David Steel (Lord Steel of Aikwood)*

### Liberal clubs (2)

Matt Cole's interesting article about Liberal Clubs barely touches upon Scotland (where their life cycle at local level paralleled that south of the border).

The Scottish Liberal Club, however, continues in existence, though not for some decades in the grand premises it once possessed in Edinburgh's Princes Street. The SLC holds meetings and an annual dinner, and has a clubroom in the premises of the Scottish Liberal Democrats at 4 Clifton Terrace. In fact the club is proprietor of the building.

A history of the SLC in its early years from 1879 to 1898 was the subject of a thesis by Noah Torn, a final-year undergraduate at Edinburgh University. It is available online at [www.scottishliberal-club.org.uk/history.htm](http://www.scottishliberal-club.org.uk/history.htm).

*Willis Pickard*

### Liberal clubs (3)

Matt Cole's article, 'The Liberal Echo Chamber' in issue 90 provides an interesting look at the role of Liberal clubs in England and at their 'drift and decline' from 1918 onwards. Sadly, it makes no mention of the clubs in Scotland and, in particular, of those in the Scottish Borders, where they remained in existence, albeit declining, until a few years ago. At one time, there were at least six clubs, founded, in some cases, during the latter years of the nineteenth century, although those in Innerleithen, Kelso and Peebles had closed by the time I first became engaged in Borders elections.

The surviving clubs in the Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles constituency, in Galashiels, Hawick and Jedburgh, played an important role as a reservoir of support for Liberalism throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, leading up to David Steel's victory at the March 1965 by-election.

This continued into the 1970s and onwards. During the October 1974 election, for example, when I was David Steel's sub-agent in Hawick, we used rooms in the Club as our offices, while the Galashiels Club, conveniently located on the main street, Bank Street, was also used as an office. Steel popped in and out of the Galashiels Club whenever campaigning in the town – and financial contributions to campaigns were made, as well.

I was only in the RSP constituency and its successors, first Roxburgh & Berwickshire and Tweeddale, Ettrick & Lauderdale, and later Berwickshire,

Roxburgh & Selkirk, during general election campaigns, so cannot provide information on how they operated in a political context outside these elections. They were also centres of social activities, of course, not just in relation to their own members, but in engaging with the wider community.

In 1976, in a debate in Parliament on the powers of the police to enter such private clubs without permission, David Steel noted that 'the Galashiels Liberal Club has just won a prize as the Ace of Clubs for raising a record amount to help fight muscular dystrophy – £1,500 in three weeks. This real club atmosphere in a community is of value.'¹ Further scraps of information can be found on the internet, such as a press report that in 1978, the Jedforest Liberal Club, in Jedburgh, sponsored a 90 metres youth race in the town's Border Games that year.²

All three clubs have now closed, the premises in Galashiels and Hawick struggling on for a few years as, respectively, a nightclub and a sport and social club, though without any political connections. Both are listed as historic buildings, though for their architecture rather than because of their importance to the political history of the Borders.

What is perhaps a last echo of these formerly vibrant clubs is to be found in Michael Moore's Parliamentary Register of Interests, where it is recorded that the Trustees of Jedforest Liberal Club, an exempt trust created in 1985, made a donation of an unspecified amount to the constituency association in November 2005 and another, of £3,500 in June 2010, for that year's election campaign. No donation for the 2015 election was recorded.³

Papers about the Galashiels Club can be found in David Steel's papers at LSE,⁴ while there are notes on the 'Galashiels Hawick Liberal Club' 1901–1912 in the National Archives at Kew.⁵

*Peter Hellyer*

- 1 <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1976/jul/27/power-of-police-to-enter-clubs>
- 2 <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=2507&dat=19680223&tid=bntAAAAAIBAJ&sjid=sKMMAAAIBAJ&pg=2764,4138445&hl=en>
- 3 <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/regmem/?p=10439>
- 4 <http://archives.lse.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=STEEL%2FB%2F8%2F2>
- 5 <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2612819>



## Biography

Andrew Connell analyses the political life and career of Liberal MP Sir James Whitehead (1834–1917)

# 'I feel I am placed at a ve Sir James Whitehead: the parliamen



# ‘A very great disadvantage’ The untimely travails of a Liberal meritocrat

**W**HAT KNOW THEY of politics who only politics know? It is received wisdom that parliament, overstocked with career politicians from privileged backgrounds, benefits from a leavening of successful entrepreneurs from outside the ‘Westminster Village’. But in practice the late entrant into politics, accustomed to instant decision-making, is apt to be frustrated by seemingly arcane procedure. When Sir James Whitehead entered the Commons in 1892 after an impressive commercial career and an outstanding term as a Liberal lord mayor of London, it was predicted that he would ‘end his career in the purple’.¹ Yet within two years he resigned his safe seat and, though he lived until 1917, withdrew from politics. Unlike his school friend the Rev. John Percival, another Liberal of Westmorland hill-farming stock,² he does not appear in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and mention in published history is limited to the odd textbook and monograph.³ Is this another instance of meritocratic failure to cut a dash on the parliamentary stage?

Whitehead’s self-made credentials were indisputable. Born in 1834, sixth child of an owner-occupier hill farmer who retired to Appleby in Westmorland, he left the town grammar school at fourteen for the drapery trade in Appleby and Kendal and thence to boomtown Bradford as a commercial traveller. ‘On the road’ he courted a customer’s daughter, Mercy Hinde of Huntingdon, married in 1860 and moved to the City of London as agent for a Bradford worsted manufacturer. In 1870 he bankrolled the establishment of Barker & Co., drapers of Kensington High Street, for whom he pioneered mail order business. When the postal reformer Sir Rowland Hill, to whom he owed much, died in 1879, he became secretary of the committee that commissioned a statue in Hill’s memory, with surplus subscriptions invested in a benevolent fund for indigent retired postal workers.⁴ By 1880, retaining his partnership in Barker’s, various directorships and an investment portfolio, Whitehead could afford to retire from day-to-day commerce.

He lived in a brick mansion in Catford, with twenty-four servants and *Virtute et Labore* inscribed over the door.⁵ Though remaining a total abstainer, he shed Methodism for Anglicanism; his sons went to public school and Oxford, mostly under the austere tutelage of Percival.⁶ He served as JP in both Westmorland and Kent and was vice-president of the newly formed International Arbitration and Peace Association:⁷ political life beckoned. But in the general election of April 1880, although funding the campaign in unwinnable West Kent, he declined nomination on health grounds and went on a recuperative world tour with his eldest son. His entrance into public life came in 1882 with unopposed election to the City of London Common Council as representative of the companies of Fruiterers and Fanmakers and an ‘advanced Liberal’.⁸ In 1884 Alderman Whitehead, with ‘so refined a physiognomy ... so delicate a figure ... an oval face more suggestive more of Holy than of Westmorland’,⁹ was both elected Sheriff of London and adopted as Liberal candidate for the new single-member constituency of North Westmorland, centred on Appleby. With half the voters newly enfranchised and corrupt electoral practices outlawed, the *Daily News* considered his prospects good;¹⁰ the local Liberal press hailed ‘a strong candidate sprung from the people’ destined for ‘glorious victory over the domination of Toryism’.¹¹

He nearly achieved it. Facing William Lowther, an entrenched Tory from the county’s foremost landowning family, Whitehead added to his credentials as local boy made good the backing of Henry Tufton, first Baron Hothfield, owner of Appleby Castle and its estates, who had contested Westmorland as a Liberal in 1880 and now chaired the constituency party.¹² From the platforms of far-flung village institutes and chapels Whitehead vigorously proclaimed his radicalism. His manifesto encompassed one man, one vote, enhanced tenant rights, abolition of primogeniture, elected local government boards with powers to regulate licensing, free education, centrally funded reform of the House of Lords and compulsory employer

Left: Lord Mayor Whitehead (‘Bonnie Westmorland’), 1889

## Sir James Whitehead: the parliamentary travails of a Liberal meritocrat

liability; he deplored jingoism, citing the recent 'invasion of Egypt undertaken in order to carry out engagements entered into by the Tory government' as a 'discreditable chapter in our history'.¹³ He was confident that 'the light of Liberalism had dawned' in North Westmorland and with it 'the prospect of a brilliant future'.¹⁴ But with nationwide results indicating a parliamentary Liberal majority little changed from 1880, the count in Appleby on 3 December 1885 put him just ten votes behind Lowther. 'Faggot votes' had won the day,¹⁵ Whitehead told supporters massed in the market place. This was 'the first time in his life he had been defeated' and 'not in a fair and honest manner'; but 'if God spares us we will win in the long run'.¹⁶

He had not long to wait. Even before the caretaker Salisbury ministry made way for Gladstone's return to Downing Street in February 1886, the GOM's resolve to press on with Irish home rule was public knowledge, though few foresaw the scale of the internal Liberal revolt that precipitated the July general election. Tory warnings that Gladstone would 'hand over the management of Irish affairs to men who would march through rapine and plunder to the disintegration of the Empire' undoubtedly resonated in Cumberland and Westmorland.¹⁷ 'I don't know what is going to happen to the Liberal Party', wrote Henry Howard, MP for Mid-Cumberland, to Whitehead. 'I hope you are not in favour of the Home Rule Bill. I cannot see my way to voting for it'.¹⁸ Howard became a Liberal Unionist but refused nomination, enabling the Tory James W. Lowther to regain the seat unopposed. Would Whitehead – not unlike Joe Chamberlain in age, self-made business background and fastidious dress sense – follow suit? 'I very much regret that Anything has happened which makes you hesitate', wrote the chief whip Arnold Morley; 'Hoping that you may see your way again to support the Government in a crisis of no ordinary magnitude'.¹⁹ Unwilling to follow Hothfield as a 'thorough Gladstonian',²⁰ Whitehead compromised, declaring himself an Independent Liberal: 'neither Separationist nor Liberal Unionist ... I am a Unionist in the broadest sense of the term ... a true Union can only be established by the concession of a liberal measure of self-government to the sister kingdom'.²¹ Despite his efforts to divert voters' attention to land reform, lower railway freight charges and the liberation of North Westmorland from 'the Lowther yoke', the Conservative majority rose from 10 to 186; but with Liberals losing half their English seats, a campaign producing a negative swing of under 2 per cent probably merited the description of 'plucky and energetic' against 'fearful odds'.²² In 1888 Whitehead agreed to stand again.

By then he was London's lord mayor-elect: 'a capable, courtly man, who will do honour to the high position he is called to, and will, with peculiar fitness, inaugurate a new era of City

