

Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



Nonconformists and the Liberals

Roger Ottewill

Religion and politics in the Edwardian era Hampshire Congregationalists

Tim Hughes

The Liberal Party and the trade unions in the 1870s

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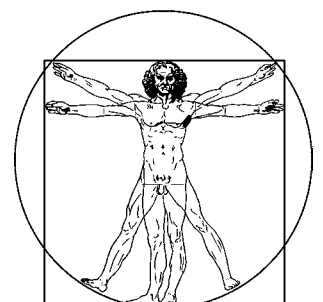
Asquith: Love, friendship and betrayal

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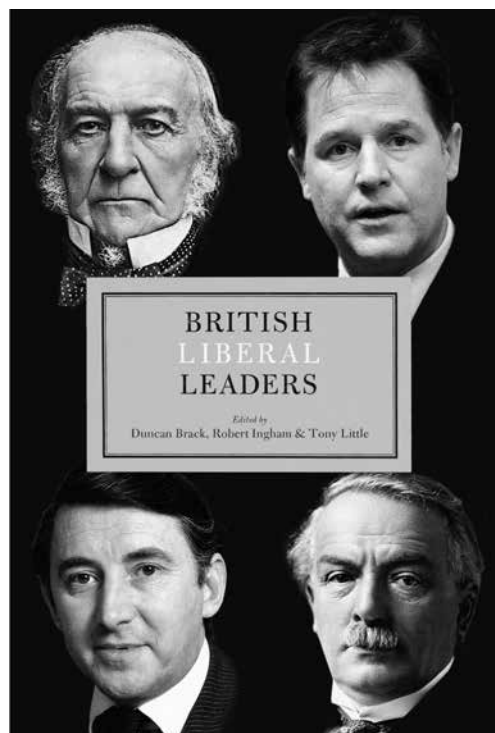
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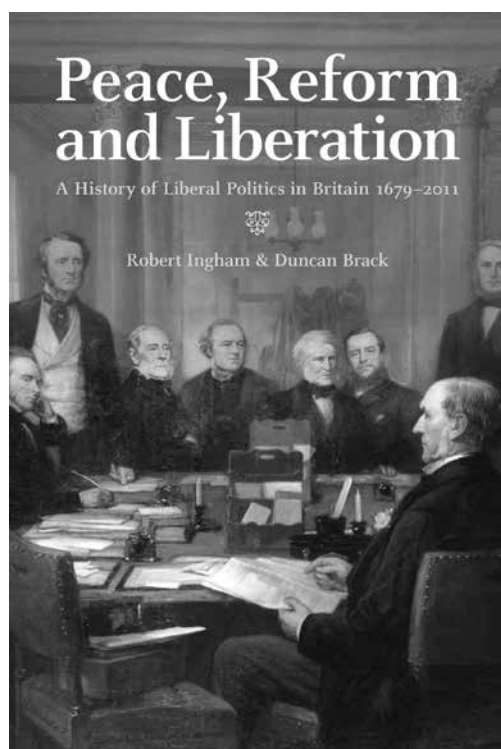
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Journal of Liberal History

The *Journal of Liberal History* is published quarterly by the Liberal Democrat History Group.

ISSN 1479-9642

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Online subscriptions are also available: to individuals at £45.00, and to institutions at £60.00. As well as printed copies, online subscribers can access online copies of current and past *Journals*.

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Cover design concept: **Lynne Featherstone**

Published by the Liberal Democrat History Group,
c/o 54 Midmoor Road, London SW12 0EN

Printed by **Kall-Kwik**,

Unit 1, 37 Colville Road, London W3 8BL

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

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

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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.



On This Day ...

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

June

6 June 1859: Whigs, Peelites and Radicals meet together in the afternoon at Willis' Rooms in King Street, St James', to discuss how to overthrow the minority Conservative government led by Lord Derby. The meeting was addressed by Palmerston and Lord John Russell but Gladstone was a notable absentee. The meeting cemented together the three anti-Tory groups and 6 June 1859 is generally taken to be the date of the formation of the Liberal Party. Less than a week later the new coalition carried a motion of no confidence in Derby's administration and Palmerston led the new Liberal government which replaced it.

July

22 July 1908: Death of William Randel Cremer, pacifist and winner the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on international arbitration, and Liberal MP for Haggerston 1885–95 and 1900–08. Born into poverty in Fareham, Hampshire, Cremer was active in the trade union movement campaigning for the nine-hour day and helping to form the Workmen's Peace Association. In parliament Cremer campaigned for international arbitration treaties with the USA and France. His work with French MP Frederic Passy led to the formation of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, of which Cremer was Vice President. In 1903 his tireless work for peace was recognised with the Nobel Peace Prize, the first individual and the first Briton to receive the award.

August

26 August 1676: Birth of Sir Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford, Whig MP for Castle Rising 1701–02 and King's Lynn 1702–12 and 1713–42. Prime Minister 1721–42. Walpole came from a strong Whig family and first achieved office under Lord Godolphin during the reign of Queen Anne. Following the formation of a Tory ministry, Walpole found himself impeached and expelled from the House of Commons. Re-elected on a wave of public sympathy, Walpole and the Whigs returned to power with the accession of George I. In 1720 the collapse of the South Sea Bubble led to the disgrace of many leading Whigs and led to Walpole's appointment as First Lord of the Treasury. As Prime Minister Walpole consolidated Whig power through use of royal patronage and pursued a policy of avoiding war, low taxes and reducing the national debt. Ironically it was Britain's involvement in the War of Jenkin's Ear that led to his downfall.

Letters to the Editor

Bill Pitt (1)

Because the *Journal* is such a respected organ of accurate history I must just correct part of Michael Meadowcroft's obituary of Bill Pitt in issue 97 (winter 2017–18). He accurately recounts my unsuccessful efforts to have Pitt stand down in Croydon in favour of Shirley Williams for the 1981 by-election and rightly describes him as a 'pedestrian candidate', but does not retell the detail of how he had to be minded by Richard Holme at every press conference and have his speech written for him at the one large public meeting I addressed in his support. (Indeed, I later complained that the SDP failed similarly to supervise their inadequate candidate at the Darlington by-election!).

I did pay tribute to Bill's clever strategy to avoid being dumped, and Meadowcroft generously suggests that if I had wooed the party more I might have succeeded in getting him to stand down – I doubt that. However, where

he goes overboard is in alleging that: 'Steel always neglected the party, which he did not rate as at all important', with a footnote referring readers to my own book. That is rubbish. The reference in my book was criticism of the perpetually chaotic Party *Council*, as anyone can read, not to the wider party.

He also states that 'an SDP victory in Croydon would have provided a real springboard for other victories and the possible eclipse of the Liberal Party'. I have a rather more robust view of the party than that, and we were operating in an Alliance where we had all the ground troops, members and councillors, whilst the SDP had some ministerial stars which we lacked. That is what made the Alliance so attractive, but Meadowcroft opted out.

David Steel

Letters to the Editor continued on page 19

Corrigenda

'Liberal archives at Flintshire Record Office, Hawarden' (*Journal of Liberal History* 97, winter 2017–18).

This article was slightly out of date in stating that the Glynne-Gladstone collection, although housed at Gladstone's Library, was accessible through Flintshire Record Office. In 2016 a decision was taken by Gladstone's Library that the collection should be accessible there and arrangements were made accordingly.

Anyone wishing to access the collection should therefore contact Gladstone's Library – contact details can be found on the website www.gladstoneslibrary.org.

'Lord Geraint of Ponterwyd' (*Journal of Liberal History* 97, winter 2017–18).

The article should have been titled 'Lord Geraint'. 'Ponterwyd' was his territorial designation but this did form part of his name.

Religion and the Liberal Party

Roger Ottewill examines the reasons why Nonconformists were drawn to the Liberal Party, through a case study of Hampshire Congregationalists in the Edwardian period.

Religion and Politics in The Experiences of Hampshire

ON COMMENCING HIS pastorate in 1904 at the historic Above Bar Congregational Church in Southampton, Rev. George Saunders stressed that his preaching would have an authentic 'Evangelical note', including the proclamation that Jesus Christ 'saves man from sin, through the power of His Cross.' At the same time, he stressed the point that:

It is by the application of the teaching of Jesus to the manifold life of today that we shall find the solution of all the problems which are pressing so heavily upon us. Hence you will not expect me to be silent in reference to the great social, *political* and national questions which affect for good or ill the welfare of our town and country [emphasis added].¹

In so doing, he was highlighting what, at the time, many Congregationalists considered to be a symbiotic relationship between religion and politics, which for the vast majority meant support for the Liberal Party.

In this article, following a section in which the religious and political contexts are outlined, three key questions are considered. What motivated Congregationalists to participate in politics? Which issues on the political agenda were of particular concern to them? How constrained were they in their pursuit of political objectives? In suggesting possible answers to these questions, primary source material is drawn mainly from doctoral research undertaken to reveal the preoccupations and associated discourses of the Congregationalists of Edwardian Hampshire and subsequent investigations.² By focusing on the local level, specifically mainland Hampshire as constituted at the beginning of the twentieth century,³ it is intended to enrich the broader narratives developed in secondary sources, such as the works of Stephen Koss,⁴ Ian Packer⁵ and Michael Watts,⁶



in the Edwardian Era Hampshire Congregationalists



and provide a basis for making future comparisons with other parts of the country.

Context

In seeking to capture the essence of their denomination and to rally the faithful, many Edwardian Congregationalists drew heavily on historical antecedents. For example, at the 1908 spring gathering of the Hampshire Congregational Union (HCU), held in Fareham, the chairman, Henry March Gilbert, in an address entitled 'Our Past and Present', reminded his audience that 'they had entered into a glorious heritage' and, in overly dramatic terms, that if their forefathers had been there they would have said: 'We too with great sums of fines, persecutions, imprisonments, tortures, and even with giving up life itself obtained for you this freedom which is yours today'.⁷ This was a reference to the inspiration and legitimacy that Congregationalism derived from the Great Ejection of 1662 when as Timothy Larsen explains, '... some 2,000 ministers were ejected from their livings because they could not swear their "unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed" in the new Prayer Book, or meet some of the other requirements of the new Act of Uniformity'.⁸ Many of those ejected attracted groups of followers who formed the nuclei of independent congregations, which by the Edwardian era had evolved into self-sustaining Congregational churches. By this stage, however, collegiality, as symbolised by the HCU, was as much a feature of Congregationalism as independency.

John Gay, in his study of the geography of religion, identifies Hampshire as one of the counties 'with a long-established tradition of independency' and an above-average concentration of Congregationalists.⁹ As such, it was the leading Nonconformist/Free Church denomination in the county. By 1901, Congregationalists had multiple places of worship in the three largest

Religion and Politics in the Edwardian Era: The Experience of the Hampshire Congregationalists

Overleaf: Rev. James Learmount (1860–1934), Minister of Christchurch Congregational Church from 1900 to 1906 (Christchurch History Society)

towns of Portsmouth, Southampton and Bournemouth and a church in most other urban centres of population. Moreover, the process of church extension, a key feature of the Victorian era and facilitated by the HCU, had seen new churches and chapels being established in many rural parts of the county as well as the expanding suburbs of Bournemouth and Southampton. Thus, a particular strength of Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire was its extensive network of churches covering most parts of the county.

