

politicians can do at a local level to put Liberal virtues into practice and to empower people. Indeed, Dombey pointed out that Sutton had done things the opposite way around to many boroughs, by first briefly holding one of its Westminster seats in the early 1970s, and then going on to win the council in the following decade, on both occasions with Graham Tope as the leading player.

Currently, forty-four out of fifty-seven councillors in Sutton are Lib Dems. Whilst the local party is working towards a ninth successive stint in power from May 2018, it had to think hard about why it wanted to win and then to express its aims clearly. For Dombey, the key task was to face the challenge of a

loss of cohesion and a growth of mistrust in politicians, particularly in the context of the lies and deceit over Brexit. But this was why she felt the Liberal Democrats were in the strongest position to take on this challenge. She concluded that ‘we do not believe in power as divine right – that is the Tory way. We do not believe people cannot be trusted – that is the Labour way. We believe in the freedom of people to empower themselves and build their own lives – that is the Lib Dem way ... I have to pinch myself every day at the privilege I have for helping make this real’.

Twenty minutes of questions followed and many speakers from the floor echoed the panel. The first questioner,

Sir David Williams – former leader of Richmond Council said that ‘Tony is right – bottom-up not top-down politics’. In the discussion that followed, there was much fond reminiscence of worthy political battles past and the Liberal values they had involved. As the Liberal Democrats look to the future, they must also look to rebuild from the foundations of what once lay before. They may succeed again if – like Kipling – they can ‘watch the things you gave your life to, broken, And stoop and build ’em up with worn-out tools’.

*Douglas Oliver is Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.*

# Letters to the Editor

## Nelia Penman

Before Nelia Penman passed away on 16 August 2017, at the age of 101, she was the last (known) surviving Liberal Party candidate from the 1945 general election. In 1945 she contested Sevenoaks as Nelia Muspratt, two years before her marriage.

She had become the last surviving candidate following the passing of Arthur Walter James (Bury) and Philip John Willmet (Isle of Thanet), who both died in 2015. Jeremy Hutchinson, later Baron Hutchinson of Lullington, contested Westminster Abbey for Labour in 1945 and at the age of 102 is the last known surviving candidate of any party from that election.

Had Neville Chamberlain chosen to call a general election in 1939 as had been anticipated, Nelia Muspratt would have been Liberal candidate for Liverpool Wavertree, having been adopted as prospective candidate the year before at the age of just 22.

*Graem Peters*

## Lloyd George and Nonconformity.

Chris Wrigley’s most interesting article (‘The Nonconformist mind of Lloyd George’, *Journal of Liberal History* 96, autumn 2017) rightly emphasises the importance of Lloyd George’s Nonconformist background in his rise to the summit of power. His Campbellite

Baptism reinforced the view of him as a Welsh outsider.

In fact, one could argue that it was Nonconformity which made him Prime Minister. In the intrigues and manoeuvres in late 1916 which led to his supplanting Asquith, his main champions were almost all Nonconformists who saw him personally as an egalitarian populist democrat, the complete opposite of elitist figures like Grey and the turncoat Congregationalist Asquith (not to mention Margot).

Those behind the moves for Lloyd George to lead party and nation during the conscription crisis – Addison, Kellaway and David Davies – were all committed Nonconformists, like many of Frederick Cawley’s pro-conscription Liberal War Committee, the chapels in khaki. Many of those who swung from Asquith to Lloyd George in the first week of December 1916 were self-made Nonconformists, often businessmen, who resented the ‘noblest Roman’ patrician style of the Asquithians. They were joined by important Nonconformist journalists like Robertson Nicoll of the *British Weekly* along with the *Baptist Times* and *Christian World*, while the new premier took particular trouble in finding office for influential dissenting figures like Compton-Rickett and Illingworth.

The Methodists strongly backed Lloyd George on conscription and strategy, as they had once backed the South African War (which saw L.G. in fierce opposition). Despite failure to get their way over such issues as state purchase of the drink trade, and later over the bloody ‘retaliation’ policy in Ireland, they mostly stuck with the Baptist premier. Disendowing the Welsh Church’s tithe in 1919 gave them some comfort.

The split between Lloyd Georgians and Asquithians was therefore as much about religious equality as about wartime leadership. The Liberal Party suffered grievously from it – and so did the moral shibboleths of the ‘Nonconformist conscience’. Lloyd George could not even find comfort in his own tabernacle at Castle Street Baptist chapel. Like his pre-war guru, Dr. Clifford, its two post-war ministers, James Nicholas and Herbert Morgan, joined the Labour Party, yet more lapsed sheep gone astray.