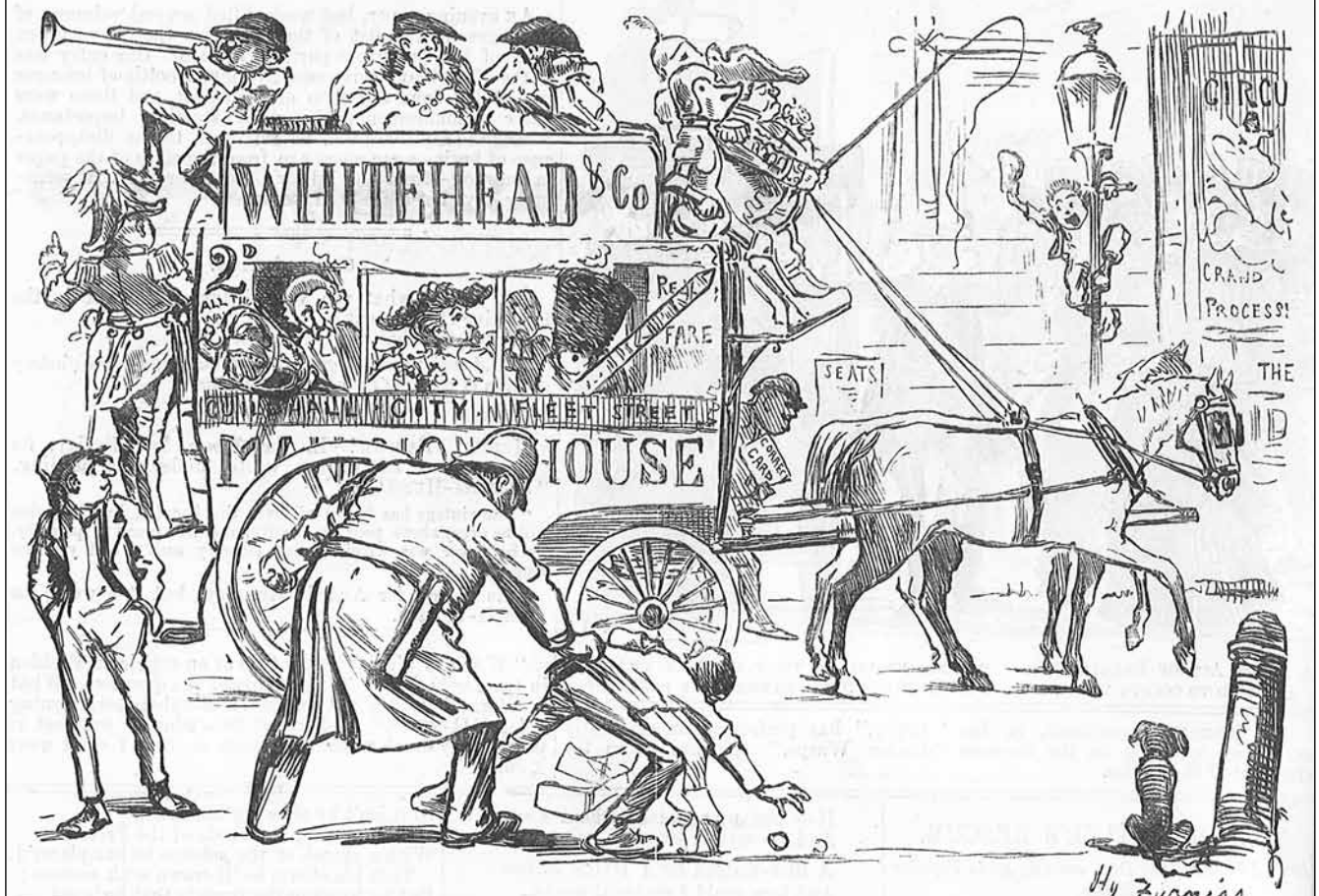
administration in conjunction with the working of a Radical Local Government Act passed by a Conservative ministry', said *Punch*.²³ As befit Labouchere's description of him as an 'excellent Radical',²⁴ he made well-publicised economies in the inaugural Lord Mayor's Show and banquet – turtle soup was off the menu – while providing London's workhouse inmates with extra rations including, his teetotalism notwithstanding, a pint of porter. But if his banquets were 'dull in their ascetic moderation',²⁵ some flummery was condoned. The 700th anniversary of the lord mayoralty on May Day 1889 saw a 'Juvenile Ball' featuring sixty-four children in 'Historical Procession and Quadrille illustrative of Costumes and Characters'. Whitehead's daughters Leila and Florence were Puritan Maidens from the seventeenth century – potentially less entertaining than the pairings of Lord Nelson with the Duchess of Marlborough (eighteenth century) and the Miller with the Wife of Bath (fourteenth century).²⁶ But he seldom lost sight of serious causes. His subscription fund better to equip the Metropolitan Volunteers earned further praise from *Punch*;²⁷ an appeal to relieve famine in China raised £31,000; and after a visit to the Paris Exposition he raised subscriptions to support the work of the Pasteur Institute, paving the way for the British Institute of Preventive Medicine, founded in 1891. The last of 'highly valuable services in an eventful mayoralty', rewarded with the usual baronetcy, was successful intervention, in conjunction with Cardinal Manning, to mediate between unions and employers in the 'Dockers' Tanner' strike of August–September 1889 that had brought the Port of London to a standstill. Nearly three decades later, at a Dockers' Conference, Ben Tillet recalled his part with gratitude.²⁸

With Whitehead's achievements at Mansion House fulsomely covered by the local Liberal press, the North Westmorland party agent was confident of winning the seat by 500 at the next election.²⁹ But in March 1890 it was announced that the Liberal candidate would be Lord Hothfield's younger brother, Alfred Tufton; on medical advice Sir James Whitehead was switching to Leicester, an 'easier' seat.³⁰ The 'consistent Radicalism' of unionised boot and shoe workers had ensured that the comfortable majorities of Leicester's two Liberal members were barely affected by the party's 1886 convulsions.³¹ Now, with the blessing of the retiring MP, sabbatarian and home ruler Alexander McArthur,³² Whitehead would join James Allanson Picton, Congregationalist minister and admiring biographer of Oliver Cromwell. In the general election of July 1892 that brought Gladstone's fourth premiership they were unopposed.

The Liberal *Leicester Chronicle* enthused over the new MP, patriot and philanthropist, 'a tallish, erect, alert man, who moves with precision and looks the world straight in the face', commending both his lord mayoral achievements and his

**By then he was London's lord mayor-elect: 'a capable, courtly man, who will do honour to the high position he is called to, and will, with peculiar fitness, inaugurate a new era of City administration in conjunction with the working of a Radical Local Government Act passed by a Conservative ministry', said *Punch*.**

## ANTICIPATIONS OF NEXT LORD MAYOR'S SHOW.



The frugal Lord Mayor's Show, as satirised in *Punch*, October 1888

refusal, as Sheriff of London, to permit the press to watch the Newgate hanging of the murderer Mary Pearcey.³³ From a less partisan standpoint, Leicester's 'Topical, Satirical and Humorous Journal' the *Wyvern*, while disappointed that the Conservatives had failed to field a candidate, declared him 'a thorough gentleman and a good fellow to boot', a 'genial yet cute' man of business, supportive of technical and commercial education, who had shown 'pluck and grit' as lord mayor, 'not a great orator, but a good speaker'.³⁴ Though remaining – like McArthur before him – resident in Kent, Whitehead did the things a constituency MP should do: he was president of Leicestershire Rugby Football Union and patron of Leicester Sunday School Union and Leicester Commercial Travellers' Association.

The foremost issue claiming the new MP's attention was railway rates. Comprising hundreds of independent, notionally competing companies, the Victorian railway was effectively a cartel.³⁵ Under the aegis of the Board of Trade, the Railway and Canal Commission attempted to exercise a degree of supervision of charges; the companies, strongly represented in parliament, countered with the Railway Companies Association. Whitehead, his background in wholesale, commercial travel and mail order, had expatiated

on the 'injustice' of railway rates in his 1885 manifesto and presided over the Mansion House Association, established during his lord mayoralty to represent the interests of commercial customers of the railways; his son Rowland was one of the association's legal team in the course of a parliamentary enquiry that culminated in an 1,851-page report in August 1891.³⁶ Involvement with Leicester strengthened his commitment: Midlands farmers and traders protested that, with transportation of goods by sea impracticable and most canals owned by railways, they were charged discriminatorily high rates. Yet the railway companies, after two decades of struggle to cover costs as growth in freight tonnage decelerated following the mid-Victorian boom, considered existing charges inadequate;³⁷ on 1 January 1893 they published a tariff of rates raised to the legal limit.³⁸

The 'subsequent uproar' set Whitehead's parliamentary course.³⁹ His first Commons contribution was to propose on 1 February 1893 an amendment to the 1888 Railway Rates & Charges Bill giving the Board of Trade greater powers of adjudication in disputes between railways and traders over what was 'fair and reasonable'. The prospects looked good; the railway interest was much less influential in the parliamentary Liberal Party than it had once been, and A. J. Mundella,



Whitehead's Mayoral subscription fund for equipping the Metropolitan Volunteers; *Punch*, 15 June 1889



restored to the presidency of the Board of Trade, would have introduced legislation on railway rates in 1886 had crisis not engulfed the government. But now Mundella's priority was the Regulation of Railways (Hours of Labour); he did not seek additional powers over rates: he explained that he had advised the companies to reconsider them, but there were 'several hundred millions' in over forty thick volumes and it would take time. Yet a fortnight later, after assurances that there was not the 'slightest possibility' of it coming up that day, Whitehead was suddenly called upon to move his second reading. His speech unprepared, he reluctantly withdrew his amendment: 'I feel

I am placed at a very great disadvantage, inasmuch as, having had myself but little parliamentary experience, I have to rely for guidance upon friends'.⁴⁰ Despite some piecemeal rate reductions, he remained deeply dissatisfied. The companies were 'too clever'; their 'stealthy and persistent ... combined aggressiveness' had given them effective monopolies; the concessions they had made in response to Board of Trade pressure were modest; they could still 'do exactly what they like'. By way of esoteric example, the charge for transporting 13,000 feet of timber from Ledbury to High Wycombe had on 1 January 1893 gone up from £244 18s 10d to £523 18s 8d; even after reduction

it was £390 7s 11d. Although persuaded not to carry out his threat of speaking against the second reading of the Midland Railway Bill simply to precipitate a parliamentary discussion on 'reasonable rates', Whitehead remained insistent that more legislation was essential.⁴¹

Heartened perhaps by Leicestershire Trade and Protection Society's recognition of 'the great obligations of the commercial community to Sir James Whitehead MP for his able service as president of the Mansion House Association on railway and canal traffic and also for his exertions in the House of Commons to protect the interests of traders from the unfair encroachments of railway companies',⁴² he proposed a 'temporary bill' that would outlaw any rates that exceeding those charged on 31 December 1892.⁴³ Promised that in response to 'unprecedented numbers' of complaints there would be a new select committee, he pressed for details of its remit and membership, refusing to be fobbed off by Mundella's assurances that this would be done 'without delay', 'at an early date', or at least 'in due course'.⁴⁴ By 16 May 1893 Whitehead knew that he was one of its nineteen members; although he considered the railway interest 'unduly represented' and agriculture's representation 'not adequate', he hoped that 'some good would come of it'.⁴⁵ The Select Committee on Railway Rates comprised nine Liberal MPs, eight Conservatives and two Irish, Parnellite and anti-Parnellite. Including railway directors from both sides of the House, it did not divide on party lines: Whitehead's closest ally in demanding legislation to provide firmer regulation and recompense for traders hit by swingeing rate increases was a London Conservative, Sir Albert Rollitt. The first report, published in August, recorded twenty-three meetings in twelve weeks. Whitehead was prominent but not dominant: his courteously insistent questioning of witnesses was replete with specific detail, but the generalities enunciated in an exchange with Sir Henry Oakley, General Manager of the Great Northern and Secretary of the Railway Association are applicable to any discussion of transportation tariffs.

WHITEHEAD: The railway companies have adopted the principle of charging what they felt the traffic would bear, have they not?

OAKLEY: I have always thought that to be a very unfortunate expression because my view of the position is that we should endeavour so to fix the rates as to encourage the greatest amount of traffic being sent over the railway.⁴⁶

There was a supplementary report in November 1893, but Whitehead missed the concluding meetings, laid low by recurrent flu, perhaps a consequence of another stressful political issue that had claimed his attention. In July 1892 North Westmorland had been easily held for the Conservatives by the carpetbagger Sir Joseph Savory, lord mayor of London in 1890–91. In local

post-election Liberal recriminations Whitehead was accused of having 'wilfully damaged the Liberal cause' to the benefit of his City friend.⁴⁷ A bitter exchange of press letters and pamphlets began in January 1893. Hothfield insisted that Whitehead had opposed home rule, deserted the constituency and undermined Alfred Tufton's candidacy by 'dirty and dishonourable methods', spreading the 'preposterous and untrue' story that Hothfield had forced him out of the seat.⁴⁸ These were 'Scurrilous and malignant' accusations, Whitehead riposted: he had given up North Westmorland after being 'slighted and harassed' by the Tuftons when he was 'really ill'; their failure in 1892 had been the consequence of inept campaigning. Hothfield dismissed such 'vague and florid innuendo ... commercial room vulgarity': had not Whitehead been overheard in 1892 describing Hothfield as a 'd___d cad'?⁴⁹ He was sorry for the electors of Leicester, hitherto represented by 'honourable and reliable' men. This mutual abuse came to an abrupt end when Gladstone's Government of Ireland Bill was thrown out by the Lords on 8 September 1893 by 419 votes to 41. Hothfield voted with the majority, commencing a political journey that by 1911 placed him in the ranks of the ultra-Tory 'Ditchers'. The *Leicester Chronicle* explained that because the attacks on Whitehead were 'obviously the outcome of merely personal feeling ... unworthy of the smallest advertisement' it had been silent on the 'North Westmorland feud'. Now the home rule vote had shown the protagonists in their 'true colours': 'Sir James Whitehead stands abundantly justified. The hon. Baronet need pay no more attention to the Hothfields'.⁵⁰

In 1894 he resumed the struggle for legislation to 'ameliorate unreasonable railway rates ... on behalf of a very large number of traders and agriculturists'. In April Mundella told him that the Railway & Canal Traffic Bill would be published 'very shortly', but without the desired provision to make canals again 'independent competitive means of transport' by compulsory purchase from railway companies.⁵¹ Enforced resignation from the cabinet a few days later was perhaps a relief. 'Alas!' Mundella replied to a 'friendly and sympathetic letter' from Whitehead, 'I know nothing about Railway rates'.⁵² His replacement at the Board of Trade, the ascetic jurist James Bryce, had in the 1880s led parliamentary opposition to Lake District railway projects on the grounds that they would spoil the scenery; 'this appointment filled railway circles with alarm'.⁵³ But he proved little more accommodating: despite working 'double shifts in the committee rooms',⁵⁴ all Whitehead could get from Bryce's parliamentary secretary Tom Burt was the 'indefinite answer' that he did not know and could not say when the bill would be read a second time. Perhaps William Harcourt, Chancellor of the Exchequer and leader of the government in the Commons, could arrange 'special facilities' for it? 'I am not in a position to