At the time a key feature of Congregationalism was its close identification with what is known as 'political Nonconformity'. As Koss indicates, of the Nonconformist denominations, Congregationalists – along with Baptists, Presbyterians and some branches of Methodism – were the most likely to be 'organised to intervene in electoral and parliamentary affairs.'¹⁰ While Packer stresses how the ideologies of Nonconformity and Liberalism, with their emphasis on freedom of worship and of speech and a dislike of hierarchies, 'meshed'. This dated back to the Victorian era when, in the words of Argent, 'the common interests of the Free Churches and of political Liberalism had been manifest in the Nonconformist struggle for religious and civil liberties.'¹¹ Thus, 'Liberalism and Nonconformity often appealed to people for much the same reasons and were seen by their followers as naturally complementary.'¹²

It is important to recognise, however, that this was as much a local as a national phenomenon, for, as David Bebbington points out, by the end of the nineteenth century and into the Edwardian era '... leading men in the chapels were commonly leading men in the affairs of the localities too as school board members, as councillors, as mayors, and they often ran the constituency Liberal organisations'.¹³ In Basingstoke, for example, the contribution of Congregationalists to civic life was clearly underscored by editorial comment in the *Hants and Berks Gazette* when Henry Jackson replaced Thomas Edney on the aldermanic bench of the borough council:

The election of Mr H. Jackson, J.P., to the honoured position of an alderman ... is well deserved ... The new alderman and the one whose place he fills [i.e. Thomas Edney] have been old colleagues in many capacities. Both are staunch Liberals. Both are deacons of the Congregational Church. Both are teetotallers and for many long years have been ardent advocates of total abstinence. Both have taken a considerable share of public life; and both are held in high esteem by their fellow townsmen.¹⁴

Similarly, Thomas Fryer, a deacon and 'an old and esteemed member' of the Abbey Congregational Church in Romsey, was also closely 'associated with the public life of the town ... being a member of the Corporation ... and ... in politics ... a staunch Liberal'.¹⁵ His son George Fryer, who was

also a deacon and a leading figure in Congregational church life during the Edwardian era, was at the time of his father's death chairman of the Romsey Liberal and Radical Club thereby personifying the close relationship between the religious and the political. Likewise, three of the deacons of the new and high-status Avenue Congregational Church in Southampton, Edward Bance, James Hamilton and Edward Turner Sims, were very active local politicians in the Liberal cause. Bance was a Liberal councillor from 1874 to 1889 and then served on the aldermanic bench until 1913. He was also mayor in 1890, 1904 and 1910.¹⁶ Hamilton was a Liberal councillor from 1889 to 1893 and from 1904 to 1910, when he lost his seat by ten votes. During his second period of service on the council, he was chair of the Libraries Committee from 1906 until 1910, and held the office of sheriff from 1909 until his defeat. Hamilton was also a member of Southampton School Board until its demise in 1903. Sims was president of the Southampton and South Hants Liberal Association and, as such, had a high-profile role in the general elections of 1906 and 1910. Such examples could be replicated from every part of Hampshire.

Political engagement also extended to ministers. As Kenneth Brown has shown, a sizeable minority took part in political and philanthropic activities at this time, with Congregationalists along with Baptists being in the vanguard. Political activity embraced 'membership of political parties and of overtly political pressure groups' and philanthropic activity included writing about and participating 'in welfare movements – temperance, hospitals, libraries ...'.¹⁷ Examples of Congregational ministers from Edwardian Hampshire who were willing 'to nail their colours' to a party political mast included: Rev. William Miles, minister of Buckland Congregational Church in Portsmouth from 1903 to 1921, 'a staunch Liberal, ... [who] championed on public platforms the policy of Free Trade when that policy and Tariff Reform were the question of the day';¹⁸ Rev. William Moncrieff, minister of East Cliff Congregational Church from 1901 to 1907, who was 'an ardent Radical and an eager student of the work of social reformers, ... [and] took his full share in the political and civic affairs of Bournemouth';¹⁹ Rev. Enoch Hunt, minister of Fordingbridge Congregational Church from 1886 to 1902, who was 'a keen Liberal ... [and] suffered as a passive resister' in the campaign against the Education Act 1902;²⁰ and Rev. Nicholas Richards, minister of Winchester Congregational Church from 1907 to 1910, who commented at his farewell gathering that 'Liberalism was in his very blood' and that he left the city 'as much of a Nonconformist as when he came (applause), and a stronger Liberal than when he came (applause)'.²¹ These examples confirm Argent's observation that: 'The temper of many Congregational ministers ... was ... Liberal in politics and ... [compassionate] in ... [their] attitudes to social need.'²²

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these examples, in electoral terms Edwardian Hampshire was hardly promising territory for the Liberal Party since at parliamentary level the county was predominantly Conservative. Only Portsmouth and Southampton, each with two MPs, could be described as marginal. Here, between 1885 and 1914, the honours tended to be evenly divided between, on the one hand, the Conservatives and their allies, the Liberal Unionists, and, on the other, the Liberals. Of the remaining six constituencies, the only exceptions to Conservative hegemony were Christchurch, which included Bournemouth, and the New Forest, both of which returned Liberals in their landslide election victory of 1906.²³ Indeed, in commenting on the 1906 election results, the *Hampshire Independent* observed that ‘never before ... [had] there been such a political upheaval in the county, as every constituency was contested, and the victories which have been won were gained only after the most strenuous fighting...’²⁴ However, apart from Southampton, all the 1906 gains were lost at the January 1910 general election, with the Liberal-supporting *Southampton Times* commenting that Southampton remained a ‘bright beam in the murky darkness of Tory Hampshire.’²⁵ By contrast, from a religious perspective, Congregationalism was, as previously indicated, a prominent feature of the ecclesiastical landscape of Edwardian Hampshire.

Motivation

Congregational engagement in politics was essentially a response to two variants of the Christian gospel, the ‘social’ and the ‘civic’. The ‘social gospel’ can be seen, in part, as a reaction against the pietism and individualism inherent in the ‘personal gospel’. Reduced to its bare bones, it was, as Bebbington puts it: ‘an attempt to change human beings by transforming their environment rather than touching their hearts.’²⁶ That said, those who subscribed to the social gospel believed that faith alone was sterile and should be a precursor to collective action intended to right societal wrongs. As Michael Watts points out, although evangelical Nonconformists had traditionally argued that the solution to society’s problems ‘lay in the repentance of sin and surrender to the will of God ... to a growing body of opinion in the later nineteenth century, the fundamental cause of many individual and social problems lay not so much with personal failings as with the environmental conditions which so often rendered the individual powerless ... [thus] their solution lay not in personal redemption but in reformation by local authorities or by the state.’²⁷

Thus, many argued that merely ameliorating the symptoms of these problems through altruistically inspired ‘good works’ was an insufficient response and steps had to be taken to tackle the underlying causes, which inevitably implied

political action. As it was put by Romsey’s Congregational minister from 1909 to 1914, Rev. Albert Bage, ‘the problem that confronted them was whether they were going to deal with the causes of social distress or the results. It was a matter of whether they should clothe the naked, and help the homeless or fight the causes from which those evils originated.’²⁸ For Neal Blewett: ‘The social gospel had much in common with, indeed was often the inspiration of, the “new Liberalism” which sought, in the words of one writer “a via media between Collectivism, Conservative or Socialist, and the decaying individualism of the Benthamite and Cobdenite epoch ...”’²⁹

Turning to the civic gospel, its genesis is particularly associated with Rev. George Dawson, a Baptist minister. However, a key role in its subsequent development was played by Rev. Robert Dale, minister of the prestigious Carrs Lane Congregational Church in Birmingham from 1854 until his death in 1895.³⁰ As Catherine Hall observes, ‘Dale unlike Dawson, held to the faith of the evangelicals and his particular contribution in later years to the civic gospel was his articulation of municipalism with a living faith.’³¹ Quoting Dale, Ann Rodrick points out that in the mid-1880s he assured his readers and listeners that ‘civil authority is ... a divine institution. The man who holds municipal or political office is a “minister of God”. One man may, therefore, have just as real a Divine vocation to become a town councillor or a Member of Parliament, as another to become a missionary to the heathen.’³² Although the ‘civic gospel’, as such, appears to have been little discussed in Edwardian Hampshire, by serving on local public bodies some Congregational deacons and ministers demonstrated, at the very least, a tacit commitment to it – they practised what Dale preached. Like him they ‘believed in the dignity as well as ... the duty of municipal life.’³³ Thus, Rev. Capes Tarbolton, minister of London Street Congregational Church in Basingstoke from 1887 to 1907 and one of Dale’s Hampshire disciples, in praising ‘... [the] robust type of ... Christian piety’, observed that it meant not abstention from, but engagement with, civic life.³⁴ Likewise, one of his successors, Rev. Rocliffe Mackintosh, commented at the mayor’s banquet in November 1912, that:

The clergy were especially interested in the condition of the people, and Councils had a great deal to do with the conditions in which people lived; so in that way the clergy and public men might be workers together for the betterment of the people and for the extension of the power of religion. They should encourage the best men in connection with their churches to enter public life and to do what they could to raise its ideals, for while our public life stood high in comparison with that of other countries, there was still a great deal that might be changed for the better (applause).³⁵

Congregational engagement in politics was essentially a response to two variants of the Christian gospel, the ‘social’ and the ‘civic’.

Religion and Politics in the Edwardian Era: The Experience of the Hampshire Congregationalists



A particular interest of Mackintosh was education and the mayor referred to his involvement in the establishment of a high school for girls, which had provided him with an early opportunity 'of connecting himself with the civic life of the town'.³⁶

For Hampshire Congregationalists the fact that many of their leaders were active in public service was a source of pride. Hence James Thomas in his presidential address to the HCU in 1906 asserted that:

As Congregationalists they could congratulate themselves on the number of citizens they had trained for public positions; he thought that there was no body of men that had more impressed upon its members the duties and responsibilities of civic life than Congregational ministers (applause).³⁷

Similarly, at the laying of the foundation stone for a new church in the Southbourne district of Bournemouth, Rev. John Daniel Jones, the well known minister of the town's leading Congregational Church, Richmond Hill, commented that: 'Pro rata to population Congregationalists had produced more men who took a prominent part in the public affairs of the land than perhaps any other Christian Church'.³⁸

Underpinning both the social and civic gospels was the 'Nonconformist conscience' which embraced 'the conviction that there ... [was] no strict boundary between religion and politics; an insistence that politicians should be men of the highest character; and a belief that the state should promote the moral welfare of its citizens'.³⁹ In this regard, many Hampshire Congregationalists were influenced by the views of the eminent Baptist minister and evangelist, Rev. Frederick Meyer. His ideal was, as Randall points out, social action to promote 'human dignity, equality and freedom of conscience'.⁴⁰ Meyer spoke in Hampshire on a number of occasions. Addressing the Romsey and District Free Church Council in 1903 he argued, somewhat apocalyptically, that:

The one hope for England ... was that ... godly men and women should exert themselves as they had never done before, to bring the Kingdom of God amongst men by their own vote and personal influence in everything which concerned the social redemption of mankind ... If England did not mend her ways ... [it would] go the way of all great nations of the past and drive a wreck upon the shores of history.⁴¹

In other words, if those who had accepted Christ as their personal saviour did not act to bring about a change in the moral climate and address various issues that called into question the extent to which Christian principles prevailed within society, disaster would surely follow.



Issues

What then were the matters that particularly taxed Edwardian Congregationalists? Essentially there were two kinds of issue on the political agenda that stood out as being of special concern. One consisted of anything which they saw as being a threat to their standing and their cherished belief in civil and religious liberty and the other was what they regarded as challenges of a moral welfare nature.