*Kenneth O. Morgan*

## French elections

Michael Steed’s comprehensive run through the alphabet soup of French politics over the decades in ‘En Marche! A New Dawn for European Liberalism?’ (*Journal of Liberal History* 96, autumn 2017), with its changing

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allegiances, and personality-based politics, was the best argument in favour of a first-past-the-post electoral system I have read in years.

Ian Stuart

### The 2017 election (1)

Professor John Curtice strives at some length ('The 2017 Election – A Missed Opportunity?', *Journal of Liberal History* 96, autumn 2017) to explain why the Liberal Democrats did well in a few seats and badly in all others. He draws extensively on opinion polls to find some rhyme or reason in it all but I don't think finds any clear pattern.

Overall, we did badly but why in a few seats the trend was bucked, in some cases spectacularly so, is a bit of a mystery, and will probably remain so. No doubt efforts will be made to discover their secrets so they can be replicated elsewhere next time but I suspect the effort will be in vain. Certainly we might just as well consult Mystic Meg as study opinion polls; their reputation is surely in tatters as they get so much wrong with increasing frequency.

What we do know is that the base of the party is becoming stronger as we gain seats in council elections all over the country, using tried and tested techniques. Unfortunately they involve us in a lot of hard and persistent work, but there is simply no substitute.

Trevor Jones

### The 2017 election (2)

I take issue with the theme of Professor Curtice's article ('The 2017 Election – A Missed Opportunity?', *Journal of Liberal History* 96, autumn 2017). The implication of the title is that the Liberal Democrats could have done more and performed better in the election, an idea which I reject.

Given what happened in 2015, with all the analysts I read forecasting that the party would cease to exist as a significant force, and probably be reduced to three seats at a subsequent election, the comeback was the best that could have been hoped for. In addition, a clear marker has been put down for the future. Elections do not stand in isolation – one example from history being that a key factor in Labour's defeat in 1959 was the memory of post-war austerity. Corbyn's success has been largely based on the advantage he has in being able to distance himself from the shambles of the Blair–Brown governments.

Many voters are still clinging to the idea that the Brexit scenario will play out successfully while we still hear confident predictions that Brexit has not affected the economy as forecast. This ignored the fact that Brexit has not happened and nobody, least of all the British government, has any idea of what final terms, if any, will be agreed and by definition what the effects of this will be.

Reality will soon dawn, however, and the party's position is clear. Many voters and former party workers did not forgive the leadership for what they considered to be a great betrayal in 2010. When MPs voted for the deal were they told that the intention was to ditch the main policy on which the election had been fought, i.e. tuition fees? When the party went into coalition in Scotland it was made quite clear that the abolition of tuition fees was a red line.

On a broader perspective Lord Heseltine has stated that the Conservatives have been the usual party of government in the UK. What he failed to mention is that since 1922 we have witnessed a catastrophic decline in Britain's world position. While loss of Empire was inevitable and, indeed, a natural development, it

was not inevitable that Britain would find itself in the position of overwhelming weakness it was in in 1940, after nine years of Conservative government, or the position the UK will be in after Brexit, on the sidelines in Europe without influence and with an economy largely dependent on such deals as can be negotiated. With the US seeking to put a 180 per cent penal tariff on Canadian British aircraft the value of any free trade deal there must be highly suspect.

In 1960 Jo Grimond wrote that if the Liberal Party failed to make the breakthrough it would be because the British people were not prepared to face up to the reality of their new position in the world. That is an appropriate epitaph for the recent general election.

Looking to the future the one hope is that as future events unfold people should look back on the Coalition government as a period of comparative success for the British economy – a period that will come to an abrupt end in 2019. As mentioned earlier the success of the Liberal Democrats in 2017 was to lay down a clear policy path for the future.

Richard Pealling

# Reviews

## Radical Joe and Chocolate George

Andrew Reekes, *Two Titans, One City: Joseph Chamberlain and George Cadbury* (History West Midlands, 2017)

Review by Philip Davis

ANDREW REEKES' BIOGRAPHY OF two giant figures in the genesis of modern Birmingham marks another welcome venture from local publisher West Midlands History. Local loyalties or no, this comparative biography recommends itself as a fascinating study of two very different personalities who left an enduring mark on 'the City of a Thousand Trades' and were nationally significant figures.

Reekes' book on Joseph Chamberlain and George Cadbury demonstrates not only their distinctiveness – chiefly of character – but also their interactions. He maps their common beginnings from

municipal Liberalism and success in West Midlands manufacturing, to their later sharp political divergence, particularly over Chamberlain's imperialism and the Boer War. These distinctive journeys are illuminated by the common thread of Birmingham localism. Long after they had parted company politically and with no great personal warmth between them, Cadbury was willing to give financial and moral support to Chamberlain's last great city project, the founding of Birmingham University. Despite strong political differences the growing city remained at the heart of both men's affection and interests.