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Rarely speaking in the House of anything but railway rates, he had recently spread his wings. He urged Dyke Acland, vice-president of the Council of Education, to recommend as part of the elementary school curriculum, 'such instruction, either by coloured drawings or other, as will show the evil consequences on the body and mind of drinking intoxicating liquors'.

answer these questions at present' was his brusque response.⁵⁵ Filibustering by the eccentric Irish Unionist lawyer James Alexander Rentoul caused further frustration before the bill got through its second reading on 22 June 1894. Having 'borne the brunt of this controversy for five years on behalf of traders', Whitehead now claimed the 'right to say a word': he 'accepted' it as better than nothing, but was 'somewhat disappointed'.⁵⁶

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It was his last speech in the Commons. By the time – after last-minute haggling on the rates chargeable when long-distance freight was handled by multiple companies – the Railway & Canal Traffic Bill had emerged from the committee stage and made its final express journey to royal assent on 25 August, 1894,⁶⁰ Sir James Whitehead was recuperating in Pontresina, Switzerland. He had effected his parliamentary resignation by being appointed Steward of the Manor of Northstead on 17 August; on the same day, in an unprecedented double resignation, Allanson Picton had taken the Chiltern Hundreds. Attributing his ill-health in part to the behavior of opposition members, 'an irresponsible body whose sole cause seems to be to secure class privilege', Whitehead told his constituency party: 'I am not, in these days of deliberate and systematic obstruction, equal to the strain of Parliamentary life'. 'A few years ago the day was never too long'; now 'excessive labour' had brought 'the usual penalty'.⁶¹ His 'present prostration', said the *Leicester Chronicle*, was a consequence of 'constant efforts' on railway rates: 'overwork and zeal in the interests of the people has claimed another victim'.⁶² The *Wyvern* felt that Sir James had been a 'very useful parliamentary man' who had accomplished 'a great many good things', but had

'never seemed to get really in touch with Leicester electorate' because of 'a suspicion that the ex-Lord Mayor was thrust upon them from headquarters'.⁶³ The Conservative *Leicester Express* portrayed him as imposed by Leicester's Liberal Caucus: 'we hope that the hon. baronet's parliamentary services have been properly appreciated, but we cannot forget that he was the choice of the Bishop-street party managers and not of the electors as a body'.⁶⁴

Picton suffered from gout, and his desire to leave the House was well known; the nature of Whitehead's recurrent illnesses is a mystery. From August to December 1893 he had 'severe influenza',⁶⁵ but by January 1894 was sufficiently recovered to speak at the Leicester mayoral banquet. On 31 July he was reported to have been 'very ill with colic', but 'out of danger'.⁶⁶ When Francis Channing, Liberal MP for East Northants and an ally on railway rates, read of the resignation 'in the papers' on 14 August, he wrote to Whitehead, 'I cannot understand why you suffer so – when you have been in the House you always seem so fit and well'. After recommending various doctors, he concluded, 'I hope you will go on at Leicester. Do not be in such a hurry to get out of what may in a year or two hence seem most attractive'.⁶⁷ The *Chronicle* said there had been 'the greatest reluctance to entertain the idea that his illness was of such a permanent nature'; but 'the worst has happened'. The *Wyvern* had thought Whitehead 'too deeply enamoured of parliamentary life to throw it up', and wondered why the secretary of the Leicester Liberal executive had kept the resignation letter 'in his pocket for a week' before 'he sprung a political mine on the town'. The *Express* too hinted that things were not quite as they seemed, remarking that Whitehead's constituents, 'irrespective of politics', would hope that 'the results of his sojourn in Switzerland will be the ultimate falsification of these alarming reports and that, when relieved of his Parliamentary duties, Sir James will be able to speedily return to London, and again render valuable service to the commercial, if not the political world'.

The Leicester by-election took place just a fortnight later, with four candidates for the two seats, indicating that local parties were not completely surprised.⁶⁸ But there is no evidence that the dual resignation signified the departing members' rejection of – or by – the parliamentary Liberal Party, shaky though its morale had been since Gladstone gave way to Rosebery and Harcourt in March 1894. Picton's subsequent retirement in the GOM's resort of choice, Penmaenmawr, might attest to his reverence for his former leader, but Whitehead had at the height of the public spat with Hothfield been criticised for his 'persistent refusal' to declare himself a loyal Gladstonian;⁶⁹ with Rosebery, who had been the first chairman of the London County Council, inaugurated during his lord mayoralty, he was on friendly terms,⁷⁰ as he was with the Lib-Lab Henry Broadhurst,

who returned to the Commons after topping the by-election poll. 'There is no one whom I would rather help than your son or yourself', Broadhurst wrote in September 1900,⁷¹ referring to Rowland Whitehead's forthcoming parliamentary candidacy, but hinting that Sir James might yet return.

Whitehead had completed his withdrawal from political life in May 1896, however, when he resigned from the City Council. His letter to the lord mayor sounded familiar notes: after 'recent serious illness' and 'frequent attacks', medical advice was that 'restoration to even comparative health will require several months rest'.⁷² Yet he remained active in such charitable work as the Rowland Hill Trust and Board of Borstal Visitors,⁷³ and had more than twenty years to live; he was evidently not as ill as he so often thought he was. Potential commercial scandal may have been a consideration. In 1893 – the year he terminated his partnership with Barker & Co. – the General Phosphate Corporation, of which he was a director, was subject to a winding-up petition less than three years since its flotation, after heavy losses in its Canadian mines.⁷⁴ There followed public allegations of insider trading by his fellow Fanmaker Henry George Smallman. Whitehead's solicitors wrote to the press rebutting them,⁷⁵ but Smallman – whose subsequent City aldermanate, London sheriffdom and knighthood show that he was not without influence – persisted, although the case never came to court. Whatever the reasons, from 1897 Whitehead reduced his public role to that of village seigneur; he moved his household to Wilmington Manor, near Dartford, installing his eldest son George in Wilmington Hall. He converted the Mission Hall into a Temperance Centre, with a Total Abstiners Football Club, Boy Scout troop and Band of Hope, built a Working Men's Institute and set up a District Benefit Society. He did not forget his old school at Appleby, endowing it with funding for entrance scholarships and science teaching, to which in 1911 he added a leaving scholarship in memory of his saintly wife Mercy. Not until shortly before his death in October 1917 did his health confine him: his former secretary wrote in May, 'I am glad to hear you have thrown off the effects of your latest illness. I think you are quite a marvellous young man!'⁷⁶

He did not abandon Liberalism. His barrister son Rowland, after unsuccessfully contesting South East Essex in 1900, took the seat in 1906. PPS first to Herbert Samuel, then to the attorney general William Robson, Rowland attended the House more assiduously than had Sir James,⁷⁷ and asked questions on such constituency concerns as the market for Leigh-on-Sea cockles and the low pay of telegraph boys at Tilbury Post Office. His longest speech was in March 1907, moving the rejection of the Women's Enfranchisement Bill. Limited though its provisions were, he argued it would be a prelude to universal adult suffrage, which would be 'disastrous to the Empire' because

there would be 'the serious risk of having legislation passed by a majority of women'. Uninterested in politics and lacking a sense of proportion and judgement, women were 'unfitted for the exercise of administrative powers' because of their 'nervous and emotional natures' and susceptibility to 'priestly influence'. In saying this he was 'upholding the highest and best ideal of womanhood, not only in the interests of women themselves, but in the interests of the community as a whole'.⁷⁸ Although introduced by Willoughby Dickenson, a Liberal in a Liberal-dominated house, the bill was defeated at its second reading. Rowland's views were widely held within the party. When Reginald McKenna came to speak in his support in November 1909, he urged him, unless there were 'local reasons to have some women in', to 'keep the suffragettes out. Men only make the best meeting'.⁷⁹ It seems probable that Rowland Whitehead's view of woman's place reflected the values with which he had been brought up. He and his brothers pursued careers, married and had children; his sisters – whether through choice or parental design – lived out their Juvenile Ball roles of puritan maids. Leila studied at Girton, but then came home to join her younger sister Florence. One Miss Whitehead acted as her father's secretary and managed the estate, the other ran the household. Following their parents' deaths they devoted their remaining four decades to such local good works as Wilmington Sunday School and Young Women's Bible Class. Leila followed her father in becoming a magistrate – the first female on the Dartford bench. Neither they nor their brothers played any active part in politics following Rowland's loss of his seat in January 1910; as the Liberal Party unravelled during and after the First World War, the Whiteheads drifted into passive Conservatism.

The sixth baronet takes pride in the lord mayoral record of the founder of the Whitehead family fortunes but feels that a man who 'led from the front by example', with his eye 'always on fairness for the common man, technology and thinking outside the box' would have achieved much more had he been elected, as he so nearly was, for North Westmorland in 1885.⁸⁰ Whitehead was fifty-eight before he entered the House in 1892 to join a parliamentary Liberal Party that despite being in government was not at ease with itself; he lasted only two years before concluding that he was too ill to continue. But, despite his expressed disappointment and precipitate exit in 1894, he achieved more in retrospect than perhaps he realised. A few days after what was to be his last appearance in the House, John Crombie, Bryce's PPS, wrote to say he was sorry to hear Sir James was ill but could assure him that the railway companies were willing to concede 'all amendments of any importance', apart from the proposal that the Commissioners be empowered to deal with complaints relating to rates as they were in 1892; if that were insisted on the bill might yet fail.⁸¹ It

**Whitehead was fifty-eight before he entered the House in 1892 to join a parliamentary Liberal Party that despite being in government was not at ease with itself; he lasted only two years before concluding that he was too ill to continue. But, despite his expressed disappointment and precipitate exit in 1894, he achieved more in retrospect than perhaps he realised.**

If not on the heroic scale to which he aspired, by sheer persistence Sir James Whitehead achieved his parliamentary objective.

was not, and eleven days after Whitehead's resignation the Railway & Canal Traffic Act became law. If freight rates were raised above the levels of December 1892 the customer could take the case to Railway & Canal Commissioners who could decide whether or not the increase was reasonable. Although traders complained that the onus was on them to appeal, with attendant legal costs and no guarantee of a finding in their favour, a landmark judgement in 1899 made it extremely difficult for railway companies to raise rates any further. Differential rates did remain, but the law was on balance disliked more by the companies than by the customers. It remained substantially unaltered until 1913.⁸² If not on the heroic scale to which he aspired, by sheer persistence Sir James Whitehead achieved his parliamentary objective.

In 1904, a decade after his sudden departure from the House, the Liberal who succeeded where he had failed by gaining North Westmorland in 1900, likewise resigned his seat in mid-term. Richard Rigg was over forty years younger, his Westmorland background was more privileged, and the circumstances of his going were very different. But Whitehead and Rigg had much in common: handsome features, popular appeal, total abstinence, self-conscious rectitude, devotion to good works, City success; and in the parliamentary context promise unfulfilled.⁸³ One can only speculate on how significant might have been their contribution to Liberal politics had they stayed the course.

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- 1 *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 16 Jul. 1892
- 2 Percival (1834–1918) went from Appleby to Oxford, the church and schoolmastering. He was headmaster of Clifton, master of Trinity and head of Rugby before Rosebery made him bishop Hereford in 1895.
- 3 R. Rhoades James, *The British Revolution*, I (1976), p. 128; G. Alderman, *The Railway Interest* (1973), pp. 127, 148, 151–2, 156. Unpublished typescript accounts of the life of JW: R. Walker, *Sir James Whitehead, Lord Mayor Extraordinary* (1987); J. Radford, *Sir James Whitehead, Gentleman of Wilmington* (2012).
- 4 JW named his second son Rowland. This statue, the first of several, was in Hill's native town, Kidderminster.
- 5 'By pluck and endeavour' is a Victorian translation of this over-used motto.
- 6 See note 2. Two sons went to Clifton, the youngest to Rugby. Two were at Trinity, Oxford, a third at Univ.
- 7 For a comprehensive list of JW's offices and honours, see W. Stenton & J. Lees, *Who's Who of British MPs, II, 1886–1918* (1978).
- 8 For JW in City and Westmorland politics see pp. 304–312

of A. N. Connell, 'The Domination of Lowtherism and Toryism in Westmorland Parliamentary Elections 1818–1895', *Northern History* XLV (2) (2008).