In the early years of the Edwardian era the dominant issue of the first type was education. Most Congregationalists, along with many other Nonconformists, were outraged by the provisions of the Education Act 1902 which they saw as unfairly privileging mainly Church of England schools at the expense of the non-denominational board schools which they favoured.⁴² In Hampshire, for various reasons, such as the conciliatory leadership of the chairman of the county council and its education committee, the Earl of Northbrook, and the Bishop of Winchester, Rt. Rev. Randall Davidson, and a politico-religious culture characterised by a spirit of accord across denominational boundaries, the opposition was relatively muted by comparison with some other parts of country.⁴³ Nonetheless, within the county Congregationalists were often at the forefront of the passive resistance campaign which the legislation triggered and were often outspoken in what the *Southampton Times* labelled 'The Education War'.⁴⁴ While in its annual reports the HCU used strong language to condemn what it deemed 'to be a gross violation of the principle of religious freedom and equality' and 'an act of flagrant injustice to Nonconformists'.⁴⁵ It also contrasted what it characterised as the 'spiritual democracy' of Congregational churches with the fact that as a result of the legislation 'the democratic principle seen alike in religious and civil affairs had been unblushingly assailed'.⁴⁶

In a similar vein, in 1905 at the sixth annual meeting of the Petersfield and District Free Church Council, Rev. Ernest Thompson, the town's Congregational minister between 1903 and 1910 and passive resister, argued that: 'They wanted not favour, but justice and liberty of conscience. It was the children's battle; it was the Church's battle; it was the Lord's battle.'⁴⁷ Given that these remarks were made during the year before the Liberal's landslide victory, it is not surprising that much of what he had to say related to the hoped for repeal of the 1902 Act and its replacement with legislation incorporating principles that Nonconformists considered to be far more just and equitable. Similarly, during the 1906 general election campaign in Southampton, at a public meeting convened by the Southampton Evangelical Free Church Council, 'when the primary matter considered was the Education Act and the duty of Free Churchmen at the polling booths', the following resolution, moved and seconded by the previously mentioned Rev. George



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Saunders and James Hamilton, respectively, was carried unanimously:

That this meeting re-affirms its intense conviction that no settlement of the education question will be satisfactory which does not ensure popular control of schools financed by the people and abolition of all religious tests; and urges all Free Churchmen to support candidates who are pledged to this end.⁴⁸

As elsewhere, in Hampshire, Nonconformist ministers were conspicuous by their presence on the platform at Liberal election meetings and 'threw themselves into the campaign with unabated vigour'.⁴⁹ Moreover, the evidence from Hampshire tends to confirm the view that, in the words of Watts: 'The strength of Nonconformist feeling in opposition to the 1902 Education Act was a major factor in the Liberal victory.'⁵⁰

In the event, due to resistance from the Church of England and its allies in the House of Lords, the Liberal government was unable to honour its commitment to reform the education system contributing, in due course, to a sense of frustration on the part of many Congregationalists. Thus, at the annual meeting of the Petersfield and District Free Church Council in 1909, during the course of what was described as 'an impressive address', Rev. Ernest Thompson lamented that they had failed to secure a just solution to the educational issue, which would 'put a stop to all those deplorable squabbles and quarrels about doctrine and dogma which were so prejudicial to the education of this country'.⁵¹ However, a slightly more positive note was struck in the *Above Bar Congregational Church* magazine, for while 'all who are interested in the truest well-being of the Nation will truly regret the rude shattering of their hopes ... [with respect to educational reform] there is no need for despair'.⁵²

A further issue of this type concerned the status of the Church of England. Many Congregationalists supported the cause of disestablishment and to this end were in favour of the Liberal government's moves to disestablish the Anglican Church in Wales. In 1912, at their spring gathering, Hampshire Congregationalists unanimously passed the following resolution:

That we, the members of the Hants Congregational Union note with satisfaction the provisions of the Bill introduced into Parliament for the Disestablishment and Disendowment of the Church in Wales and express the earnest hope that the Government will, with unswerving determination carry the same into law.⁵³

Thus, the HCU was again prepared to adopt an overtly partisan stance. Many, of course, saw Welsh disestablishment, which was enacted in 1914, as the first step towards achieving the same outcome for the Church of England as a whole.⁵⁴

Turning to moral welfare issues and adapting a phrase that was to be popularised nearly a century later, the stance of Congregationalists was to be 'tough on sin and tough on the causes of sin'. They sought through political action to remove, in the words of Bebbington, 'obstacles to the gospel', 'substitutes for the gospel' and 'infringements of the gospel code of living',⁵⁵ and had in their sights the evils of alcohol, gambling, prostitution and anything that they perceived as contributing to the desecration of Sunday. While poverty, malnutrition and inadequate housing were also of concern, the causes which loomed largest were temperance and Sunday observance. Here the goal was to create, in the words of Packer, 'a more godly society'.⁵⁶

Among Hampshire Congregational ministers strongly committed to the cause of temperance were Rev. Reginald Thompson, Basingstoke's Congregational minister between 1907 and 1911, for whom it was one of his 'two great "external" enthusiasms';⁵⁷ Rev. William Bennett, Warsash's Congregational minister between 1898 and 1903, who was 'a great worker in the cause of Temperance';⁵⁸ and Rev. Henry Perkins, minister of Albion Congregational Church in Southampton between 1895 and 1903, who 'warmly supported the Temperance movement and Band of Hope'.⁵⁹ For these and others engaged in the temperance crusade, the objectives were to secure more restrictive legislation and to ensure that existing provisions for controlling public houses were rigorously applied. In their pursuit, Congregationalists were prepared to undertake united action with members of other denominations. In Basingstoke, for example, a cross-denominational committee was established in early 1903 to campaign for the Sunday closing of public houses. Members, who included not only the Congregational minister, Rev. Capes Tarbolton, but also the vicar and one of his curates, approved the following resolution:

... as the Sunday Closing of Public Houses has been unquestioningly fraught with much good to the people of Scotland, of Ireland, of Wales and of the Colonies, this meeting deplores the prolonged delay in extending similar beneficent legislation to England. It believes that the present time is particularly opportune for pressing the claims of Sunday Closing upon legislators, and therefore earnestly calls for combined and vigorous action on the part of Church of England, Nonconformist, Temperance and other philanthropic organisations, and appeals to reformers and politicians of all political parties to unite in a great effort to obtain from Parliament this great boon for the people.⁶⁰

They also signed a memorial to the town magistrates 'in favour of a reduction in the number of licensed [public] houses in the borough'.⁶¹ As Rev. Tarbolton pointed out, the signatories:

Overleaf (page 10):

Rev. John Philip Rogers (?–1971), Minister of East Cliff Congregational Church, Bournemouth, from 1908 to 1915 (East Cliff URC Archive)

Rev. George Saunders (1866–1949), Minister of Above Bar Congregation Church, Southampton, from 1904 to 1920 (Avenue St Andrew's URC, Southampton, Archive)

Overleaf (page 11):

Dr Robert William Dale (1829–95), Minister of Carr's Lane Chapel, Birmingham

Rev. Ernest Thompson (1875–1973), Minister of Petersfield Congregational Church from 1903 to 1910 (Petersfield Museum)

... represented not one party alone politically: Conservatives and Liberals united in it. They represented not one section of the religious community alone: the Established Church and the Free Churches united in it. They represented no particular section of society: working men and employees of labour united in it. They represented not merely the teetotal element of the population by any means.⁶²

Such unanimity confirms Bebbington's assertion that temperance 'was the political question on which there was most cooperation between Church and chapel.'⁶³ That said, Nonconformists tended to be more militant in their opposition to measures which were seen as favouring the interests of brewers. Thus, in its annual report for 1904, the HCU heavily criticised changes in legislation at national level:

Deeply concerned as we are by the sobriety of the nation, we must repudiate Mr Balfour's claim that his Licensing Act is a great measure of temperance legislation, the more the Act is understood and its power to lessen licenses duly appreciated the more it is evident that it is a Brewer's Endowment Act, and not a powerful weapon of wholesome reform.⁶⁴

For most Nonconformists, alcohol was the very embodiment of evil to a degree that was not replicated on the part of most Anglicans.

Equally contentious was what Congregationalists considered to be the erosion of the special status of Sunday, which was seen by many as a proxy for a decline in moral standards more generally. During his address to the HCU's autumn gathering in 1907, a visiting speaker from Bromley, Rev. William Justin Evans, after amusing delegates with some examples of the extremes to which Puritans had gone to maintain the solemnity of 'The Lord's Day', argued that the pendulum had swung too far the other way:

... Sunday was being made a day of pleasure and work. The leisured and idle classes were making it a day for golfing and motoring, and the working classes ... for gardening, loafing, and drinking. The holy day was becoming a holiday; it could not remain a holiday unless it was a holy day ... The Sunday desecrators were amongst the worst enemies of the country today ... it was more than ever necessary that there should be one day for worship.⁶⁵

Although, as John Wigley points out, the 'Edwardian Sunday had more in common with that of the 1850s' than that of the late twentieth century and 'impressed children and foreign visitors alike as one of the peculiarities of English life', it was under threat on many fronts.⁶⁶ Indeed, in the words of Hugh McLeod:

even ... Christians who had somewhat more relaxed ideas about Sunday were likely to agree that religious activity should have first priority, and that the kind of Sunday that was becoming increasingly popular, which was simply a day of relaxation, was part of a worrying trend towards a frivolous and hedonistic way of life.⁶⁷

It was the perceived link between attitudes to Sunday and an increasing preoccupation with pleasure and excitement that drove many leading Congregationalists to resist every move to liberalise rules relating to the Sabbath. However, as Packer observes, although Sabbatarianism 'was widespread among Nonconformists ... it was difficult to make it into a political issue at national level.'⁶⁸ Consequently, much of the campaigning was undertaken locally.

One part of Hampshire where this issue was particularly to the fore was Bournemouth.⁶⁹ Here, for Congregationalists and their co-religionists in other denominations, the principle of a 'quiet Sunday' was sacrosanct. Indeed, such a policy was vigorously applied by leading lay Nonconformists and churchmen who served on the borough council. One of the most distinguished was John Elmes Beale, a deacon of the previously mentioned Richmond Hill Congregational Church and a prominent local businessman, who founded what continues to be a well-known chain of department stores. He served as a Bournemouth councillor and alderman for many years and held the office of mayor from 1902 to 1905 thereby epitomising the tenets of the civic gospel. As guest speaker at Lymington Congregational Church's 201st anniversary celebrations in 1901, he made his position on Sunday observance clear when he 'spoke of the battle of Nonconformity and the need for more united action amongst the Free Churches, and especially in regard to the insidious attacks being made upon the Sabbath day, and particularly in regard to sport.'⁷⁰ A year later, at celebrations to mark the eleventh anniversary of the opening of Richmond Hill's new premises, Beale expressed his belief that:

... the ambition of every member of the Town Council was to make Bournemouth more beautiful, both physically and morally. He was glad also to be present as deacon of that church, because as Christian people its members were doing all they could to make Bournemouth spiritually beautiful, their lofty ideal being to win Bournemouth for Jesus Christ (applause).⁷¹

Thus, he clearly saw a close relationship between the spiritual and the civic.

