

Liberal History News

Summer 2018

New history of the Scottish Liberal Party

The Scottish Liberal Party was the dominant party of Victorian Scotland and, while its electoral fortunes declined with the rise of the Labour and (Scottish) Unionist parties during the 1920s, it remained a significant 'third' force in an increasingly crowded 'Scottish political system', particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century and, of course, upon its 1988 merger with the Social Democratic Party to form its current political party, the Scottish Liberal Democrats.

Yet while the party's early history has received some attention from historians, the past century of Scottish Liberal (and Scottish Liberal Democrat) history is relatively neglected in the relevant literature. Yes, the *Journal of Liberal History* has focused on aspects of the party's existence, but unlike the SNP and Scottish Conservatives, there exists no accessible, single-volume history of the party.

This is a gap I intend to fill with a major research project during 2018 and 2019, one that will also encompass single-volume histories of Scotland's four main political parties, but beginning with the Scottish Liberals/Liberal Democrats. Both primary and secondary sources will be consulted, chiefly relevant holdings at the National Library of Scotland, as well as contemporary books, pamphlets and media coverage. Oral interviews would also be deployed to cover more recent events.

The resulting book will be scholarly, comprehensively charting Scottish Liberal organisation, ideology, personnel and electoral performance, while also being written in an accessible way, ensuring it will be of value to the interested lay person as well as the specialist reader. I would also anticipate a reasonable amount of media interest upon publication, particularly in the run up to

Scottish Parliament elections due in 2021 and in the context of ongoing debates about Scotland's constitutional future.

Unfortunately, political and historical publishing in Scotland is not, with important exceptions, a commercially viable activity and therefore funding is essential. The project has already received generous support from the Trust for Scottish Liberal Democracy, the Scottish Liberal Club, the Liberal Democrat History Group and several individuals, although further donations would ensure that a thorough research is possible.

If you are interested in making a donation, please contact me at David Torrance, 72/7 Brunswick Street, Edinburgh EH7 5HU; email davidtorrance@hotmail.com

Dr David Torrance is the author or editor of more than a dozen books on Scottish political history and biography. He splits his time between Edinburgh and London.

Think history

Can you spare some time to help the Liberal Democrat History Group?

The History Group undertakes a wide range of activities – publishing this *Journal* and our Liberal history books and booklets, organising regular speaker meetings, maintaining the Liberal history website and providing assistance with research.

We'd like to do more, but our activities are limited by the number of people involved in running the Group. We would be enormously grateful for help with:

- Improving our website.
- Helping with our presence at Liberal Democrat conferences.
- Organising our meeting programme.
- Publicising our activities, through both social media and more traditional means.
- Running the organisation.

If you'd like to be involved in any of these activities, or anything else, contact the Editor, **Duncan Brack** (journal@liberalhistory.org.uk) – we would love to hear from you.