- 9 *The Citizen*, 11 Nov. 1882. Whitehead owned this City weekly.
- 10 *Daily News*, 30 Apr. 1884.
- 11 *Kendal Mercury*, 22 Aug. 1884.
- 12 A.N. Connell, "'Ice in the centre of a glowing fire": the Westmorland Election of 1880', *Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society*, 3rd series VIII, (2008), pp. 219–39. Tufton was ennobled as by Gladstone in 1882; both had been to Eton and Christ Church, but not contemporarily.
- 13 James Whitehead, *To the Electors of the Northern or Appleby Division of the County of Westmorland*, 25 Nov. 1885.
- 14 *Kendal Mercury*, 13 Nov. 1885, speech in Ambleside.
- 15 Faggot votes, often held by non-residents of a constituency, attached to nominal title to artificial sub-divisions of a large estate with a single beneficial owner. The Earl of Lonsdale was the largest landowner in Westmorland.
- 16 *Westmorland Gazette*, 12 Dec. 1885, *Kendal Mercury*, 11 Dec. 1884.
- 17 *Westmorland Gazette*, 6, 13 Jul. 1886
- 18 Parliamentary Archive WHD/1, Howard to Whitehead, 22 Apr. 1886.
- 19 WHD/1, Morley to Whitehead, 2 Jun. 1886.
- 20 *Penrith Observer*, 15 Jun. 1885
- 21 *Mid-Cumberland & North Westmorland Herald*, 13 Jul. 1895.
- 22 *Kendal Mercury*, 16 Jul. 1886.
- 23 *Punch*, 29 Sep. 1888. The 'new era of City administration' was the London County Council, inaugurated in 1889, with its meetings at the Guildhall. Lord Rosebery was its first chairman.
- 24 WHD/1, H. Labouchere to JW, 6 Oct. 1888.
- 25 *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 16 Jul. 1892
- 26 The programme is reproduced in Radford, *Sir James Whitehead*.
- 27 *Punch*, 15 Jun. 1889. These were part-time soldiers, fore-runners of the Territorial Army.
- 28 WHD/2, William Soulsby to JW, 31 May 1917.
- 29 *Penrith Observer*, 6 Jun., 4 Jul. 1893, quoting a letter of March 1890.
- 30 *Mid-Cumberland & North Westmorland Herald*, 22 Mar. 1890.
- 31 H. Pelling, *Social Geography of British Elections 1885–1910* (1967), p. 210.
- 32 WHD/2, Alexander McArthur to JW, 2 Jan. 1890.
- 33 *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 16 Jul. 1892.
- 34 *Wyvern*, 8 Jul. 1892.
- 35 H. Pollins, *Britain's Railways and Industrial History* (1974), pp. 91–99.
- 36 *Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the Railway Rates and Charges Provisional Order Bills*, 1 Aug. 1891.
- 37 B. R. Mitchell, D. Chambers, N. Crafts, 'How good was the Profitability of British Railways, 1870–1912?', *Warwick Economic Research paper 859* (Jun. 2008); Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics* (1981), Table G2, p. 622.
- 38 Alderman, *Railway Interest* (1973), pp. 95–160 outlines the fluctuating parliamentary influence of late Victorian railways.
- 39 All Whitehead's parliamentary contributions are to be found in Parliamentary Reports, 4th series (*Hansard*),

- vols. VIII–XII (Feb–May 1893) and XXII–XXVI (Mar–Jul 1894).
- 40 *Hansard*, VIII, 172, 233, 661, 1045, 1553–7, 1, 2, 7, 15 Feb. 1893.
- 41 *Hansard*, IX, 45–47, 1036, 1226, 21 Feb., 3 Mar., 7 Mar. 1893.
- 42 *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 11 Mar. 1893.
- 43 *Hansard*, XI, 316, 14 Apr 1893.
- 44 *Hansard*, X, 488–9, 658, 20, 21 Mar. 1893, XI 313, 1024, 14, 24 Apr. 1893.
- 45 *Hansard*, XII, 1153, 16 May 1893. Alderman, *Railway Interest* p. 152, lists four known supporters of the railway on the Committee, and six of the traders.
- 46 *First Report of Select Committee on Railway Rates*, 22 Aug. 1893: witness statements of 21 Jul.
- 47 *Mid-Cumberland & North Westmorland Herald*, 21 Jan. 1893
- 48 *Mid-Cumberland & North Westmorland Herald*, 4 Feb. 1893
- 49 *Mid-Cumberland & North Westmorland Herald*, 4 Mar. 1893
- 50 *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 25 Sep. 1893.
- 51 *Hansard* XXII, 138, 12 Mar. 1894; XXIII 225–6, 635, 12, 17 Apr. 1894.
- 52 WHD/2, A.J. Mundella to JW, 21 May 1894. His resigned because of a public enquiry into the affairs of a finance company of which he had been a director.
- 53 Alderman, *Railway Interest* (1973), p. 155.
- 54 *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 28 Apr. 1894.
- 55 *Hansard* XXIV, 1273, 1285, 1535, 25, 29 May 1894.
- 56 *Hansard* XXVI, 101, 22 Jun. 1894.
- 57 *Hansard* XXII 309, 30 Mar. 1894.
- 58 *Hansard* XXIII, 1227, 1661, 24, 30 Apr. 1894.
- 59 *Hansard* XXVI, 1248, 9 Jul. 1894.
- 60 *Hansard* XXIX, 347, 25 Aug. 1894.
- 61 Quoted in *Kendal Mercury & Times*, 17 Aug. 1894, *Westmorland Gazette*, 18 Aug. 1894.
- 62 *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 18 Aug. 1894
- 63 *Wyvern*, 17 Aug. 1894
- 64 *Leicester Express*, 14 Aug. 1894.
- 65 *Penrith Observer*, 8 Aug. 93, 25 Nov. 1893; *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 30 Sep. 1893.
- 66 *Penrith Observer*, 31 Jul. 1894.
- 67 WHD/2, Evans to JW, 13 Aug., Channing to JW 14 Aug., 1894.
- 68 Leicester by-election, 29 Aug. 1894: H. Broadhurst (Lib-Lab) 9464; W. Hazell (Lib) 7184; J. Rolleston (Con) 6967; J. Burgess (ILP) 4,402.
- 69 *Mid-Cumberland & North Westmorland Herald*, 2 Sep. 1893. The Whitehead boxes in the Parliamentary Archive contain no correspondence from Gladstone. There is no mention of him in the Gladstone Diaries.
- 70 WHD/2 contains a note from Rosebery on 12 Jun. 1895, responding to an invitation from Lady Whitehead to a garden party.
- 71 WHD/2, Broadhurst to JW, 19 Sep. 1900.
- 72 Quoted in Radford, *Sir James Whitehead*.
- 73 WHD/2, E. R. Brice to JW, 9 Dec. 1898 (Borstals), W. Gilbey to JW, 20 Feb. 1901 (Hill Trust).
- 74 *London Gazette*, 7 Apr. 1893. See D. G. Paterson, 'The Failure of British Business in Canada, 1890–1914', University of British Columbia Discussion paper (1974) p. 20.
- 75 *Leicester Chronicle & Mercury*, 28 Oct. 1893, quoting a letter to the *Westminster Gazette*.
- 76 WHD/2, W. J. Soulsby to JW, 31 May 1917. Soulsby was formerly secretary at Mansion House.
- 77 *Hansard*, 4th series vols. CLIII–CXCVIII (Mar. 1906–Dec 1908); 5th series III–XII (Apr.–Oct. 1909) passim.
- 78 *Hansard*, CLXX, 1112–1120, 8 Mar. 1907.
- 79 WHD/4, R. McKenna to RW, 13 Nov. 1909.
- 80 Email from Sir Philip Whitehead to the author, 8 Jan 2015.
- 81 WHD/2. J. W. Crombie to JW, 16 and 18 Jul 1894.
- 82 P. J. Cain, 'The British Railway Rates Problem, 1894–1913', *Business History* XX, 1 (1978), pp. 87–97. The landmark case was *Smith & Forrest v London & North Western and others*.
- 83 A. Connell, 'The Strange Case of Mr Rigg', *Journal of Liberal History*, 60 (Autumn 2008), pp. 14–22. Rigg was later mayor of Westminster.

# Reports

## Europe: The Liberal commitment

Evening meeting, 1 February 2016, with Sir Graham Watson and Lord William Wallace. Chair: Baroness Julie Smith.

Report by **David Cloke**

**H**OW AND WHY did the Liberal Party, SDP and Liberal Democrats all end up as the strongest supporters of Britain's membership of the European Economic Community and its successor institutions? Has it helped or hindered the party's political achievements? Have developments in Europe since the EEC's founding Treaty of Rome in 1958 reflected the party's European faith? Earlier in the year, as a referendum on Britain's membership of the EU seemed increasingly on the cards, the Liberal Democrat History Group

met to discuss the historic Liberal commitment and record, with Sir Graham Watson (Liberal Democrat MEP 1994–2014) and Lord William Wallace (Liberal Democrat Foreign Office minister in the coalition government, 2010–15).

In introducing the speakers, Baroness Smith noted that they had kindly agreed to divide the subject up between them chronologically, with Sir Graham beginning with the roots of Liberalism's European outlook and Lord Wallace picking up the story from the Second World War.

Sir Graham started by warning attendees that he was not a historian, other than as a chronicler of events in which he had been involved. His contribution was as a practitioner of politics rather than an interpreter. As Baroness Smith has noted, his practice had made him very well qualified for the discussion: former leader of the ALDE group in the European Parliament and president of the ALDE Party, and now a member of its economic and social committee.

For Sir Graham the first question to be asked was how far back one could trace evidence of British Liberal ideas about the value of pooling sovereignty to unite Europe. Some, such as Piers Ludlow of the LSE, were sceptical that the idea even went back to the late nineteenth century. But, as a romantic, Sir Graham believed that it was possible to trace the idea back to the late eighteenth century and the awakening of revulsion both at the continental despots and also at the 'John Bull' style militarism that

built up as Britain approached the Napoleonic Wars. It could be seen, Watson noted, in the works of such radical poets as Oliver Goldsmith and Robert Burns and the calls for the brotherhood of man, or ‘brethren in a common cause’ as Burns put it, as a means of putting to an end the almost constant wars in Europe.

In 1759 Emmanuel Kant had launched the idea of a league of nations in his book *Perpetual Peace*. Adam Smith not only talked about the importance of trade but in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) highlighted the importance of rules to govern it. These rules would need to be agreed by intergovernmental treaty, but the body to enforce them had to be, by implication Watson argued, supranational. These works represented the basic philosophical roots, the wellspring of Liberal thinking on Europe, Watson believed. However, it was not until the development of parliamentary democracy in the nineteenth century that the idea of a united Europe began to take shape. De Tocqueville’s *America* published in 1838 demonstrated that a united states of Europe was a logical possibility and also that ‘the working classes could govern a state’. It also suggested, Watson argued, that democracy and a United States of Europe might go hand in hand.

Interestingly, Watson frequently called on the works of poets and writers to support his case and often the examples he gave seemed ahead of their time. At this point Watson quoted Tennyson (no noted radical) from ‘Locksley Hall’ of 1841 when he looked forward to a time when the ‘war drum throbs no longer and the battle flags are furled in the parliament of man, the federation of the world.’

Six years on in 1847 and after his great achievement of the ending of tariffs in agriculture, Richard Cobden undertook a European tour. Despite having a domestic reputation as a ‘little Englander’, mostly as a result of his suspicion of Imperial involvements, to Europe, Watson noted, Cobden was what J. A. Hobson late called ‘the international man’. Throughout a Europe run by authoritarian monarchies or by opportunists, his visit had been eagerly awaited by those yearning for freedom. He was greeted by formal committees of welcome, and those committees, Watson pointed out, became the revolutionary movements of 1848. In that upheaval which affected almost every European nation, the ideas of democracy, nationalism and international cooperation were uppermost.

The revolutions of 1848 failed, however: Russia’s crushing of resistance in Hungary allowed Austria in turn to crush Italian nationalism. And then, Watson argued, after the near catastrophic war with Russia in the Crimea, Britain withdrew from active engagement in continental affairs. Nonetheless, Watson noted, the Liberal academics of the mid-nineteenth century, such as Matthew Arnold and T. H. Green, kept the cause alive and were seen as conspicuous defenders of reason versus clerical dogma and of universal values against national exceptionalism.

At the height of the struggle over the Second Reform Bill in 1867, a group of Liberal academics published *Essays on Reform and Questions for a Reformed Parliament*. In these they called for an alternative to monarchy and to class rule, for participatory government and the extension of the franchise, arguing that by giving each voter a sense of individual responsibility Britain would move from a class-based society to a genuine commonwealth. At the same time, enthusiasm for movements against continental oppression such as those headed by Mancini in Italy and by Kossuth in Hungary, led them to supporting a more unified idea of continental engagement.

Many of these ideas were brought together with the formation of the Liberal Party in 1859 – inspired in part, Watson suggested, by a belief in international engagement born of self-confidence. Watson also noted that the idea that nationality should make concessions to supranational government featured in a number of plans. Bryce’s *Studies of the Holy Roman Empire* in 1867 was essentially propaganda for European federalism, and his followers backed the establishment of a league of nations as a means of ending secret diplomacy. In Scotland, James Larnier’s European federation proposal of 1884 outlined how it would work: a European Assembly and a European senate elected by PR, a European civil service and an ambitious programme of international public works. In 1889 the International Parliamentary Union was established, which was essentially a European one.

Indeed, despite Britain being a world power with a worldwide naval and trading presence, the important issues of foreign policy, Watson argued, were almost exclusively European. The focus of British foreign policy was the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe, and the most important colonial issues were

always decided in Europe. Engagement was, therefore, essential for the achievement of Liberal Imperial goals.