While they held a council majority, Beale and those who thought like him were able to ensure that their view of what Sundays should be like shaped council policy-making. Some idea of what this meant in practice is evident in the following extract from an article in a series on the

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British Sunday that the *Daily Telegraph* published in 1905:

With regard to the present aspect of Sunday at Bournemouth, it might be stated that numerous churches are filled to overflowing most Sundays, and the erection of new churches speedily secure crowded congregations. Visitors and townspeople alike very largely regard Sunday as a day set apart exclusively for religious observance, and public amusement is in almost every form discouraged. The corporation allow their piers to be open on Sundays for promenading, but have religiously refused to allow their fine municipal orchestra to play Sunday music. The steam-boat companies do not run their boats on Sunday and several years ago, when an outside company endeavoured to carry out pleasure sea excursions on Sundays, ... pier tolls [were promptly raised] to the maximum sum of 4d for each passenger embarking or disembarking from the pier. This had the effect of quickly stopping the new venture ... The corporation golf links are also closed on Sunday, and no attempt has been made to alter this state of things ... Altogether, Bournemouth at present is one of the quietest towns on Sunday in the country, but there is a distinct feeling manifesting itself that a little more relaxation might be beneficial in some respects. Any innovation, however, is likely to meet with strong opposition from the great majority of the Anglican and Nonconformist communities.⁷²

Likewise, in the words of a publication entitled *Beautiful Bournemouth*:

Bournemouth's Quiet Sunday most visitors appreciate, although there may be some who vote it 'deadly dull'. In these busy, bustling days it is a reputation difficult to maintain, but so far the council have resolutely declined to run Sunday trams, or provide Sunday music. This policy may not be approved by the restless pleasure seekers who hanker after a Continental Sunday which, except for extra religious services, differeth not from a week-day, but it is a policy, steadily pursued, which has contributed to making Bournemouth unique among watering places.⁷³

There was perhaps a touch a poetic licence attached to the last of these remarks. What can be said is that with respect to Sunday observance, Bournemouth had more in common with resorts such as Torquay, which was described as 'a very churchy town',⁷⁴ than, say, Brighton, which had 'adopted the forward movement in regard to treating Sunday as a day, not only for religious observance, but for reasonable recreation.'⁷⁵ The defenders of Bournemouth's 'quiet Sunday' claimed that it had contributed to the 'remarkable growth and prosperity' of the area and that any change in policy might cause 'incalculable damage.'⁷⁶ By contrast, opponents argued that 'Bournemouth's 'dull and

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dismal Sunday' ... [was] doing harm to the town.'⁷⁷ In other words, those who favoured a 'quiet Sunday' felt that it contributed to the distinctiveness of Bournemouth, while the advocates of change saw it as making the town more competitive vis-à-vis other seaside resorts.

In the controversy surrounding the principle of a 'quiet Sunday', a particular bone of contention was the fact that the council-run tramway system was closed on Sundays. Seeking to reverse this policy was the Sunday Trams Association. In response, those in favour established the Sunday Defence League. Both campaigned vigorously in 1906 when a local poll on the issue was held. This resulted in a clear victory for those opposed to change. Of the 9,753 eligible to vote, 6,309 or 64.7 per cent did so, with 57.2 per cent voting against any alteration to the existing policy.⁷⁸

Six years later the issue was back on the local political agenda and members of the Sunday Defence League again organised 'its forces for a strenuous campaign to maintain the quiet Sunday for which Bournemouth is renowned, and which we still believe, notwithstanding all that has been stated to the contrary, is one of its greatest assets'.⁷⁹ During the contest for the 1912 municipal elections, readers of East Cliff Congregational Church's magazine were exhorted 'to VOTE, irrespective of creed or politics, on November 1st, FOR CANDIDATES who are opposed to SUNDAY TRAMS and all that would follow in their train [emphasis in the original]'.⁸⁰ The minister Rev. Phillip Rogers, saw 'the Sunday introduction of trams as an attempt to secularise the Sunday in Bournemouth, and God save Bournemouth from a Sunday like that at Brighton'. Using a powerful metaphor, he argued that: 'Just as the dykes of Holland kept back the floods of the ocean, so a sanctified Sunday would act as a bulwark which kept back the floods of wickedness.'⁸¹

The outcome of the municipal elections was inconclusive as far as the trams issue was concerned, but the borough council subsequently decided to hold a second poll in January 1913. This time, despite the efforts of the Sunday Defence League, a majority voted for a change in policy. On this occasion the turnout was 70.1 per cent, with 52.5 per cent voting in favour of the running of trams on Sundays.⁸² The outcome clearly indicated a shift in public opinion towards a more liberal view of Sunday observance and the increasing strength of the secular 'other'. Indeed, it was seen by many as the 'end of that 'Sunday quiet' which ... [had] been a distinctive feature of the town and a great attraction to many visitors and residents.'⁸³ It also indicated a waning of the influence of Congregationalists and other committed Christians in shaping public policy and played a part in constraining their political ambitions.

Constraints

Notwithstanding the potency of the social and civic gospels and the commitment of

Congregationalists to certain political causes, unlike political parties and even secular pressure groups, they were not in a position to pursue these single-mindedly. Put a little differently, they were constrained by various factors emanating from both within the denomination and without.

Internal constraints arose, in the main, from the opposition of those Congregationalists who viewed politics with suspicion, not least because in their eyes it distracted the Church from its primary mission of saving souls. They were concerned about the corrosive effect of political activity and sympathetic towards the views of the anonymous author of *Nonconformity and Politics*, in which it was claimed that an 'over-concentration on politics' was partly responsible for the fact that 'by 1909 secularisation had ... made deep and unnecessary inroads into the life of the chapels'.⁸⁴ What was seen as 'party passion' was withering 'the passion for Christ'.⁸⁵ As he put it, the kingdom of God does not lie in the material realm but 'in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost' and it is the latter that should pre-occupy the churches.⁸⁶ Put simply, there were many Nonconformists 'who feared that the soul was neglected in the social gospel ...'.⁸⁷

Although the evidence from Edwardian Hampshire is not clear-cut, something of a modification of his views on politics can be seen in the stance of Rev. John Daniel Jones. In a sermon on 'Christianity and Politics', preached in 1906, he went as far as to suggest that engagement in political activities was 'as religious as leading a prayer-meeting ... [and] teaching in the Sunday School'.⁸⁸ In 1909, however, as Bebbington records, he 'devoted two sermons to endorsing the ... argument' of *Nonconformity and Politics*.⁸⁹ Moreover, in early 1910 he defended himself against the charge that he had preached a political sermon during the first general election campaign of that year:

I claim as a citizen the right to take part in national affairs. I claim the right of *speaking* with my fellow citizens about national affairs. That right I have exercised during the recent election, and shall exercise again whenever occasion calls for it. But as a minister and a preacher I regard the realm of party politics as entirely barred against me. I detest and abhor political sermons, and have never preached one ... in God's house men of varied and conflicting opinion ought to feel equally at home ... [emphasis in the original]⁹⁰

That said, as Koss points out, Rev. J. D. Jones was a close friend and colleague of the leading Congregationalist Rev. Silvester Horne and together both were heavily involved in campaigning during the general elections of 1906 and 1910.⁹¹

A further example of what might be regarded as a reassessment of priorities comes, ironically, from an address of the 'staunch Liberal' Rev.

William Miles, in his capacity as chairman of the HCU for the year 1913. He argued, in the context of observations concerning the functions of the Christian Church, that:

The work of the Church was first, not politics. He felt that the less the Church had to do with politics the better it would be for the Church and the better for politics, too. Mr. Balfour had said a wise thing when he remarked that the Christian Church had never interfered in politics without losing more for herself than she had gained for politics. It would be a great advantage ... if every Christian minister would assume such an attitude towards politics that men of all political parties could feel at home among them.⁹²

Possibly, like others, by this stage he had become somewhat disenchanted with the Liberal government, since it would seem that by politics Miles meant party politics. Indeed, he later acknowledged that it was not 'possible for a man to stand in the pulpit and proclaim all the doctrines of the Word of God without coming into contact, now and again, with political prejudice and vested interest'. Alongside the drink trade and Sabbath breakers, this included 'every political institution which ground the face of the poor and enriched the few at the expense of the many'.⁹³ That said, although there was some ambiguity as to what exactly was meant by 'politics', there is evidence to suggest that during the Edwardian era there was a reaction amongst Congregationalists regarding the extent to which churches, as institutions, should be involved in anything that might be deemed 'political'. At the same time, they reserved the right as citizens to support political parties and campaign on particular issues.

A particularly potent external constraint was public hostility towards the perceived misuse of the pulpit to promote political causes, as the comments of Rev. John Daniel Jones quoted earlier indicate. One further example from Edwardian Hampshire occurred during the febrile atmosphere of the 1906 general election campaign, when Rev. James Learmount, Christchurch's Congregational minister from 1900 to 1906, preached a sermon on the relationship between Christianity and politics based on the text: 'Whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God'.⁹⁴ Reported verbatim in the sympathetic *Christchurch Times*, he argued that:

To escape from hell and get to heaven is not the great business of life. The great business of every Christian is to do what Christ would do today ... with our freedom and ... our circumstances around Him ... good people who take ... no part in politics are wrong ... It is the duty of religious people to ... lay down great Christian principles for the guidance of government and well-being of the nation ... to cry aloud when the leaders of the State make grave moral mistakes,

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seek to set up class distinctions, and to raise barriers which prevent all men from realising the solidarity of mankind growing out of the fact of the Fatherhood of God.⁹⁵

Reference was also made to specific issues, including free trade, which 'should not merely be a means ... of getting more wealth; it should be a measure of social justice', and, temperance, which 'ought not to be a matter of opinion; ... [but] a question affecting the people's life, a question of heaven or hell for them.' Publicans and brewers were portrayed as purveyors of evil. In his peroration, he referred to politics as 'applied religion' while acknowledging that 'bitter politics' were 'of the devil.'⁹⁶

The Rev. Learmount was subsequently taken to task by the Conservative-supporting *Observer and Chronicle*, which described his sermon as an 'illustration of how certain pulpits are used for party politics at election time'.⁹⁷ He defended himself in a letter published a week later in the *Christchurch Times* by maintaining that the thrust of his argument was not party politics but righteousness. However, with Congregational ministers being far more likely to support the Liberal than the Conservative Party, there can have been few in the congregation who would not have interpreted his remarks in this light.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that, during the Edwardian era, many leading lay and clerical Hampshire Congregationalists, prompted in part by righteous indignation, felt that it was their Christian duty to engage in politics and, if necessary, party politics in the Liberal interest. As Rev. George Saunders, with whom this article began, commented during an interview for a series of newspaper profiles on Southampton's local religious leaders which was published in 1905:

I have spoken on Liberal platforms. I think a minister should be granted the liberty which any other individual enjoys. I do not believe in the introduction of party politics into the pulpit, but I think the pulpit should state very clearly great principles and should not be afraid to apply them to every department of national life.⁹⁸

Indeed, many Congregationalists would have aligned themselves with the comments of Rev. E. R. Pullen, minister of Shirley Baptist Church in Southampton, at a 1906 election meeting. His response to those who argued that he should not get involved in politics was that 'the old testament prophets did and ... he was a citizen as well as a Christian minister.'⁹⁹

While relations with the Liberal Party might have cooled somewhat during the later part of the Edwardian era, evidence from Hampshire indicates that they were by no means completely

fractured. Arguably, Koss' chapter title for the period 1908 to 1914, 'Decline and Disenchantment', overstates the disaffection.¹⁰⁰ As Packer comments, 'There was still probably more Nonconformist enthusiasm for the party in 1910 than there had been in, say, 1900. Liberalism and Nonconformity remained closely entwined and many aspects of Liberal thought and policy were influenced by Nonconformist views.'¹⁰¹ For example, in what was described as a 'vigorous speech' at a mass meeting held during the January 1910 election campaign in Southampton, Rev. Ieuan Maldwyn Jones, minister of Albion Congregational Church, gave full expression to this relationship. Having made clear that 'he had never spoken in his pulpit on party politics, and never would', that night he was there 'as a citizen, as a patriot and as a Nonconformist' and in these capacities it was essential to realise that 'if the Lords gained the day' in the election they could say 'good-bye to their Liberalism ... to their ideals as men ... to their social reform and their temperance legislation.' Indeed, 'if there were any Nonconformists who did not intend to vote Liberal this time, then he would say 'I am ashamed of your Nonconformity' (hear, hear).'¹⁰² Likewise at a public meeting in Petersfield about the Constitutional crisis engulfing the country, Rev. Ernest Thompson did not shy away from political partisanship: 'The duty of Free Churchmen at this time seemed to be perfectly clear, to return the Liberal party to power to smash the veto of the Lords.'¹⁰³

Similarly in the second general election campaign of 1910, a resolution of the Southampton Evangelical Free Church Council called upon Nonconformists: 'at this serious crisis of our national affairs to put forth every effort to secure the return to Parliament of those gentlemen who will support the Government in this final effort which it is making to enforce the People's will, and thus secure fair treatment by the Lords for measures introduced for the removal of Nonconformist grievances in education, for licensing reform, and other measures for the social welfare of the people.'¹⁰⁴ This was passed unanimously by a mass meeting of Free Churchmen at which Rev. I. M. Jones was again one of the main speakers along with a Baptist and a United Methodist minister.

