

Reviews

consists largely of ceramic objects which could be produced cheaply on a large scale, but it also includes examples of commemorative works in brass, silver, wood, and glass. These objects carry the images of those who by dint and drive advanced the great reform bill: Lord Grey, Brougham, Lord John Russell, and Lord Althorp. The collection includes a tray blending the messages of reform and patriotism portraying a young man carrying a tricolor banner bearing the slogan 'Reform'. He stands on a greenward which carries the slogan 'England Forever'. There is also, among others such, a spirit flask of Daniel O'Connell – a reminder of Catholic emancipation and a nod to the future of O'Connell's campaign for repeal of the Act of Union. There is also a spirit flask of Frederick, Duke of York and Albany, a popular figure who is commemorated by a 124-foot column in Waterloo Place hard by the Reform Club. There are also plates, mugs, and jugs celebrating the Reform Act itself. A punch bowl is decorated with the slogan 'The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill'. An 'Old Rotten Tree' jug condemns the rotten borough system. A cream jug (not the cow creamer celebrated in the works of P. G. Wodehouse) carrying an image of Lord John Russell is a tribute to 'The Champions of Reform'. A teapot, fittingly bearing the image of Lord Grey, also carries the portraits of Lord John Russell and Brougham. There are snuffboxes in the collection as well as a silver urn dedicated to Joseph Hume, a member of the

Reform Club and MP for various constituencies from 1818 until his death. The urn was presented to him at a dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand. It acknowledged 'his Great Zeal/ And persevering advocacy/of Reform Retrenchment &/the Removal of all/ Public Abuses'. There are Britannica mugs and jugs, reminders that reform was no French disease but a movement fully compatible with British patriotism. The collection contains a miniature cannon inscribed 'The Voice of the People' which was said to have been fired at a reform demonstration in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire in 1831–1832.

These are examples of efforts to make instrumental words flesh. The collection, of which this catalogue is a beautiful description, contains 100 artifacts that are material accounts of the events and the people involved in the passing of the Great Reform Act. This is the first volume of the catalogue and we can look forward to another that will disclose the richness of the Reform Club's collections further.

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wider lessons. The reader is mostly left to spot what patterns he or she can in the stories, but the book does provide a useful service in capturing this bygone age of local government as it looked from the political inside.

Norman Baker's time in helping take the Liberal Democrat to control of Lewes Council – which he led for some time – and then to parliamentary victory also saw some very intensive and bitter party infighting. Most of the time Baker is relatively magnanimous about those he fell out with and his own limitations as a group leader – but only most of the time.

The second book-within-the-book follows Norman Baker's parliamentary career, and in particular his four and a half years as a minister in a coalition whose creation in May 2010 Baker strongly supported, though he doubts the wisdom of initially presenting it as a 'love in' rather than as a business relationship between people who often disagree.

Curiously absent from the account of these years are most of his Liberal Democrat parliamentary colleagues. Nick Clegg gets fulsomely praised – more so indeed than Charles Kennedy who Baker found remarkably lukewarm rather than congratulatory in his reaction to Baker's investigations securing one of the resignations of Peter Mandelson. (The lukewarm reaction of Kennedy and other Lib Dems is put down by Baker to a belief that Mandelson was far more warmly disposed to cooperating with the Liberal Democrats than many of his Labour colleagues.) Also frequently praised are Baker's staff, but

Ploughing his own furrow

Norman Baker, *Against the Grain* (Biteback Publishing, 2015)

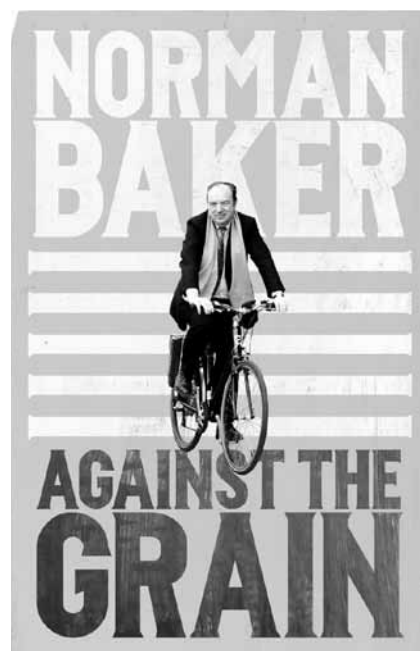
Review by **Mark Pack**

NORMAN BAKER WAS quickest off the mark in the former-Lib-Dem-MPs-write-books stakes, and his lengthy *Against the Grain*, published in 2015, has the virtue not only of interest and humour but also of capturing views fresh out of coalition before longer-term consensus has set firmly in minds.

However, much of the book is not about coalition and, indeed, *Against the Grain* is really two books in one. The first is a tale of politics as it used to be,

documenting what already sounds a very distant world where councils closed their offices at lunchtime, the government kept a 1771 map of the River Dee an official secret, a cinema licensing committee existed for an area without any cinemas (Baker got appointed to it), and hard local campaigning could take Liberal Democrats to council control and parliamentary victories.

The rapid-fire anecdotes keep this part of the book moving swiftly, though at the cost of relatively little analysis or



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other Lib Dem MPs are notably absent most of the time, even when he is talking about issues where his work closely overlapped with colleagues.

That absence reflects a theme which runs through both halves of the book, and the title too, namely Baker's instinctively individual approach. He gives the impression of being much happier ploughing his own furrow than working in a team with others, and the book certainly isn't an exercise in currying favour with former parliamentary colleagues.

From his battles to be allowed to ride a bicycle as a minister in place of a chauffeured car through to his views on how environmental campaigners got their approach wrong in the 2010–15 parliament (targeting the Lib Dems for not doing more rather than the Tories for doing almost nothing), the pages about being a minister are packed with insight.

As in the first half of the book, magnanimity to opponents is the norm, though notable exceptions are Theresa May's special advisors during coalition – far more so than Theresa May herself – and Tony Blair, especially for his record on Iraq.

That of course brings up Norman Baker's interest in conspiracy theories. Those who (like me) doubt his views on the death of David Kelly will not find anything in here to win them over to Baker's view, though his account of

other occasions of government cover-up and misdeeds are often rather more convincing. Certainly they do help explain his outlook – even if you view the time he was apparently followed and had a phone call cut off more likely a matter of bad luck and coincidence than of an attempt by dark forces to intimidate him.

Regardless of your view on that, there is much to commend in Baker's account of government – how coalition could or should really work behind the scenes and how to make canny use of media outlets liberals love to hate, such as the *Daily Mail*, to help achieve your

own political ends. Especially when up against as partisan and leak-prone opponents as Theresa May's special advisors.

For a politician as idiosyncratic as Norman Baker, the memoirs are rather packed with useful insights for both students of government (local and national) and for fellow Liberal Democrats.

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 and the party's election law manual, as well as co-author of the party's general election agents' handbook.

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