At this time, Watson noted, Gladstone, in his concept of ‘international public right’ and Mill and Acton in their defence of intellectual and personal freedom, were putting forward the same kind of ‘universals’ as the EU existed to promote, recognising that these can be constrained, as in America, by populist pressure, or by bureaucracy. Watson also argued that Gladstone had an important influence on Liberal thinking on Europe and on the British consciousness as he shifted the perspective of foreign policy from Empire to Europe. As did Cobden and the Manchester School’s concept of economic integration as a route to peace.

Gladstone saw Europe as a family of nations with a common law and common interests, a product of Hellenic discipline and Christian moralism. He had a strong hands-on engagement with European affairs in the two and a half decades that he dominated British politics, supporting international peace movements and encouraging peoples to strive for independence from foreign rulers. He believed in Europe and strove to cultivate the concept of Europe. This was not, however, devoid of national interest: there were benefits for Britain in keeping peaceful relations with the continental powers.

The Manchester School, meanwhile, spoke of the inevitable advance of free trade: in Cobden’s words, ‘breaking down the barriers which separate nations, those barriers behind which nestle the feelings of pride, revenge, hatred and jealousy which every now and then burst their bounds and deluge whole countries in blood.’ Free trade would usher in an era of universal peace. Watson noted that Gladstone also adopted the belief that free trade would enhance world unity and lessen the danger of war. Indeed, he believed that the 1860 commercial treaty with France had averted war on the continent.

What was not clear to Watson was whether, at the time, these political and economic views were seen as being aligned. He thought that that it was unlikely, though he believed that Gladstone himself must have been aware. It was also worth noting the contrary view expressed by the Conservatives as evidenced by their political pamphlets. One highlighted Britain as a great power and, focusing on the Empire, declared themselves ready ‘to fight for Canada as for





The signing ceremony for the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (the Treaty of Rome), at the Palazzo dei Conservatori on Capitoline Hill, Rome, 25 March 1957

Kent'. They perceived Britain as having no European interest.

Sadly, in Watson's view, the ideas of European integration seemed to disappear with Gladstone's departure from British politics and the entry of the country into an era of Imperial reaction and Empire free trade. Nonetheless, Gladstone was, Watson argued, the key incubator of the European idea in the Liberal consciousness.

For twenty years the European trail goes cold with little evidence of thinking about the politics of a united Europe. Domestic reform dominated Liberal politics. Only Lord Bryce kept the flame alive, and with G. L. Dickinson proposed the idea of an international union, setting up a group of like-minded people to draft a proposal for a league of nations. The League of Nations Union of 1914 Watson believed, laid the basis for a government commission in 1918 and Woodrow Wilson's proposals in 1920. Whilst it was supposed to be universal it was essentially European, its languages English, French and Spanish, its objective one of keeping the European nations at peace.

The years following the First World War saw Liberalism embattled but also saw (perhaps as a consequence) the development of cooperation across parties. In 1924 Ramsay Muir and Gilbert Murray were present at a meeting that would prove to be the genesis of Liberal

International and in 1939 Beveridge established the Federal Union Research Institute in Oxford.

If Liberalism was embattled after the First World War, Watson noted that the Second almost killed it off. But the yearning for a Liberal European order continued in Britain. Small practical efforts were made to bring people together, such as John Macmillan Scott's 1946 delegation of Young Liberals to Norway to begin the establishment of Liberal International. This was followed by a meeting with Belgian parliamentarians organised by Sir Percy Harris in 1947 and a conference of Liberal parliamentarians from ten European countries (including Germany) in London in 1949 which called for greater European cooperation in all areas. It was the first meeting of international politicians to come up with a fully European programme. As Macmillan Scott had said, 'in the new world opening up life would be lived across borders not behind them'.

Watson noted that there were tensions within Liberalism between classical European ideas – and the practical means of working within the European Community – and the transatlantic focus of British foreign policy. These were picked up later by Wallace and in questions from the floor. Despite these tensions Liberals kept pressing on, with the founding of the Liberal Movement for a United Europe in 1952, with wider

public recognition of the issues coming, in Watson's view and somewhat ironically, following the failed Anglo-French cooperation over Suez. This debacle also marked a turning point in the party's electoral fortunes. Whether the association of the Liberal Party with the European idea helped or hindered it was harder to identify; however, Watson closed by saying he believed that it was a moot point in any event as the party 'knew no other way'.

William Wallace sought to outline the development of Liberal thinking regarding the European ideal following the Second World War and place it within the context of the varied responses in Britain to the new world. He started by thinking about where he had come in; how did he assume that he was in favour of European integration. He had joined the party in 1960, like many, charmed and won over by Jo Grimond. He had told him that he was a European and so he was!

How much then did the party understand the implications of its gut European commitment? Wallace said that he was not sure that many of them really did. Not many people really looked into the details of the EEC, indeed, his wife, Helen, found herself at twenty-seven, one of the leading experts on the subject when the few people older than her with an interest in the area left to work in the Commission! And a look at the party's manifestos from the time revealed that the details were not spelt out clearly.

Wallace outlined that after the war ended in 1945, there was a range of attitudes to Europe amongst Britons. There was a feeling that the continent was as a dangerous place and Britain could easily get swamped; a fear of war and of Britain being left alone again; and view that it was a necessity but one which cost us most and gained us least. This was Churchill's view when he expounded his redefinition of Britain in the world in the late '40s and early '50s: an Anglo-Saxon country with three circles of global influence – its relationships with the United States, the British Commonwealth and Empire, and Europe. Wallace added that Britain had very reluctantly committed troops to the European continent in 1954 after deep debate and concern about another Dunkirk.

The post-war Liberal Party, meanwhile, assumed that it had to be in favour of Europe. The 1947 and 1948 Assemblies passed federal resolutions and it had the sense that being an internationalist



## Report: Europe – the Liberal commitment

meant being in favour of world government – and as that was not possible immediately, European government was at least a step forward.

Nonetheless, Europe divided the party in the late '40s and early '50s. Wallace noted that there was a clear divide between economic liberals and social liberals and also between those committed to free trade and those committed to building a social market economy in Europe rather than a free trade one. To be fair to the free trade Liberals, Wallace highlighted that they were very much affected by the sense that the conflict was between totalitarianism and freedom, and thus they supported a small state, strong free markets and open borders. Against them were the Social Liberals (some of whom, like Megan Lloyd-George, left the party in the late '40s) who wanted a social market economy.

The divide spilled over into rowdy Assemblies in the early 1950s. A number of free marketeers left and founded the People's League for the Defence of Freedom in 1956. On the left, the radical Liberals such as Frank Owen, Jo Grimond and Desmond Banks, founded the Radical Reform Group which itself disaffiliated from the party in 1954 only to re-affiliate a year later. The division was essentially between the Keynesian and Hayekian views of the economy and between the individual and community views of freedom.

As a questioner noted later, the last significant debate on the subject was at the 1960 Liberal Assembly with the remains of the anti-EEC group furious at the party's support for the common market. They were roundly defeated and seemed, after that, to disappear. Wallace agreed that 1960 proved to be last hurrah for the group, which included some significant figures in the party who had been candidates in the 1950 and 1951 general elections and had made substantial contributions to it. As far as Wallace could recall, the only figure who was associated with them who remained in the party was Roy Douglas. Under Jo Grimond's charisma the party became European.

Wallace was of the opinion – often argued at History Group events – that Suez was the turning point in all sorts of ways. It strengthened the Liberal mindset on policy, most notably in the form of deep opposition to Imperial nostalgia, to the insistence that Britain be a world power, to the view that Britain should hang on to the colonies for as long as possible (many active Liberals, including Jo Grimond, were involved in the campaigns for colonial freedom in the 1950s), and to the independent nuclear deterrent which symbolised that Britain was more important than its European partners. Wallace also noted later in response to a question that the party was strongly against the idea that sovereignty was important and that this came across in papers published by the *Unservile State*, notably in 'The Illusion of Sovereignty' that he had written.

Consequently, the party argued that Britain should accept that it was fundamentally European and should seek to get on with its European neighbours. In 1960 Grimond published a policy paper entitled 'Britain Must Join', and a later paper by Christopher Layton proposed following the French model of economic policy, thus indicating that the party saw it as not just a model for Europe but for Britain. A questioner later noted that the party's natural Europeanism at this time was why he became a Liberal: it made sense and related to his personal experience.

Wallace again highlighted the lack of detailed understanding of the issues and the lack of contact with continental Liberal parties. Christopher Layton, Richard Moore and a handful of others sought to tackle this problem, and younger members built contacts through organisations such as WFLRY – the World Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth – run by Margareta Holmstedt.

Wallace noted, however, that following De Gaulle's veto the European question seemed to fall down the agenda. Nonetheless, among the three conditions that Grimond put to the Labour government when it lost its majority in 1965 was a shift in foreign policy from

East of Suez to Europe. And when the second application was made in 1969, Assembly passed a resolution strongly supporting it. With both the main parties split on the issue in 1971–72, Wallace pointed out that the Liberals contributed to the majority on one of the key votes on whether to join. (It was later pointed out, however, that Emlyn Hooson had at least abstained on that vote because of concerns about the impact of agricultural policy on farmers in his constituency.) Thus, Wallace argued, the party was both beginning to gain a reputation as the pro-European party, and it was also beginning to understand what the policy meant in practice. This then featured in the manifestos of the 1974 general elections.

From accession, the party had to learn a lot more about its sister parties and about the patterns of the then much simpler EEC. Wallace noted that he hadn't realised how anti-Catholic some of the European Liberal parties were, or, indeed, the extent to which it had formed a part of his own thinking. There were deep arguments over the building of a European Liberal Party. British Liberals were concerned about having too many economic Liberals and not enough social Liberals in the group, with arguments about French representation: should the Republicans be allowed to join (as they wished) or should the French Radicals instead? We also favoured Radical Venstre, but not Venstre and were keen to involve D66 in Holland. Wallace had also sought to bolster the social liberal wing of the FDP in the mid 1970s, but, he noted, most of them left over the following decade.

Connections were also built within British politics most notably during the 1975 referendum campaign. The Liberals had more experts on the subject than either of the other two parties and began to build links with pro-Europeans in the other parties from which, Wallace noted, was later built the Alliance between the Liberal Party and the SDP.

Despite the loss of representation in the European Parliament following

### Future History Group meetings

- Sunday 18 September, Liberal Democrat conference, Brighton: **Coalition: could Liberal Democrats have handled it better?** with David Laws, Chris Huhne, Akash Paun and Jo Swinson (see back page for full details)
- January/February 2017: AGM and speaker meeting, provisionally related to Liberal International's 60th anniversary
- Friday 17 or Saturday 18 March 2017, Liberal Democrat conference, York; details to be announced

the introduction of direct elections and the failure to get PR for them through the Lib–Lab pact, the party remained strongly pro-European and anti-imperialist. Thatcher meanwhile, moved from being a pro-European to a sceptic, and one who believed the myth of Britain being apart from Europe. Her view, as Thatcher said to Helen Wallace after her Bruges speech was that ‘they owe us so much’. Wallace later added in response to a question that one should not underestimate the impact of the Falklands War. It reinforced the image of Britain as an independent military power and harked back to the trope of Britain as a country standing alone against the odds. Thatcher picked it up and linked it, with Reagan, to images of the Second World War. This had sunk the party’s view of Britain’s place in the world.

Wallace added that there had been few opportunities for the party to put forward its view of Britain in the world and in Europe, though he did admit that it had not taken up the opportunities that had existed at the insistence, he later noted, of the party’s campaigners. He also deprecated the failure of Blair to follow through the indications given in the talks between Labour and the Liberal Democrats in 1996. Nonetheless, the party essentially remained committed to its view that the European

ideal was a common enterprise aimed at building a Keynesian social market at a European level.

Questioners asked whether there was a tension between the localism and Europeanism of the Liberal Party and Liberal Democrats, about the strength of the European commitment in the modern party and whether it had had an impact on the party’s willingness to argue for the reform of European institutions.

Wallace agreed that it was hard to reconcile the concept of giving more powers to Brussels with devolution, noting that Brussels appeared to be and was very remote, and he believed that it was a tension that had yet to be fully reconciled. Julie Smith noted that a number of new members to the party did not appear to share the instinctive pro-European position of longstanding members. She noted as an aside that she had come from the SDP which had been the only party not to split on the subject. Wallace also thought that part of the problem might be the general loss of faith in managers, leaders and elites. Graham Watson agreed that the party had perhaps been inhibited about calling for reform but, he argued that this was because the whole discourse was about attack on the European idea and the natural instinct was to defend it.