For many Congregationalists, there remained a distinctive Nonconformist political agenda, centred on temperance, disestablishment of the Church of England, Sunday observance and improvements in the living conditions of the disadvantaged. In the words of Rev. Will Reason, Social Service Secretary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, when speaking to the Southampton Free Church Council in 1912: 'year by year ... the public conscience and certainly the Christian conscience, was becoming more and more sensitive of those facts of human life which they summed up in the phrase "social problem".'¹⁰⁵ Thus, although many Congregationalists might have become more ambivalent

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towards party politics, their political sensibilities, in the broadest sense of the term, remained intact as the Liberal government wrestled with industrial unrest, the Irish Home Rule Crisis of 1913–14 and the campaign for women’s suffrage. Echoing Packer, ‘the separation of religion and politics still had a long way to go in 1914.’¹⁰⁶

However, there remained a keen awareness that the spiritual dimension of Congregationalism should neither be neglected nor undermined. Thus, in its annual report for 1913 the HCU quoted with approval a letter from Congregational Memorial Hall in London reminding recipients ‘that the chief business of the Church ... [was] the salvation of souls, using the word ‘salvation’ in the wide and far-reaching sense which is given to it in the New Testament.’ While at the same time, the Temperance and Social Service Committee of the HCU expressed the earnest hope ‘that all Preachers will give due attention to the question of Sunday observance and of Temperance in their pulpit ministrations.’¹⁰⁷ In this respect, political engagement was one manifestation of the challenge faced by Congregationalists of how to be *in* the world but not *of* it – quite a difficult balancing act.

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- 1 S. Stanier, *History of the Above Bar Congregational Church Southampton from 1662 to 1908* (Southampton, 1909), p. 281.
- 2 Roger Ottewill, ‘Faith and Good Works: Congregationalism in Edwardian Hampshire’ (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2015).
- 3 That is including Bournemouth and Christchurch, which remained part of Hampshire until 1974, but excluding the Isle of Wight.
- 4 Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (London, 1975).
- 5 Ian Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics, 1905–1915* (Basingstoke, 2006).
- 6 Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 3, *The crisis and conscience of nonconformity* (Oxford, 2015).
- 7 *Hampshire Post*, 1 May 1908. For further details of the life and career of Gilbert see Roger Ottewill, ‘Henry March Gilbert 1846–1931: “Staunch Liberal and Nonconformist”’, *Journal of the Southampton Local History Forum*, no. 22, 2014, pp. 11–18.
- 8 Timothy Larsen, ‘Victorian Nonconformity and the Memory of the Ejected Ministers: The Impact of the Bicentennial Commemorations of 1862,’ in R. N. Swanson (ed.) *Studies in Church History 33: The Church Retrospective* (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 459. Since the ejection took

place on the feast of St Bartholomew, it was generally referred to by Nonconformists as ‘Black Bartholomew’s Day’.

- 9 John Gay, *The Geography of Religion in England* (London, 1971), p. 143.
- 10 Koss, *Nonconformity*, p. 12. With respect to Methodism, Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians were far more likely to be politically active on behalf the Liberal Party than Wesleyan Methodists.
- 11 Alan Argent, *The Transformation of Congregationalism 1900–2000* (Nottingham, 2013), p. 29.
- 12 Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics*, p. 98.
- 13 David Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience* (London, 1982), p. 153.
- 14 *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 20 Oct. 1906. For a fuller discussion of their involvement in the political life of Basingstoke see Roger Ottewill, ‘Blending the Sacred with the Secular: Congregationalism in Edwardian Basingstoke 1901–1914’, <https://www.academia.edu/8992806/>.
- 15 *Romsey Advertiser*, 24 Jul. 1903.
- 16 For further details of Bance’s career see Roger Ottewill, ‘The Avenue Quartet: Exemplars of Edwardian Congregationalism’, *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2014, pp. 227–47.
- 17 Kenneth Brown, *A Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales 1800–1930* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 202–5.
- 18 *Hampshire Telegraph*, 26 Aug. 1921.
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- 26 David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* (London, 1989), p. 211.
- 27 Watts, *Dissenters*, p. 289.
- 28 *Hampshire Post*, 26 Apr. 1912.
- 29 William G. Addison, *Religious Equality in Modern England 1714–1914* (London, 1944), p. 166, quoted in Neal Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People: The British General Elections of 1910* (London, 1972), p. 344.
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- 31 Catherine Hall, ‘From Greenland’s Icy Mountains ... to Africa’s Golden Sand’: Ethnicity, Race and Nation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England,’ *Gender & History* 5, no. 2, 1993, p. 223.
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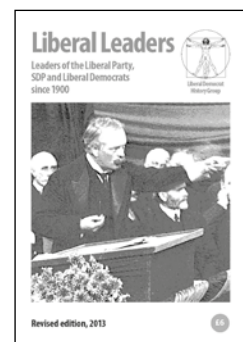
Religion and Politics in the Edwardian Era: The Experience of the Hampshire Congregationalists

- 34 *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 Feb. 1907.
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- 43 For an elaboration of these points see Roger Ottewill, 'Discord and Concord: Education and Religion in Hampshire Communities c. 1900 to c. 1905' (MRes dissertation, University of Southampton, 2007).
- 44 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, 9 May 1903. Passive resistance involved withholding that part of their rates which it was estimated would be used to fund church schools.
- 45 *HCU Annual Report*, 1901, pp. 18–9, Hampshire Record Office [HRO] 127M94/62/46.
- 46 *HCU Annual Report*, 1902, p. 16, HRO 127M94/62/47.
- 47 *Hants and Sussex News*, 5 Apr. 1905.
- 48 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, 13 Jan. 1906.
- 49 A. K. Russell, *Liberal Landslide: The General Election of 1906* (Newton Abbott, 1973), p. 110.
- 50 Watts, *Dissenters*, p. 362.
- 51 *Hants and Sussex News*, 17 Mar. 1909.
- 52 *Above Bar Free Churchman*, vol. IV, no. 37, Jan. 1909.
- 53 *Hampshire Post*, 26 Apr. 1912.
- 54 Due to the First World War the legislation was suspended and it was not until 1 June 1920 that the Welsh Church was finally disestablished.
- 55 Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, pp. 133–4.
- 56 Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics*, p. 111.
- 57 *Congregational Year Book*, 1954, p. 522. His other enthusiasm was overseas missions.
- 58 *Congregational Year Book*, 1936, p. 267.
- 59 *Congregational Year Book*, 1913, p. 182.
- 60 *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 Jan. 1903.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Ibid.
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- 64 *HCU Annual Report*, 1904, p. 16, HRO 127M94/62/49.
- 65 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, 3 Nov. 1907.
- 66 John Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester, 1980), p. 159.
- 67 Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850–1914* (Basingstoke, 1996), p. 176.
- 68 Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics*, p. 114.
- 69 As indicated in footnote 3, Bournemouth remained part of Hampshire until 1974, when it was transferred to Dorset.
- 70 *Lymington Chronicle*, 31 Oct. 1901.
- 71 *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, 29 Nov. 1902.
- 72 *Daily Telegraph*, 6 Oct. 1905.
- 73 *Beautiful Bournemouth: An illustrated guide to Bournemouth, The Evergreen Valley of the South* (c. 1905), not paginated.
- 74 *Daily Telegraph*, 9 Oct. 1905.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, 7 Sept. 1912.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, 5 Oct. 1906.
- 79 *East Cliff Congregational Magazine* 70, Oct 1912, p. iv. A motion opposing the introduction of Sunday trams was passed at a mass meeting attended by between 3,000 and 4,000 people at Westover Palace Skating Rink. *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, 19 Oct. 1912.
- 80 *East Cliff Congregational Magazine* 70, Oct 1912, p. iv.
- 81 *Bournemouth Guardian*, 14 Sep. 1912.
- 82 Sunday trams commenced running a couple of months later, although only in the afternoons and evenings. Sunday morning trams were not introduced until 1926.
- 83 *Bournemouth Visitors' Directory*, 8 Feb. 1913.
- 84 *British Weekly*, 25 Mar. 1909, p. 669, quoted in Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 158. The author is thought to have been Rev. Henry William Clark, a Congregational minister who was teaching at a school in Harpenden.
- 85 *Above Bar Free Churchman*, vol IV, no 40, Apr. 1909.
- 86 *Nonconformity and Politics. By a Nonconformist Minister* (London, 1909), p. 191.
- 87 Blewett, *The Peers, the Parties and the People*, p. 348.
- 88 "Christianity and Politics", A Sermon Preached at Richmond Hill Congregational Church by the Pastor, Rev J. D. Jones, M.A., B.D., *Richmond Hill Magazine and Congregational Record*, New Series VII, no. 5, 1906, pp. 37–8.
- 89 Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, p. 158.
- 90 *Bournemouth Guardian*, 12 Feb. 1910.
- 91 Koss, *Nonconformity*, p. 71 (1906 election), p. 106 (1910 elections).
- 92 *Bournemouth Guardian*, 19 Apr. 1913.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 1 Corinthians ch. 10 v. 21.
- 95 *Christchurch Times*, 6 Jan. 1906.
- 96 Ibid.
- 97 *Observer and Chronicle for Hants and Dorset*, 20 Jan. 1906.
- 98 *Hampshire Independent*, 11 Mar. 1905.
- 99 *Hampshire Independent*, 13 Jan. 1906.
- 100 Koss, *Nonconformity*, pp. 100–124.
- 101 Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics*, p. 119.
- 102 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, 15 Jan. 1910.
- 103 *Hants and Sussex News*, 5 Jan. 1910.
- 104 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, 3 Dec. 1910.
- 105 *Southampton Times and Hampshire Express*, 7 Dec. 1912.
- 106 Packer, *Liberal Government and Politics*, p. 120.
- 107 *HCU Annual Report*, 1913, pp. 23 and 38, HRO 127M94/62/58.

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The sixty-page booklet contains concise biographies of every Liberal, Social Democrat and Liberal Democrat leader from 1900 to 2013 (publication date). The biographies stretches from Henry Campbell-Bannerman to Nick Clegg, including such figures as H. H. Asquith, David Lloyd George, Jo Grimond, David Steel, David Owen and Paddy Ashdown. **Sale price £3** (normal price £6); available to *Journal of Liberal History* subscribers at the special price of **£2.40**. Add **£1.25** P&P.

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Letters to the Editor

continued from page 5

Bill Pitt (2)

Michael Meadowcroft's obituary of Bill Pitt (*Journal of Liberal History* 97, winter 2017–18) notes that after ceasing to be MP for Croydon, Pitt moved to Kent, fought Thanet South for the Alliance/Liberal Democrats in 1987 and 1992 and then 'somewhat perversely, joined the Labour Party.'

The word 'perversely' jarred me slightly and as a Kent Liberal Democrat activist from 1998 to the present, I would like to offer some comment. I never met Bill Pitt but was aware of him through his quotes as 'former Liberal MP Bill Pitt' on local Labour leaflets successfully calling on Lib Dem voters to vote tactically for Labour in Thanet South to beat the Conservatives (in particular, Jonathan Aitken in 1997).

Pitt's tactical switch to Labour (successful in the sense that it ousted Aitken and kept the seat out of Tory hands until 2010) is perhaps not 'perverse' in a Kent context. Kent has a deeply Conservative history. Even in 1895 and the Liberal landslide of 1906 it remained firmly blue. In the close election of 1992 every seat was still blue. Only in 1997 did ten out of seventeen seats turn Labour, and there has never (yet) been a Liberal Democrat MP in this county.

There is, in my experience, a strong frame in the minds of both the Kent public and political activists that the Conservatives are the established kernel of power, representing to both their supporters and opponents the protection of wealth, tradition and social hierarchy (especially in the large farming areas). Liberals and Labour in Kent are both seen, by themselves and their supporters, as broadly progressive opposition parties. Formal and informal pacts led to most of the district councils ceasing to be Conservative in the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. Kent County Council (the largest county authority in England) was run by a Labour–Lib Dem coalition in the mid-1990s.

If, as may be likely, Bill Pitt's thought process that led him to Labour was: 'we need to get the Tories, and Labour and Liberals have more in common than divides us, so we should be in one party', he would not be the first or last person to reach that conclusion. Of course there has been traffic in both directions. In

my division of Faversham (a gain from the Conservatives in May 2017) many people, including active campaigners, recognise that the Liberal Democrat candidates are best placed to win.

At County Hall today, Liberal Democrats (who are the largest opposition party) and Labour (slightly smaller) work closely together. We have voted together on every matter since the present council was elected in May 2017. My feeling is that this co-operation will continue and the Conservatives very much fear a united opposition.

The extreme hostility towards Labour that I sometimes read on social media from some on my Liberal Democrat colleagues, particularly in London, is often surprising to me. But of course we are in different situations and have different perspectives.

Councillor Antony Hook (Kent County Council)

Liberals in local government (1)

I was a bit disappointed by the errors in your report of the History Group fringe meeting at Bournemouth on 'Liberals in Local Government 1967–2017' in *Journal of Liberal History* 97 (winter 2017–18). (The full text of what I said was published in the December 2017 issue of *Local Campaigner*, the current bulletin from the Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors.) Here for the record are some corrections.

Kath Pinnock is still a member of Kirklees Council, but Trevor Jones (the Dorset councillor) was not the first Chair of the Association of Liberal Councillors (ALC). He had, however, taken over when the operation at the Birchcliffe Centre in Hebden Bridge was set up in 1977 and had been the driving force in the negotiations with the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust which made that possible. That was when I was first employed as the ALC Organising Secretary (not in 1985, which was when I moved on).

Phoebe Winch was indeed a 'pivotal' person in the driving group in ALC at the time, but her surname is spelt with an 'i'. *Focus* artwork was 'generated' all over the country but John Cookson's particular claim to fame in his printing den at

Northwest Community Newspapers in Manchester was in inventing 'artwork sheets' of headings and drawings that could be cut up and pasted into leaflets (using scissors and gum).

The *ALC Bulletin* was indeed produced six times a year but sent out to all members in the post, not via *Liberal News*, which nevertheless carried regular articles written by ALC. *Grapevine*, produced by Maggie Clay, was a dedicated mailing to Liberal councillors. There was indeed a series of many *Campaign Booklets* (as we called them), but that on Rural Campaigning was written and edited by Phoebe – the contribution by Paddy Ashdown was just a corner of a page!

At the 1977 county council elections Liberals won just 90 seats; we held 'around 800' seats on principal councils around the country.

Those were heady days in which we really did believe that 'the only way was up', and between us all we made it happen.

Tony Greaves

Note from the Editor: we apologise for the inaccuracies in the report, and thanks for the corrections. We will endeavour to do better in the future!

Liberals in local government (2)

I'm sure Richard Kemp is right (report on fringe meeting on 'Liberals in Local Government' in *Journal of Liberal History* 97, winter 2017–18) that Trevor Jones invented the *Focus* name for leaflets in Liverpool, but the concept originated earlier. Having consulted friends in Southend, I understand that Liberal councillor Michael King distributed a regular newsletter called *Progress Report* after winning a by-election in Leigh ward in 1967; the ward has had continuous Liberal/Liberal Democrat representation since. Prittlewell ward Liberals circulated the *Council Comments* newsletter even earlier, certainly by 1962.

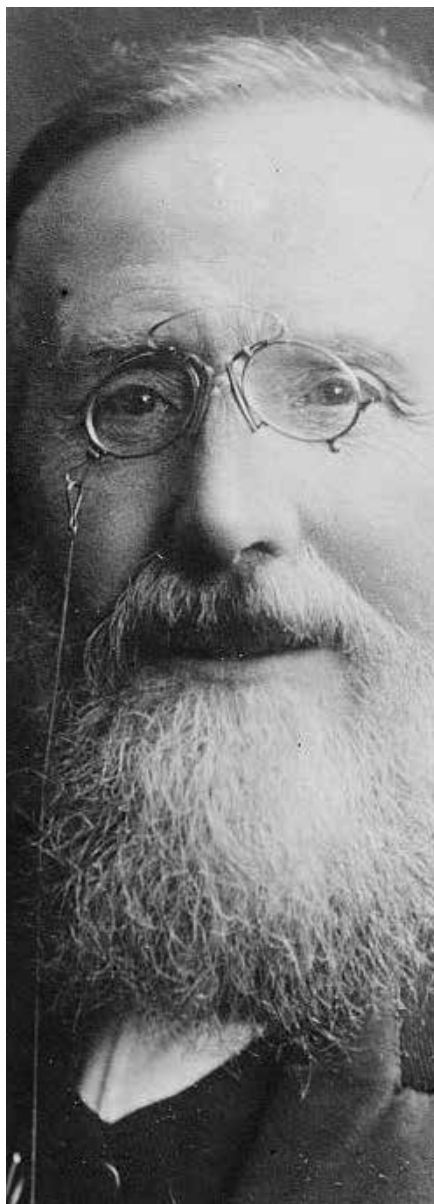
This may all be little known, as it was long before AL(D)C hit its stride as a fount of campaign ideas, and King was rarely involved in politics outside Essex, although Prittlewell's David Evans was a well-known figure on national party committees. I imagine in those days Southend, Liverpool and possibly other places developed the same idea but in isolation from each other.

Mark Smulian

Trade unions

Did the Liberals miss an historical opportunity to become the party of organised labour and the trade unions in the 1870s? By Tim Hughes.

The Liberal Party and the



ON TUESDAY 27 September 1870, Gladstone met with a delegation from the Labour Representation League, an organisation created to promote the election of working-class MPs, but described by Gladstone in his diaries simply as a 'Deputn of working Men'.¹ They met to discuss the Franco-Prussian War. The initiative for the meeting had come from

Karl Marx and it stands, for all concerned, as a failure to focus on the real issue of the long-term relationship between organised labour and the Liberal Party following the Second Reform Act.²

It may seem strange that trade union representatives were meeting with the prime minister to discuss matters of foreign policy. They were, after all, representatives of emerging

trade unions in the 1870s



sectional interests rather than of a class. Certainly Gladstone had built a strong reputation with the unions in the 1860s as Chancellor of the Exchequer, when unions demonstrated an interest in his Post Office Savings scheme. This interest was founded on their need to keep union funds safe, and for Gladstone was evidence that the working man shared his

concerns for personal and public economy. He even referenced his meetings with the unions in his 'Pale of the Constitution' speech, which appeared to embrace universal male suffrage in 1864.³ This was a matter of state policy. Foreign policy was, however, an area on which popular support could be built, as Palmerston had demonstrated.

The Liberal Party and the trade unions in the 1870s

In doing this, a more knowing Gladstone could have opened up the possibility of creating a new political paradigm. Gladstone's foreign policy has come to be seen as rooted in moral convictions that had first surfaced in his 'Letters to the Earl of Aberdeen' on the abuses in the Neapolitan prisons. This has been seen as Gladstone's first meaningful alignment with an identifiable Liberal foreign policy.⁴ His 'Letters to Aberdeen' railed against injustice and was readily supported by Palmerston and republicans as an attack on the abuses of monarchical rule. Palmerstone distributed them, with no lack of glee for the embarrassment it caused Aberdeen, to the British embassies.

Gladstone argued unconvincingly that these letters should be seen as a defence of monarchy rather than an attack on the tyrannies of untempered monarchical rule; for Shannon they 'retarded Gladstone's movement towards Liberalism'.⁵ It is certainly premature in the context of Gladstone's career to begin to call him a Liberal at this juncture and his foreign policy remained distinctive from either Palmerston or the Manchester School of Cobden and Bright, which embraced the dichotomy of free trade and peace. Gladstone would, however, go on to set the boundaries of a new 'liberal' foreign policy, creating a school of foreign policy now defined by scholars of international relations as liberal. If he could do this in the realm of foreign policy he could also have broadened this out in terms of organised labour within the emerging Gladstonian Liberalism.

Interestingly, suspicion of monarchy was also a theme in the September meeting, where the delegation sought reassurances that there were no pro-German 'dynastic influences' holding back Britain's involvement in the Franco-Prussian War, a less than subtle reference to Queen Victoria.⁶ For the delegation of working men there was a more pragmatic reasoning behind supporting a republican government in France: the broader primacy of the people and the principles of freedom in foreign policy. It is not that morality did not play a role in the thinking of the Labour Representation League – which has been convincingly linked to the thinking of the Republican, Italian nationalist, Mazzini more than the internationalist Marx in this respect – but that it was rooted in a different thinking to that of Gladstone.⁷ Republicanism was never an aspect of Gladstonian Liberalism, although it was present in a Liberal Party that contained Bradlaugh and Dilke. Marx stressed the fear of 'Prussian instruction' and it could be that he had laid down the grounds for suspicion rather than these coming directly from the delegation. Marx also mentions these as coming from the 'oligarchic part of the Cabinet'.⁸ Clearly Marx himself saw a division between the Whig and radical elements. It appears that Marx saw Gladstone as an unreliable ally. Marx was of course right to be suspicious of Gladstone, who brought to even foreign policy

a Conservative sensibility based on his Peelite beliefs rather than coming from an internationalist perspective that would have been shared by his working-class delegation. The delegation had reason to be suspicious of the monarchy, given Victoria's later interventions in foreign policy at the behest of Disraeli in order to put pressure on Cabinet members to support Disraeli's policies in the Balkans.⁹

Looking more closely at the Labour Representation League, this was created with the primary aim of registering working-class men for the vote and getting working-class men elected as MPs 'proportionate to other interests and classes at present represented in Parliament'.¹⁰ This was a significant ambition, with 30 per cent of working-class men having the vote in 1867 but – with few seats with a working-class majority – one that depended upon building alliances. Rooted in the London Working Men's Association and the embryonic TUC, their very presence in No. 11 Downing Street was the result of an impressive series of working-class successes that could be seen as culminating in the Trade Union legislation of 1871, which saw the trade unions achieve a legal status that gave them protection through the courts.

It is, however, too easy to see a separation between organised labour and Liberalism, a separation of tradition as well as creed. The meeting's significance comes from its taking place in a period of transience and consolidation which builds on the 'community of sentiment' and 'a coalition of convenience' of the 1860s to form a more robust Gladstonian Liberalism: a form of Liberalism which, while it should not be confused with Gladstone, was nevertheless focussed on his person.¹¹ It remains to be considered whether Gladstonian Liberalism was a change of substance rather than of sentiment, but it left room for the ascendancy of organised Nonconformity from its interest in disestablishment and church rates into becoming the foundation stone of a popular more radical liberalism.¹² This led through clear choices of policy directed by Gladstone, not least towards Ireland and the eventual Whig split from the Liberal Party in 1886.