Questions were also asked about the lessons to be learned from the 1975

referendum, and what the role of the party should be in the current campaign. Watson argued that the main lesson was that the campaigns would be very different. In 1975 the whole political establishment and media supported the Yes campaign and the rest of Europe no longer appeared prosperous and unthreatening. The so far unimpressive Remain campaign needed to find an emotional appeal, Wallace believed. It also needed to tackle the myth of excessive European regulation. Did those that wanted to leave want no health and safety regulation, nothing on food safety? He also noted that such regulations could be tougher in the United States where the New York State Attorney General had actually gone after bankers. Many other issues could also only be tackled at a European or global level such as climate change and tax avoidance.

Meanwhile, Watson argued that the specific role of the Liberal Democrats was quite limited. It alone, would probably change few people’s minds. It would, however, play significant part in the wider Remain campaign and through the connections it made could bring in new members to the party.

*David Cloke is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group’s executive.*

# Reviews

## Lloyd George in cartoons

Alan Mumford, *David Lloyd George: A Biography in Cartoons* (Matador, 2014)

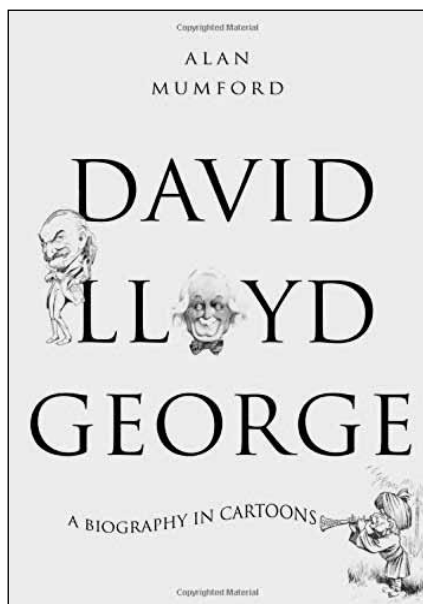
Review by **Kenneth O. Morgan**

**D**AVID LLOYD GEORGE was God’s gift for cartoonists. Whereas contemporaries like Asquith seemed prosaic and conventional, L.G. captivated his observers for almost half a century with a career full of vitality and versatility. In February 1934, (in a cartoon not in this book) Strube in the Daily Express portrayed him with Sir Henry Lytton of d’Oyly Carte, reflecting, as

two ‘Old Savoyards’ on how one man in his life played many parts. Beyond them stands a tableau of miscellaneous Lloyd Georges, the Welsh bard, the court jester, the Birmingham policeman, the rat-catcher of Limehouse, and, brooding in the background, ‘the man who won the war’. From the Boer War onwards, he bewitched the great cartoonists of the day – Staniforth, Gould, Reed, Partridge,

Raven Hill, Strube, David Low, Vicky. In return, they contributed immensely to his rise to the top – and, to some lesser degree, to his descent thereafter. Of all politicians, he became the great cultural artefact of his time.

It is a fascinating theme and is covered entertainingly by Alan Mumford, himself both a notable political cartoonist and a historian of the genre who has previously produced volumes on cartoonists’ treatment of the Labour and Conservative parties. While his sketch of Lloyd George’s life is prosaic, the accompanying cartoons, enterprisingly culled from a miscellany of archives, are enormously revealing, both of the man, and of the culture of his time. No one, it seems, could reach a settled view of his image. He appeared in magazines like *Punch*, the *Westminster Gazette* or the *Bystander* in guises varying from a highwayman



looking for hen roosts to rob to John Knox in the pulpit, denouncing 'motorists, golfers and all those miserable sinners who happen to own anything'. He is shown at various times as a knight errant and a conjurer, as a boxer and a punch ball. To E. T. Reed in 1915 he was 'the Charlie Chaplin of politics'. The Prime Minister of Great Britain drew on the mystique of George Robey 'the prime minister of mirth'. After all, the Edwardian music hall was his inspiration as much as the Edwardian pulpit. Sketches, mainly from his early career, alluding to his Welshness, are less interesting and nearly all clichés, a harp-playing 'Dame Wales' and the like, as in celebration of his earldom in 1945. Cartoonists also draw variously on the animal world. He is shown as a weasel and a secretary bird in 1909, a Welsh terrier in 1912, an octopus in 1917, a butting goat in 1913 (a reference to his belligerence not to his sexuality), and, most magnificently as an elephant by Leonard Raven Hill in *Punch* in 1919 – 'a cheerful pachyderm', scornfully ignoring the darts fired into his hide by a posse of trivial critics. No overriding image emerges. Mr Mumford, following us earlier historians, defines Lloyd George as 'an outsider', Welsh, Baptist, from a relatively poor social background in a tiny rural village. But what emerges here is an assured individualist, not unduly underprivileged, who soars up 'the greasy pole' through his own dynamism and genius.

What use did the cartoonists make of his career with all its dizzying twists and turns in peace and in war? In general, the treatment he received was relatively benign. While sketches attack his

radical onslaughts on landlords and the wealthier classes in general, many others are sympathetic towards his reforms like Old Age Pensions and National Health Insurance. On some of the darker passages in his career, he was lucky to get away with it. The ferocious 'retaliation' in Ireland in 1920, the era of the Black and Tans, does not seem to have inspired undue ferocity amongst the cartoonists – the Australian socialist Will Dyson in the *Daily Herald* always excepted. The fawning visit to meet Hitler in Berchtesgaden in 1936 seems to have provoked astonishment rather than condemnation. Likewise, defeatist, Petain-like speeches during the Second World War. His private life too, escaped unscathed as of course it did with the investigative journalists of the time. Mumford publishes one rare cartoon from the small-circulation *Bystander*, in April 1922, showing Lloyd George and Lord Birkenhead by the seaside, reading some of the sexier poetry of Byron in their deck chairs, but that is far from revelatory. A curious sketch by an unknown artist in the monthly *Truth* in 1920 hints at another of Lloyd George's little hobbies – phrenology and the workings of the human brain. The cartoons generally conform to the stereotypes – dauntless enemy of landlords, social crusader, triumphant war leader and peacemaker, titan in the wings after 1919. That is not surprising: the cartoonists had largely created these clichés in the first place.

What, in return, did Lloyd George make of the cartoonists? In general, he was grateful to them. They emphasised positive aspects of his career. No wonder he had friendly relations with men like Staniforth in the *Western Mail*, George Strube in the *Express*, even the more angular David Low in the *Star* and the *Evening Standard*. Invariably, they made him sound fun. If a Strube cartoon of him appeared in the morning paper, it made Lloyd George's day. Strube depicted Lloyd George as permanently accompanied by a pheasant and a walking mangel wurzel, thus recalling L.G.'s famous factual error in a speech back in 1913. Their abiding presence as Lloyd George's stage army in the thirties served to underline his splendid isolation in politics, spurned by the establishment but standing magnificently alone in crusades to revive agriculture and industry, conquer unemployment, promote a British New Deal, defend Spanish Republicanism and finally stand up to totalitarian bullies. Lloyd George, after all, relied

heavily on his PR (other than the new radio). He was a master of spin. In 1916, it made him prime minister. Just as he kept leads open to the press, from their mighty owners to their parliamentary and military correspondents, and used them to promote his causes, so he owed much to the aid of the photographers – and therefore the cartoonists. With his Inverness cloak, his pince-nez and especially his flowing Welsh locks, he created an image and style, years before Alastair Campbell began operations. He embodied a sense of uniqueness: the cartoonists, even a younger socialist critic like Vicky, pandered to it. They also fed his vanity about his appearance. Low's famous *New Statesman* cartoon of Lloyd George perched primly on a bench in the Commons emphasises the prettiness of his small feet of which he was inordinately proud. His personality in many ways was a feminine one. No wonder women loved him.

This fascinating book, then, breaks new ground, even in the well-occupied field of Lloyd George studies. Both the politician and the cartoonist flourished in an atmosphere of happy symbiosis. At least, they did then. Lloyd George, controversial though he always was, lived in a far more deferential, respectful world in which reporters kept their distance. Our culture now is rougher, and so is that of the cartoons. How a leading politician, with an unconventional sex life, with a slap-happy way with money and overtones of corruption engulfing his premiership, would fare now at the hands of Steve Bell and Martin Rowson in the *Guardian*, those latter-day Gilrays and Rowlandsons, to name but two, is an intriguing thought. The media now are far more merciless and unforgiving towards human peccadillos: their hacking and intrusions into privacy have been exposed by the Leveson inquiries and in the courts. Lloyd George today would have to find new defences to preserve his reputation. But who is to say that the man who took on and routed Lord Northcliffe in his own day would not again prevail? The English world of 'back to basics' would have been just one more where the Welsh wizard came, saw and conquered.

*Kenneth Morgan is a Welsh historian and Labour peer. His thirty-five books include Wales in British Politics, Lloyd George, Consensus and Disunity, Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880–1980, James Callaghan and Michael Foot.*

## 'Competition, individualism, responsibility, invention and patents'

Tony Holden, *Holden's Ghosts: The Life and times of Sir Isaac Holden – inventor, woolcomber and radical Liberal MP* (Kindle edition, 2015)

Review by **Simone Warr**

**H**OLDEN'S GHOSTS IS a biography of the Victorian, radical liberal, Nonconformist, wool-combing magnate Sir Isaac Holden, written by his descendant Tony Holden; in order to avoid confusion I will henceforth refer to Isaac Holden as 'Sir Isaac'.

The 'ghosts' of the title refer to a local Bradford nickname for the male night workers employed in Sir Isaac's factories on a casual, evening basis. Such workers, along with the regular day workers, endured extremely harsh conditions, being poorly paid and often working in temperatures of 120 degrees Fahrenheit for a sixty-hour week. Women continued at work to within a week of childbirth, commonly returning just two weeks afterwards. The very title of the book expresses Sir Isaac's seemingly paradoxical nature, readily acknowledged by the author; for whilst he was a self-made man of humble origins who prided himself on his philanthropy and political attempts to extend the franchise, Sir Isaac also later opposed factory reforms such as the Nine Hours Bill, which hoped to reduce the working hours of women and children from sixty to fifty-four hours a week. Further, the press reported that he lived simply, whilst occupying a magnificent Italianate villa, surrounded by extensive parklands, in the vicinity of dire poverty.

However, Holden's analysis of Sir Isaac's core beliefs indicates that little paradox existed in reality, for like many of the manufacturing aristocracy of the time, Sir Isaac's central beliefs were based on individualism and free trade. 'The animus of my public life in politics,' the author quotes Sir Isaac as saying, consisted of 'rights, liberty and independence; collectivism would destroy liberty tomorrow without individualism.' And Sir Isaac stated that his business philosophy comprised 'competition, individualism, responsibility, invention and patents.' Thus Sir Isaac's political and philanthropic interests, such as voting reforms, Irish home rule, the disestablishment of the church, and national secular education were entirely in line with his prized notion of individual liberty, along with a degree of equality of opportunity. Equality, in eventual individual

status and wealth, need not necessarily follow this ideal.

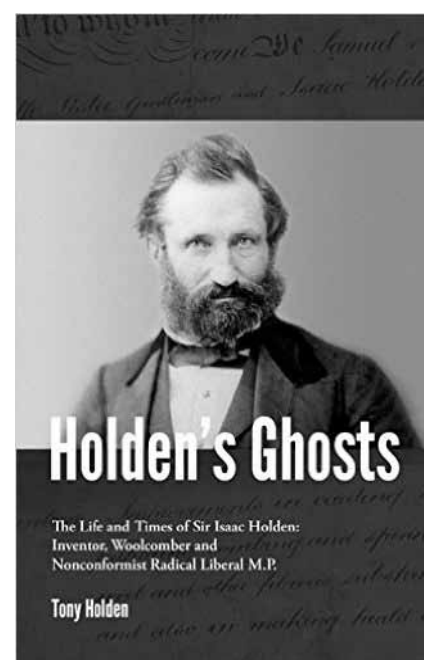
According to Holden, Sir Isaac justified the harsh working conditions and wages, current during his lifetime, by adhering to Adam Smith and David Ricardo's Wages Fund Theory. This theory contended that a limited pot of potential wealth or profit exists, with shares in this diminishing proportionately with the number of workers it has to be shared amongst. However, as the author points out, no final pot actually existed, and wages were in fact at the discretion of the employer. Despite being the son of a farmer and lead miner, and empathising with the need to reduce miners' hours, in the 1890s Sir Isaac voted against the coal miner's Eight Hour Bill, again by applying Wages Fund Theory, stating that if working hours were reduced without a similar reduction of hours in continental jobs, the competitive edge of British business would be lost.