Gladstone favoured working-class men entering parliament and would be the first to appoint a working man to his government – Thomas Burt, the leader of the Northumberland Miners' Association – as parliamentary secretary to the Board of Trade, even though he was not at that time a member of the Liberal Party. On being elected in 1874 as one of the first two Lib-Lab MPs, Burt was honoured alongside his fellow miners' leader, Alexander Macdonald, in a banquet held by the Labour Representation League. Here he spoke about how 'something had been done to break the exclusiveness which had hitherto kept the poor man outside the House of Commons' but that it would be a mistake to become an exponent of 'class representation and legislation'.¹³ He

Overleaf (page 20):

Thomas Burt
(1837–1922)

Alexander Macdonald
(1821–81)

Liberal Prime Minister
W. E. Gladstone
(1809–98)

Overleaf (page 21):

A. J. Mundella
(1825–97)

Robert Applegarth
(1834–1924)

George Howell
(1833–1910)

was instinctively Liberal in his politics and would refuse to take the Labour Party whip when the miners affiliated to the Labour Party in 1908. Interestingly, in 1870 he was active in the Workmen's Peace Association campaigning for British neutrality during the Franco-Prussian War, further evidence of the importance of foreign policy in the formation of political allegiances among the representatives of the working class.

There is therefore some credence to seeing Gladstone as bringing 'the working man within the pale of the constitution'.¹⁴ However, while he promoted the careers of individuals, he did this in recognition of individual merit rather than recognising the rights of a class. For the leaders of organised Labour and their representatives who entered the House of Commons, the language of class did not necessitate class politics, as shown above. It is within this distinction that the opportunities lay for Liberalism to institutionalise the interests of organised labour within their own party. This opportunity could have been taken in 1871 with the Liberal government's Trade Union legislation but this required amendment through the 'bipartisan effort' of 1875 and effectively demonstrated the distance in perception that remained between Liberalism and organised labour.¹⁵

The original Liberal Trade Union Bill had proved highly controversial if not potentially toxic and had been divided into two at the instigation of a deputation from the Trades Union Congress led by the Liberal MP, A. J. Mundella, creating the Criminal Law Amendment Bill out of the third clause of the original bill. This proved sufficient to maintain the support of the unions for the main Trade Union Act of 1871. The Liberals had been slow to recognise the importance of picketing to the trade unions and the ambiguity of the term 'intimidation and molestation' as defined in the clause. This should not be a surprise given the manner in which Gladstone had built bridges with the unions through his perception of them as akin to friendly societies and agents of economy rather than agents within the realm of industrial conflict.

Recognised as requiring reform, the initial response of the working-class MPs Burt and Macdonald had been to support Disraeli's idea of a royal commission; but when it reported in February 1875, it proved unsatisfactory to politicians and trade unionists alike. A Conservative bill was introduced with which Mundella achieved much in the committee stage, only for the Conservative home secretary, Richard Cross, to work with Howell, the secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC, to produce the Conspiracy and Protection Act. This met the demands of the trade unions. If the Criminal Law Amendment Act demonstrated 'clear fault lines running through the relationship between working-class radicalism and official Liberalism',¹⁶ it also showed a desire to transcend them. However, official Liberalism failed to recognise the potential

vulnerability of their support from organised labour. Howell wrote, 'Everyone vied with the other to do the best thing. Cross deserves our warmest gratitude for his conscientious work.'¹⁷

The failure of the leaders of organised labour was to not recognise Gladstone's limitations and conservatism at this point, although to be fair these limitations were also not clear to middle-class radicals sympathetic to the trade unions like Mundella. For Gladstone, when entrenching his Post Office savings accounts, he had spoken to the unions but responded to their Friendly Society characteristics.¹⁸ He related to the self-help they represented but he did not see their collective nature and never retreated from his commitment to a more libertarian individualism; he was never an egalitarian despite Bebbington linking Gladstone, via his Ancient Greek sensibilities, to modern concepts of New Labour communitarianism.¹⁹ Organised labour represented, with only 217,128 members, a small part of the practical 'collective self-help' that was developing among the working class alongside 300,157 members of co-ops and 1,857,896 members of friendly societies in 1872.²⁰

For the leaders of organised labour, they believed they shared a vision of international fairness and the promotion of liberal values of freedom. Indeed in September 1870, they shared the short-term objective of intervention in the settlement of the Franco-Prussian War, although Gladstone was seeking government intervention in order to maintain a balance of power in Europe based on mediation between the Great Powers which was central to the ideas of Aberdeen and the Concert of Europe. This was founded on essentially pre-Disraelian Conservative values. While meeting with representatives of Labour, his chief concern in the diaries appears to be Cardwell's army reforms and there could be no question of stronger measures being taken. Schreuder sees Gladstone as being more open to the use of aggression but certainly not as open as his allies.²¹ The second administration would make clear that Britain's strategic interests would come first with Gladstone.

Middle-class radicals did recognise the significance of organised labour and their representatives. The Reform League, from its conception, was subsidised by Liberals such as Samuel Morley who contributed to the wages of George Howell, the full-time secretary of the Reform League. Howell would become secretary to the TUC Parliamentary Committee from 1873 to 1876. Like the International, the Reform League saw the need to be fronted by working men while having their agendas driven by middle-class intellectuals. Morley would provide further funds to promote working-class candidates in 1868, alongside an understanding with the Liberal chief whip, George Glyne, reminiscent of the later agreement between Herbert Gladstone and the Labour Representation Committee in 1903. Indeed the

Smothered by 'organised Liberalism' and misunderstood by the one figure within 'official Liberalism' who could have given it momentum, the trade unionists of the Labour Representation League could have been a bridge offering continuity between the radical working-class traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The opportunity was missed.

similarities may well explain the lack of concern from official liberalism about the development of the Labour Party in 1906.²²

However, of the two candidates backed by the Reform League that stood for election in December 1868, neither was endorsed by the local Liberal parties, a problem that would re-emerge in 1903. Two would be elected in 1874, Alexander MacDonald from the Miners' National Association and Thomas Burt, agent of the Northumberland Miners' Association. The Lib-Lab tradition had begun but was based primarily on the links to a strong union rather than forging a meaningful channel with the emerging working class. Potential Liberal MPs – such as Keir Hardie, Arthur Henderson and Ramsay MacDonald – would still face rejection and become key figures in the foundation of the Labour Party. Yet in 1885, twelve working-class MPs were elected and historians have been challenged by Reid to explain 'why such a separate Labour Party should eventually have felt to be necessary at all'.²³

Could a Labour Party have emerged separate to the Liberal Party in this period? There were certainly union men of substance, including Randal Cremer who stood for parliament in 1868, who would be successfully elected for the periods 1885–1895 and 1900–1908, and who would eventually win the Nobel Peace Prize. However, he had resigned from the International as early as 1867, seeing it as too radical and was never going to lead a party of the left. Perhaps this could have come from Robert Applegarth, but he never stood for election and faded from view; or alternatively a figure like Howell, Liberal MP from 1885 to 1895; or Potter, who stood without success in Peterborough and Preston. The man who tried to form a party of labour was John Hales who sought to turn the English section of the International into a national party of labour and the working class. It never looked like he would succeed. Socialist parties would emerge in the 1880s and the Independent Labour Party in 1893, but even the cloth-capped Keir Hardie had sought to become a Liberal MP. A closer look at these men reveals the Liberal nature of organised labour, rather than offering an image of the socialist fellow traveller.

Applegarth was one of the delegation in the September meeting. He had already seen a key aim of organised labour to extend the franchise being achieved for urban workers in the Second Reform Act. The improved legal status of the trade unions was achieved through a royal commission to which he had acted as a prominent witness, having written to Gladstone in June 1866 and been interviewed by the home secretary, H. A. Bruce.²⁴ Only the aim of securing labour participation in parliament seemed an ongoing concern.²⁵ It is in this area of labour participation that a failure of imagination occurred. Applegarth collaborated with the various intellectual forces of his time – Marx, Beesley²⁶ and

Liberal MPs such as Mundella – but the reluctance of organised labour to set up broader objectives could simply be seen as their acceptance of the broader Liberalism they sought to represent²⁷. His role would end with his resignation from the Carpenters and Joiners Union and from the International to take up a role on a Royal Commission on Contagious Diseases. This however removed him from a pivotal role as a leading trade unionist and moderate link to the International. He was fond of the phrase 'As long as the present system lasts', but this demonstrated his belief in progress rather than socialism, and Humphrey cites an old socialist saying of him in his later years, 'the old man has never really been one of us'.²⁸

Owen has emphasised the significance of localism but also finds himself using different facets of Liberalism to explore the relationships between labour and Liberalism. While the title of the study focuses on 'organised Liberalism' a distinction is made with 'official Liberalism' in the text. It is this distinction which, while recognising the difficulty of accommodating working-class candidates standing for the Liberal Party, also opens up a space for official Liberalism and the leadership to do more to accommodate organised labour, the Labour League and later the Labour Representation League. While he identifies a 'genuine desire' from the National Liberal Federation, created in 1877 by Joseph Chamberlain, to promote working-class candidates, they are often unable to impose their will.²⁹ What was required was a 'People's William' who sought not only to open doors and be inclusive towards the working class in terms of recognising the leaders of labour and exceptional individuals but one who saw the need to be more proactive as a party leader in developing more structured links with organised labour.

Wrigley has argued that, 'Gladstone, in his final active decade of politics, took careful notice of the growing strength of labour' and sees this as developing out of his experiences with the Lib-Lab MPs in the 1880s and also with the 1889 dock strike. While building on Gladstone's experiences in the 1860s, however there is little mention of the early 1870s in this evaluation.³⁰

How might these words, written in 1889, have been received in 1870?

In the common interests of humanity, this remarkable strike and result of this strike, which have tended somewhat to strengthen the condition of labour in the face of capital, is the record of what we ought to regard as satisfactory, as a real social advance [that] tends to a fair principle of division of the fruits of industry.³¹

Gladstone has clearly moved from seeing the trade unions as friendly societies. But Wrigley, while he does recognise Gladstone's caution towards the unions in the 1890s, still overestimates the change that has taken place in regards to Gladstone rather than the changing nature and leadership

of the new, emerging, less-skilled trade unions. A year later, Cardinal Manning, a friend and confidant of Gladstone's, would commend Gladstone on his 'very wise reserve' on the 'relations of capital & Labour' regarding the dockers strike, while emphasising how the dockers 'have broken with the Socialist Theories, and are simply industrial and economic.' Manning clearly seeks more from Gladstone than he is willing to give. Here in microcosm are the expectations, disappointments and excuses – Manning cites Gladstone's focus on Ireland – that those who look to Gladstone have to accept.³²

Historians have come to recognise that working-class traditions and class consciousness, in the sense of being aware of one's class, can just as easily lead to Tory as to Liberal or socialist politics.³³ The trade union legislation of 1875 showed how Conservatives were as capable as Liberals as satisfying the demands of organised labour. The trade union reformists of the early 1870s can now be seen as Liberal, and one of the strands within the coalescing forces of liberalism coming together beneath Gladstone's umbrella. Smothered by 'organised Liberalism' and misunderstood by the one figure within 'official Liberalism' who could have given it momentum, the trade unionists of the Labour Representation League could have been a bridge offering continuity between the radical working-class traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The opportunity was missed.

A footnote on Marx

Returning to the meeting in September of 1870, Marx sought to counter the influence of monarchy and Russia by using the Labour Representation League to put pressure on Gladstone. Although his predictions regarding the subsequent need for France to move towards Russia were impressive and in effect foresaw the First World War, it is interesting that he did not proactively seek the development of a working-class party in England, based on the trade unions, which he could have influenced.³⁴ He had recognised the need for the working class in different countries to develop their own paths to representation and power but preferred to out-manoeuvre the marginal anarchist factions in Europe. He had also recognised that England represented the most developed position and that this position was founded on the trade unions but in the end preferred

to fight battles over ideology rather than power. He too may have missed an opportunity to divert the socialist tradition's trajectory from what would become the British Labour Party.