The story of Sir Isaac is an extraordinary adventure of a man of great courage and resilience, a poor boy made more than good, becoming a hugely powerful and wealthy businessman and politician. Beginning as 'a draw boy to two hand weavers', with fluctuating educational opportunities, he later became a teacher of classics and chemistry, claiming to have invented Lucifer matches, then progressed to bookkeeping, eventually becoming an inventor, patent holder and entrepreneur holding an extensive business monopoly. Remarkably, his success began in his forties, however, it got off to a rocky start when, having saved for years to build his own enterprise, fate struck several, cruel blows in the form of a railway share crisis between 1847 and 1848. This unfavourable economic climate contributed to Sir Isaac's first business folding, whilst his wife of fifteen years also died from tuberculosis in 1847. Left with four children, instead of retreating into debt and grief, Sir Isaac took the risky option of beginning a wool-combing business in 1848 revolutionary France, along with his new partner Samuel Cunliffe Lister. Success was achieved through a combination of technical improvements

in the form of a new wool-combing device, the square motion wool-combing machine, and strategically buying up the patents of the opposition, in effect largely creating a monopoly, much echoing the rise of today's multinationals, and a trend towards a kind of business-based feudalism. Who originally invented or perfected to usefulness the square motion wool-combing machine, remained a bone of contention for many decades between Sir Isaac and his business partner.

Before his time Sir Isaac, a health fanatic, promoted a mostly minimal, vegetarian diet supplemented by a small amount of meat, fresh air and regular exercise. It seems to have paid off, for he became a multimillionaire businessman, by our current standards, in late middle age, was elected to the House of Commons aged fifty-eight, and served there intermittently until he was eighty-eight, becoming a baronet aged eighty-six, and dying with his full faculties at ninety.

This book was clearly a labour of love for the author; however, whilst Sir Isaac's life is clearly fascinating, more psychological and emotional insight into the man himself would have made it easier to empathise with Sir Isaac's ups and downs. The loss of Sir Isaac's first wife in 1847, and simultaneous business failure, was factually reported without any sense of the devastation he must have felt, and even his letters of courtship to his second wife seemed rather businesslike. It seems Sir Isaac spent much time trying to persuade her to alter her will, so that he, his former wife's offspring, and any



## Reviews

they should have together, would share in her inheritance on her death. Equally, when she died, many years later, the only remark reported was that Sir Isaac felt she might have lived longer had she heeded his dietary recommendations. Maybe more emotional documents have been lost, or perhaps this was indeed the man, businesslike to the very end.

*Holden's Ghosts* is a well-researched account of an extraordinary life, and places Sir Isaac clearly and concisely in his wider historical and political context.

A little over-detailed at times regarding political and business machinations, and more colour could have been added with deeper psychological and emotional insights, perhaps revealed by letters. But I am sure many will nevertheless find this a really rewarding read.

*Simone Warr is a PhD student in Modern British History at the University of Cambridge. She is currently researching issues involving religion, politics, democracy and citizenship in the nineteenth century.*

But did Spencer deserve to be called a 'Czar', as the book's title dubs him? Should he be given all the blame for the bifurcation process that the book describes? A broader look at nineteenth-century Lord Lieutenancies may help answer these questions. Most notably, the structural problems resulting in viceroy and prime minister disagreeing over policy is not simply limited to the 1880s. The issues Spencer faced – the lack of support and sympathy from London politicians, the personal financial and physical burdens of the job, the lack of power of the position, the scarcity of resources to run the administration of Ireland, and the harshness of the criticisms of Irish nationalists – were ones also faced with varying degrees of success by Spencer's predecessors in the 1830s, 1840s, 1850s and 1860s. These often exploded into verbal conflict by letter and a tendency for the viceroy to take a course divergent from government in London, as in the 1840s when De Grey and Peel disagreed over the appropriate remedy for the rise of the Repeal movement, or when Bessborough and Russell clashed over the necessary level of expenditure during the famine. However, many other viceroys and prime ministers, such as Heytesbury and Peel, faced similar problems but still maintained a cohesive approach to policy throughout their joint periods of office.

This means that personality may also play a role here. With the context of Gladstone's religious fervour and micromanagement of Irish affairs well-recognised, and self-effacing Spencer finding himself led into arguing for

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## Autocrat or cipher?

James Murphy, *Ireland's Czar: Gladstonian Government and the Lord Lieutenancies of the Red Earl Spencer, 1868–86* (University College Dublin Press, 2014)

Review by **Charles Read**

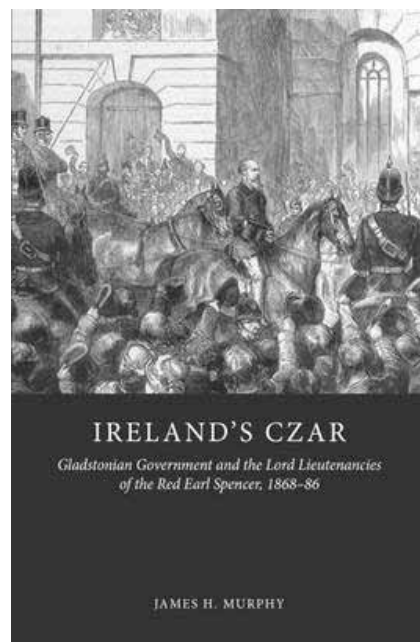
JAMES MURPHY HAS performed historians a great service by shedding light on one of Ireland's less well-known viceroys in his latest book, *Ireland's Czar: Gladstonian Government and the Lord Lieutenancies of the Red Earl Spencer*. This work adds to the recent trend among historians of nineteenth-century Ireland to investigate Dublin Castle administrations in more detail, a move against the grain of much of the existing literature, which focuses on the personalities of politicians in London or those of nationalists outside the Irish government. Although recent biographies of Lord Castlereagh (Chief Secretary, 1798–1801), the 2nd Earl de Grey (Lord Lieutenant, 1841–44) and the 4th Earl of Carnarvon (Lord Lieutenant 1885–86) all mark steps in this direction, the arguments put forward by Murphy about Spencer's effect on the wider politics of the 1880s make this book especially of note.

Indeed, this volume is not a simple narrative of Spencer's career or his doings during his appointments as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland between 1868–71 and 1882–85. As Murphy declares on page 3, 'this book is only in a qualified sense a biography of Spencer'. Neither is it simply a description of political crises, or the day-to-day functioning of government. Instead, it is a lively, detailed, and well-written political history of the period 1868–85 from the perspective of Dublin Castle – and one which calls into question existing interpretations of Anglo-Irish relations in the period

leading up to the Home Rule Crisis of 1885–86.

The first seven chapters of the book describe how Spencer negotiated the thorny issues of his first period of office, such as Irish church disestablishment and the security threat posed by the Fenians, without damaging the political reputation of the Lord Lieutenant.

The rest of the book focuses on the early-1880s, a period less well studied by other historians, but which follows up theories Murphy has already suggested in his previous work. It is argued that Gladstone's policies did not strengthen the Union by means of conciliating nationalist grievances. Instead, this process weakened the Union. The consequence of the contrast between Spencer following more coercive policies in Dublin, and Gladstone more conciliatory ones in London, was, in Murphy's words, 'bifurcated' government. It may have helped Gladstone and his government at Westminster to psychologically distance itself from the Irish executive in Dublin with Spencer as its figurehead, but it also weakened the idea of Britain and Ireland as one country in terms of political culture and identity. In essence, this was the beginning of the end of the Anglo-Irish union. Political affiliation with Britain in popular Irish opinion in the 1880s was damaged by the Gladstone government's deliberate sacrifice of the cultural capital of the Irish executive's traditional authority for his own short-term political ends.



'Czar'-like heavy-handed coercion, a process well described by Murphy, conflict, it seems, was inevitable. Establishing responsibility for the deleterious consequences of incoherent British government in Ireland for the longer-term future of the Anglo-Irish Union could well have been explored further in the book. The political use which Gladstone made of Spencer, finally using his loyalty to ensure his support for home rule, could have been more critically assessed. There is little doubt, however, of the outcome. Murphy convincingly argues that this conflict weakened the case for continued union. And that this also contributed to the Home Rule Crises after 1885 and the subsequent decline of the Liberal Party as Britain's dominant electoral force.

This insight is supported by similarities in other periods. The difficult situation faced by Spencer in advocating his own policy agenda, which he believed to be the right course of action in Ireland, whilst following instructions from London, was also noted as early as 1859 by De Grey, another activist viceroy who clashed with his political superiors in London:

Every act, every decision, every thought or suggestion must be submitted to the government at home, who have to justify everything; the natural consequence of which is that he can hardly take the most insignificant step or sanction the most inferior appointment without previous communication. This is all natural, all right, and all inevitable; but the Lord Lieutenant becomes a mere cipher!¹

Perhaps, in the 1880s, Gladstone actually needed to appoint a cipher willing to take his orders without conscientious dispute. However, a 'Czar' apparently intent on running his own repressive agenda could well have been very convenient for Gladstone. Certainly, the political history of Britain and Ireland could have looked very different if he had taken a different course.

*Charles Read is a Retained Lecturer in Economic History at Peterhouse, Cambridge, and writes for The Economist. He has recently completed a PhD thesis entitled 'British economic policy and Ireland, c.1841–53' at the University of Cambridge.*

¹ Transcript of 'Memoirs of the Earl de Grey' [1859] (CRT/190/45/2) Bedfordshire and Luton Archives Sp. 64.

## Liberals and Labour

James Owen, *Labour and the Caucus: Working-Class Radicalism and Organised Liberalism in England, 1868–1888* (Liverpool University Press, 2014)

Review by **William C. Lubenow**

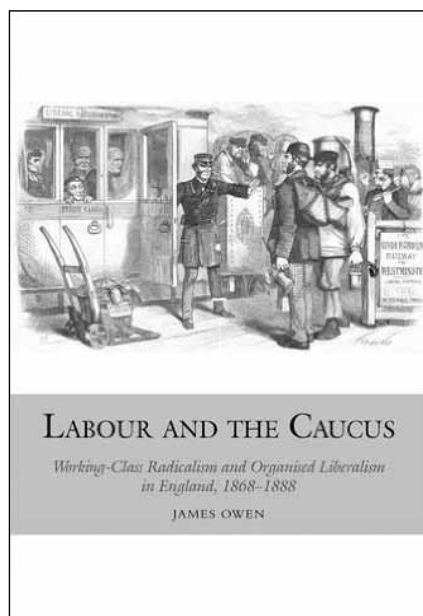
**T**OO FREQUENTLY THE 'labour movement' and 'organised liberalism' (the caucus) are treated as two separate but unified concepts. Dr Owen, in his excellent and stimulating examination of the prehistory of the Labour party between 1868 and 1888, deconstructs these concepts by making two points. Firstly, he exposes the flexible pragmatism of labour activists in working, when and where it suited their purposes, with organised Liberalism. Secondly, he discusses the rhetorical value of 'the caucus.' The concept was a shifting one: labour activists could use it to attack establishment Liberalism when they felt it stood in the way of their political ambitions; establishment Liberals could use it as a device to defend themselves against labour insurrectionists. This study, therefore, modifies, in interesting ways, the 'continuity thesis': that popular radicalism had an ongoing tradition through the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth-century. Owen, in contrast, reveals the cleavages within working-class radicalism and official Liberalism. The point he stresses throughout is that 'place' made a difference: locality, but also the nature of the electoral environment (whether the contests were parliamentary or municipal), made a difference in the ways potential labour candidates conducted themselves in their relationship with organised Liberalism. The upshot was that neither the 'labour movement' nor 'official Liberalism' were fixed and rigid categories organising political experience.

While never taking on board the error that there is no reality independent of language, Owen gives proper weight to use of language as labour activists and members of the caucus addressed each other in their contests for political position. Yet he always engages in this analysis of the connections between the linguistic and the political and cultural environments of party organisations and elections in various places both urban and rural. He carefully shackles the more freebooting elements of what has been called the 'linguistic turn' by scrupulous attention to rigorous methods. To carry out this task Owen has consulted widely and deeply

in the unpublished manuscripts and correspondence of the time: the John Burns papers, the George Howell papers, the Labour Representation League papers, the H. J. Wilson papers; the national and local newspapers; the periodical literature of the time; the published autobiographies of leading and minor figures; and the extensive scholarly literature on the labour movement and Liberalism. Owen's sturdy interrogation of these materials as well as his penchant for examining the local details of political action yields a rich trove of scholarly insights into a perennial historical problem: the ways in which novelty can disrupt and the ways robust agencies can accommodate change, how there can be differences and yet there can be ongoing persistence.

The Second Reform Act introduced a period of what might be called an age of mass politics. It offered challenges and opportunities to the two major parties of state. Both Gladstone and Salisbury embarked upon a series of strategies converting British parliamentary sovereignty to popular sovereignty. It also offered the opportunity for the likes of Joseph Chamberlain to destroy three perfectly good political parties, the Liberal party over home rule and the Conservative and Liberal Unionist parties over tariff reform. It also offered new opportunities (and challenges) to nascent radical and socialist groupings. In the 1880s three socialist organisations – the Social-Democratic Federation, the Socialist League, and the Fabian Society – emerged. But these bodies neither coordinated with each other nor were they internally united on organisational policy. Some members of these groups preferred a parliamentary policy, others an industrial policy. H. M. Hyndman determined to press the SDF into a parliamentary strategy; William Morris and others resigned, regarding this policy as mere political opportunism. Within the Fabian Society Sidney Webb favoured the strategy of permeating official Liberalism, drawing it into socialism. Bernard Shaw, however, regarded the official Liberals as a 'forest of dead trees.' When John Burns, regarded as the first socialist to enter a parliamentary contest,





contested the newly created constituency of Nottingham West, he did so not as a socialist representing the SDF but rather as someone firmly established in the radical tradition. He identified himself with Chamberlain, not Hyndman.

An examination of local politics, assessing the language socialist activists used, illustrates the way socialist activists were prepared to modify their previously published positions. Further, that the local political environment shaped the ways activists engaged both each other and

official Liberalism. Finally, it was not so much the 'non-revolutionary' character of the British workers which prevented their conversion from Liberalism to more assertive organisations. Rather, it was the close relations between official Liberalism, the miners, their unions, and especially Non-conformity which 'which created a formidable barrier that the socialists could not penetrate.' (185) This was not a case of working-class 'conservatism.' The relations between local Liberalism and socialist activists was an assertion of equality, not deference. Attention to the strained relationship between working-class activism, in its various forms, and the Liberal caucus, in its various parliamentary and urban and rural forms, show how the various questions of membership in various groups and their programmes were negotiated in the dynamic formation of political identities.

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in 1992 – one of only four gains for the party in that year's general election – is assigned particular significance as setting an example to other Cornish seats, though this does prompt the question of why gains in other parts of the country did not result in similar geographic concentrations of success. The answer in part is scattered throughout the book in the various references to Labour's failure in the early and mid twentieth century to establish itself firmly in Cornwall, leaving a much wider space in the political environment for the Liberal Party than elsewhere in the country.

More controversially, Ault suggests that the 1997 successes flowed from a strategic choice by the party: '[The Lib Dem] period of greatest electoral success has been since they abandoned equidistance in the mid-1990s. So, [the party's usual] search for an independent identity, however logical, may have been what was actually holding the party back.'

Conversely, a sense of a distinctive political culture in Cornwall is, Ault concludes, not much of a factor in explaining the Liberal Democrat successes. Feelings of geographic distance and separateness helped foster an anti-establishment mood which benefited a challenger political party, especially as, unlike in Wales or Scotland, it did not come with a nationalistic tinge which benefited a nationalist party. (The Cornish nationalists have never had anything close to the electoral success of the Welsh and Scottish nationalists.) But that was only a relatively small factor.

The character of key Liberal (Democrat) campaigners comes through as being more important, with Ault drawing many pen portraits of many of the party's MPs from the region, showing how in their many different personal ways they were nearly all something out of the ordinary. Moreover, there seems to have been something about Cornwall – perhaps its rural nature – which allowed such personal flair to flourish and gain political reward. It also, Ault suggests, was the sort of territory in which the Liberal and then Liberal Democrat emphasis on local issues could best flourish.

This seems to run slightly counter to the culture point and is a tension left mostly unexplored in Ault's book: is what is significant about Cornwall not its political culture directly, but rather that it is a culture which lets other factors be significant in ways that do not play out elsewhere? There is some evidence in support of this view in Ault's constituency

## Cornwall: culture, character and campaigns

John Ault, *Liberal Democrats in Cornwall – Culture, Character or Campaigns?* (Create Space, 2015)

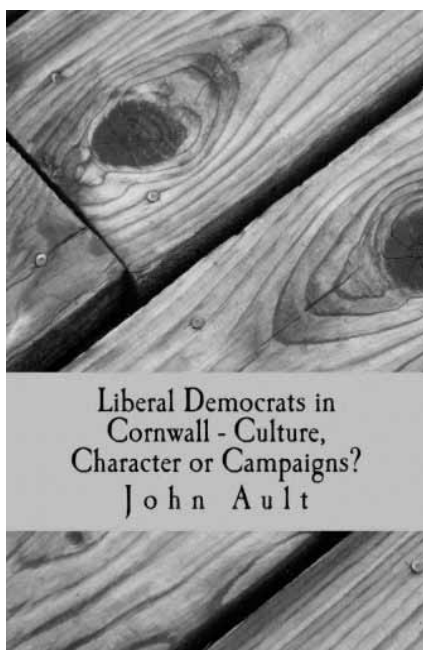
Review by **Mark Pack**

**A**N EXPANDED VERSION of the author's PhD thesis, John Ault's *Liberal Democrats in Cornwall* is a valuable addition to the relatively sparse number of detailed local histories of the Liberal Democrats. Given its academic roots, it is also much more rigorous in its research and sourcing than other local histories such as *A Flagship Borough: 25 Years of a Liberal Democrat Sutton Council*, *Southport Liberal Association: The first 100 years* or *The Liberals in Hampshire*. Moreover, by looking at a concentrated geographic area, yet one that is larger than a single local party, John Ault is able to provide rather more perspective on the questions of why Liberal Democrats prospered – at least until the

2015 general election – in the areas under examination.

As the title suggests, he tries out the three theories, culture, character and campaigns to explain why Cornwall remained a two-party Conservative–Liberal (Democrat) political system even when Labour was becoming one of the two main parties elsewhere. Cornwall was an area where the old Liberal Party survived better than in most places, and was then also the site of major success under the Lib Dems, including a major breakthrough in 1997 and culminating in the party winning all of the county's parliamentary seats in 2005.

In explaining the start of that run of success, the gain of North Cornwall



research, though it would be fair to conclude that it is more suggestive than conclusive and that it points to a Celtic-fringe rather than Cornwall-only phenomenon.

Turning to the third of Ault's putative factors – campaigning – he draws extensively on telephone surveys conducted in constituencies around the UK before and after the 2010 general election to set the Cornish 2010 results in context. Around 2,600 people were surveyed over thirteen constituencies, making the individual constituency results prone to significant margins of error but sufficient to draw more general conclusions. The constituency analysis gives a multifaceted result, both showing the importance of local campaigning intensity to Liberal Democrat results but also that in some areas in Cornwall the party outperformed for its level of activity, suggesting a wider regional (or, given what is said above, Celtic-fringe) effect.

## Boris' Winston

Boris Johnson, *The Churchill Factor: How One Man Made History*

(Hodder & Stoughton, 2014)

Review by **Andrew Connell**

**A**NOTHER BOOK ABOUT Churchill; is there anything more to say? In identifying Churchill's refusal – backed by Archibald Sinclair in a walk-on role, but not by his 'former mentor' Lloyd George, 'dazzled' by the Fuhrer and now 'an out-and-out defeatist' – to

Given contemporary debates in the party about whether really intensive literature-based campaigning works, it is worth noting that Ault finds that delivering six or more pieces of literature a year outside of election time delivers results. His post-2010 surveys in a smaller sample of seats also give a hint of what was to nearly sink the party in 2015: the less the electorate focused on the contest as being a local choice between rival candidates (rather than a national contest), the worse the Liberal Democrats did.

As the book is an adaptation of John Ault's PhD, it shows its academic roots frequently. Often that is useful, such as in the range of reference sources given for further reading. The less specialist reader should also be aware that this also means the book moves relatively slowly at times when Ault goes through literature reviews. There are also enough typographical errors to be fairly noticeable, and occasionally they also obscure understanding – as with the reference to phantom Appendixes B, C and D for details of the telephone surveys. The typography also is functional rather than beautiful, though at least the generous line spacing leaves plenty of spaces for scribbled thoughts.

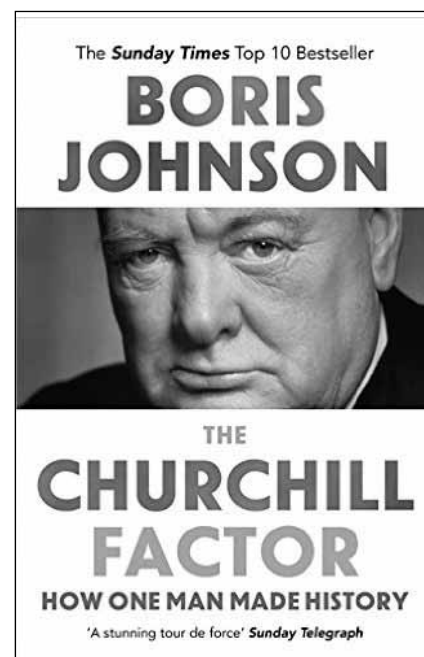
Overall, the verdict on Cornwall is that whilst it was campaigning which most propelled Liberal Democrat success, it worked best in tandem with popular and effective characters – and the environment in the Celtic fringe in general was the most receptive for this combination.

*Dr Mark Pack worked at party HQ from 2000 to 2009, heading up the party's online operation for the 2001 and 2005 general elections. He is author of 101 Ways To Win An Election.*

negotiate with a seemingly irresistible, but irredeemably evil, Third Reich in the summer of 1940 as his supreme achievement, Boris Johnson is in accord with an historical consensus contested only on the far right.

But his Churchill is not only the hedgehog who knew one big thing; he is also the fox who knew many things. Egregiously intrepid, courageous, vastly energetic, farsighted and clear-thinking but unfailingly human, Boris's Winston had a unique historical impact that was 'colossal' yet benign. Rationally skipping between Conservative and Liberal parties while embodying the best instincts of both, he was progenitor and later creator of the welfare state (albeit 'heavily influenced' by Lloyd George); he turned the scales in World War I by pioneering the tank, and in World War II by forging the special relationship with the United States. Indeed, most of what is best about modern Europe, Africa and the Middle East can be attributed to Churchill; and what is worst to subsequent failures to heed his wisdom.

Not that Johnson's story is pure hagiography. Churchill is acknowledged to have been wrong about the Dardanelles, Chanak, the gold standard, India and the abdication. But even then he turns out not to have been really to blame. The return to gold was pressed upon him against his better judgement by the likes of Montague Norman, who should have known better; and in his quixotic championing of Edward VIII's right to marry Mrs Simpson and remain king he was ahead of his time. True, Churchill had personal flaws: he was self-indulgent and improvident; he could be inconsiderate and rude. But in the final analysis these were the flaws of the diamond, subsumed in the greatness of the man. If love is imagining that you know someone's faults but they just don't matter, here is a love story.



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A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

# Coalition: Could Liberal Democrats have handled it better?

The 2015 election decisively ended the Liberal Democrats' participation in government. Did what the party achieved in coalition between 2010 and 2015 justify the damage? Could the party have managed coalition better? The meeting marks the publication of the autumn *Journal of Liberal History*, a special issue on the policy record of the coalition.

Speakers: **David Laws** (Minister for Schools, 2012–15), **Chris Huhne** (Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, 2010–12), **Akash Paun** (Institute for Government). Chair: **Jo Swinson** (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment relations, consumer and postal affairs, 2012–15).

**7.45pm, Sunday 18 September**

Lancaster Room, Hilton Brighton Metropole (no conference pass necessary)

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The suggestion that in identifying so closely with Winston Boris is effectively proclaiming admiration of himself as he would wish to be seen is irresistible; and depending on his future career, the *Churchill Factor* may be a key source for historians of the author. It certainly offers clues to his role in the 2016 referendum. Yes, Churchill was 'a visionary founder of the movement for a united Europe'; but he envisaged a unique semi-detached British role, a vital bridge between Europe, the US and the Commonwealth. Johnson could have gone either way on Brexit. I think he

calculated that his Churchillian formula could best be negotiated in the wake of a close vote to stay in the EU, and on the assumption that remain would win campaigned to limit its majority. He was aghast at the result, and after a half-hearted attempt to float the model, walked away – for a few days, until Theresa May, unexpectedly appointing him Foreign Secretary, gave him the opportunity to put his hero's theory into practice. Watch this space.

Like Winston, Boris writes to sell copies. His prose has neither Churchillian grandiloquence nor the

conventional restraint of those who consider themselves serious historians. The bibliography was compiled by a scholarly amanuensis. The text is not annotated, although page-by-page 'Notes on Sources' at the end of the book enable the reader to track down most of the quotations, if not the evidence for the plausible assertion that Winston Churchill never in his life rode on a bus. What Johnson offers is a series of bracing chats. He wants the reader to engage with him, share his jokes, travel with him as he explores the ground on which his hero trod and imagines Churchill's clerical assistant, 'a pretty Home Counties sort of girl in flattish shoes, with a sensible skirt and nothing too fussy about your jewellery or make-up'. These conceits may impress or irritate, but most readers will turn the pages to the end; and even if they are uncertain as to the significance of what they have just read, they will know they have been entertained.

*Andrew Connell is a retired history teacher. His book, Appleby Gypsy Horse Fair: Mythology, Origins, Evolution and Evaluation, was published in 2015. He is a former mayor of Appleby and a Liberal Democrat district councillor.*

## Liberal Democrat History Group online

### Website

Details of our activities and publications, guides to archive sources, research resources, and a growing number of pages on Liberal history: [www.liberalhistory.org.uk](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk)

### Email

Join our email mailing list for news of meetings and publications – the fastest and earliest way to find out what we're doing. Fill in the form at: <http://bit.ly/LDHGemail>.

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