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- 2 Marx to Engels on 10 Sep. 1870. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 44 1870–73, p. 70.
- 3 Borough Franchise Bill Second Reading, Hansard CLXXV, May 11 1864.
- 4 Derek Beales, 'Gladstone and Garibaldi', in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone* (Hambledon Press, 1998), p. 150.
- 5 Richard Shannon, *Gladstone*, vol. 1 (Hamish Hamilton, 1982), p. 242.
- 6 *The Times*, 28 Sep. 1872, cited in footnote in Foot and Matthew, *Gladstone Diaries*, vol. 7, p. 371.
- 7 Henry Collins, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement* (Macmillan, 1965), pp. 285–286
- 8 Marx to Engels, 10 Sep 1870; op. cit.
- 9 Milos Kovic, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 311.
- 10 Minutes of the General Council of the Reform League, 4 Dec. 1867, cited in James Owen, 'The Struggle for Political Representation: Labour Candidates and the Liberal Party, 1868–85', *Journal of Labour History*, 86, Spring 2015, p. 15.
- 11 John Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857–68* (Pelican Books, 1972), p. 290.
- 12 For a history of the Liberation Society see J. P. Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).
- 13 *The Bee-Hive*, 21 Mar. 1874, cited in Lowell J. Satre, *Thomas Burt, Miner's MP 1837–1922: The Great Conciliator* (Leicester University Press, 1999), p. 38.
- 14 Simon Peaple and John Vincent, 'Gladstone and the working man', in Peter J. Jagger (ed.), *Gladstone* (Hambledon Press, 1998), p. 83.
- 15 Jonathan Spain, 'Trade unionists, Gladstonian Liberals and the labour reforms of 1875' in Eugenio Biagini and Alastair Reid, *Currents of Radicalism: Popular Radicalism, Organised Labour and Party Politics in Britain, 1850–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), ch. 6, p. 109.
- 16 James Owen, *Labour and the Caucus: Working class radicalism and organised Liberalism in England, 1868–1888* (Liverpool University Press, 2014), p. 14.
- 17 Howell to Robert Knight, 14 Jul. 1875, cited in F. M. Leventhal, *Respectable Radical: George*

Howell and Victorian Working Class Politics (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), p. 184.

- 18 Chris Wrigley, 'Gladstone and Labour', in Quinault, Swift & Windscheffel (eds.), *William Gladstone: New Studies and Perspectives* (Ashgate, 2012)
- 19 David Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 303. For Gladstone, the unions saw more favour than under Blair, who famously didn't invite them to No. 10, but neither man was interested in embracing class politics. This emphasises the liberalism of New Labour rather than the egalitarianism of Gladstone.
- 20 Neville Kirk, *Change, Continuity and Class: Labour in British Society 1850–1920* (Manchester University Press, 1998), p. 49.
- 21 D. M. Shreuder, 'Gladstone as "Trouble Maker": Liberal Foreign Policy and the German Annexation of Alsace Lorraine, 1870–1871', *Journal of British Studies*, 17 (1978), pp. 106–35.
- 22 Owen, 'The Struggle for Political Representation', p. 15.
- 23 A. J. Reid, *United We Stand: A History of Britain's Trade Unions* (Penguin, 2004), p. 149.
- 24 Copy of the letter dated 25 Jun. 1866, in A. W. Humphrey, *Robert Applegarth: Trade Unionist, Educationist, Reformer* (HardPress Publishing, 2013; originally published 1913), p. 142.
- 25 Report of the Fourth Annual Congress of the International Men's Association, pp. 4–5, cited in Collins, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, p. 153.
- 26 Edward Spencer Beesley, English positivist and Comtist who had links with Marx and the trade union movement. See Christopher Kent, *Brains and Numbers: Elitism, Comtism, and Democracy in Mid-Victorian England* (University of Toronto Press, 1978).
- 27 Asa Biggs, *Victorian People: A Reassessment of Persons and Themes 1851–1867* (Pelican Books, 1965), p. 204.
- 28 Humphrey, *Robert Applegarth*, pp. 94, 319.
- 29 James Owen, *Labour and the Caucus*, p. 98.
- 30 Wrigley, 'Gladstone and Labour', p. 70.
- 31 *The Times*, 24 Sep. 1889, cited in Michael Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism: Reconstruction of Liberal Policy, 1885–94* (Harvester Press, 1975), p. 92.
- 32 Cardinal Manning to Gladstone, 27 Aug. 1890 in Peter C. Erb (ed.), *The Correspondence of Henry Edward Manning and William Ewart Gladstone, 1882–1891* (OUP, 2013), p. 69.
- 33 Matthew Roberts, 'By-elections and the Unionist Electoral Ascendancy', in T. G. Otte and Paul Readman (eds.), *By-elections in British Politics, 1832–1914* (Boydell Press, 2013); for the impact of positive Unionism and the importance of working-class Tories to Conservative electoral success.
- 34 Collins, *Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 182–3.

Asquith

How did Liberal Prime Minister Asquith's friendships and relationships affect his political decisions? By Alan Mumford.

Asquith: Friendship



, Love and Betrayal

ASQUITH'S QUALITIES AND effectiveness as Prime Minister in peace and war are well known. Three passages in his life, also well known, have been recorded as wholly separate events. This article establishes a connection between them which adds a different dimension to a review of his character.

Friendship and betrayal: the Relugas Compact

Edward Grey, Richard Burdon Haldane and Herbert Henry Asquith were leaders of the Liberal Imperialist Group within the Liberal Party during the Boer War. Asquith had been Home Secretary under Rosebery, Grey a junior Foreign Office minister; Haldane had never been in government. They believed the war was justified and important for the maintenance of Britain's position in Africa. They also disagreed with the leader of the Liberal Party, Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who spoke for probably the majority of Liberal MPs who opposed both the war and methods used in it, described by Campbell-Bannerman as methods of barbarism.

On 7 October 1903 Grey had written to Asquith: '... under no circumstances would I take office with CB as Prime Minister in any govt. in which CB was leader in the House of Commons.'¹ Haldane went further – he would not serve under Campbell-Bannerman either as Prime Minister or Leader in the Commons. When it became clear that the problems faced by Balfour and the Unionist government in 1905 were likely to lead to a general election, these three met at a house owned by Grey in Relugas in Scotland in September. The evanescent Rosebery was no longer an alternative leader. The three agreed that Campbell-Bannerman, although he should become Prime Minister, should not lead from the House of Commons, but should rather do so from the House of Lords. Asquith would take over as leader in the Commons as well as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Grey would go either to the Foreign or Colonial Office and Haldane would become Lord Chancellor. This was to be a mercy

killing, not an assassination. Haldane was asked to use his contacts with the king's advisers to persuade him to accept the idea and even to suggest it to Campbell-Bannerman.

The essence of the compact was that the three would not serve in a new government except on these terms. In fact, before Balfour took the decision to resign and force the Liberals to form a new administration, Campbell-Bannerman took the initiative, perhaps having been warned what the trio had agreed. He called Asquith in for a meeting on 13 November 1905 and asked him what position he would like in a future Liberal government, suggesting 'The Exchequer, I suppose.' Asquith said nothing. 'Or the Home Office,' continued Campbell-Bannerman. Asquith said, 'Certainly not.' Campbell-Bannerman then remarked, 'I hear that it has been suggested by that ingenious person, Richard Burdon Haldane, that I should go to the House of Lords, a place for which I have neither liking, training or ambition.'² They also discussed alternative positions for Haldane whom Asquith proposed for Lord Chancellor and Grey for the Foreign Office. (It should be noted that here as elsewhere in this article Asquith's version of what happened does not come direct from him but is Margot's report of what he told her. Only in his letters to Venetia Stanley are they his unfiltered words.)

Balfour resigned on 4 December 1905, and Asquith and separately Grey had further discussions with Campbell-Bannerman. Asquith had concluded, following his previous discussion with Campbell-Bannerman, that he would not be able to force him into a new arrangement. On 7 December, he set out to Grey the reasons why he could not decline to take office – that he would thereby have either prevented the formation of a Liberal government or created a weak Liberal government. Not only did he explain his own position but he urged Haldane to accept the War Office. Grey in fact had returned to see Campbell-Bannerman on 7 December and had told him that unless Campbell-Bannerman went to the Lords he, Grey, would not accept office – although he knew Asquith would not similarly refuse. Grey

H. H. Asquith (1852–1928), Leader of the Liberal Party 1908–26, Prime Minister 1908–16

Asquith: Friendship, Love and Betrayal

wrote to Asquith: 'If you go in without me eventually I shall be quite happy outside & I shan't think it in the least wrong of you to go in.'³ In further discussion with Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith had again emphasised that given Campbell-Bannerman's age and health no one would consider him the worse for moving to the Lords. Asquith spoke also about Grey who 'was his dearest friend as well as supporter, and to join a government without such a friend would be personal pain to him, as they had never worked apart from one another.'⁴

This expression of the potential personal pain was not accompanied by 'and therefore I could not accept the Chancellorship'. Campbell-Bannerman was determined not to go to the Lords, offered Haldane the post of Attorney General but finally deputed Asquith to tell Grey that he could have the Foreign Office. (Campbell-Bannerman's offer of that post to Cromer had been rejected.) Haldane would go to the War Office. Asquith also saw Grey, who was still fully determined to carry out his declared intention to refuse office.

Grey's decisiveness was overturned in a meeting with Haldane, at which it was agreed that it was Grey's duty to accept office provided Haldane was included in the Cabinet. With this confirmed by Campbell-Bannerman the Relugas Compact was finally buried.

Asquith presented no ultimatum on behalf of himself or Grey and Haldane if Campbell-Bannerman refused. Campbell-Bannerman was speaking as if he assumed Asquith would take the job; Asquith offered nothing to disabuse him and therefore implied that he would accept. Campbell-Bannerman needed Asquith, but could do without Grey and Haldane. Asquith, the obvious successor to Campbell-Bannerman, had most to lose and clearly betrayed the terms of the compact. He had not, after his first interview with Campbell-Bannerman, discussed with his colleagues the reasons why he felt that he would have to accept office. He assured them that he was working hard on their behalf in terms of the offices they might hold, but he took what he wanted most himself with no certainty that Grey would be offered the Foreign Office, and the likelihood that Haldane would not get what he most wanted. Haldane's relationship with Asquith was extremely close. He had been Asquith's best man at his wedding to Margot, they had shared their early legal experiences as they trained to be barristers. Haldane was a frequent and very welcome visitor to Asquith and his family during his first marriage. On top of that they shared political beliefs as expressed through Liberal Imperialism. His relationship with Grey, though similarly strong in relation to Liberal Imperialism, was not as deep at the personal level as was that with Haldane.

The consequences of his decision were beneficial for the creation of an effective Liberal government but the way Asquith behaved carries

no credit in relation to his deep friendship at this time with Haldane and Grey. He recognised his debt to Haldane who had facilitated Grey's change of mind. 'No words of mine can express what I feel, by your action during the last two days, you have laid the party, the country and myself (most of all) under an unmeasured debt of gratitude.'⁵ Haldane and Grey did not express feelings of betrayal in 1905, or twenty years later in their memoirs.

Friendship, buttressed by a formal agreement for action, was surrendered to the recognition of the realities of Campbell-Bannerman's position. Asquith in 1928 looked back on 'the whole affair in which from first to last there was nothing in the nature of an "intrigue"'.⁶ Haldane bizarrely reduced its importance by describing it as 'a private, agreement of a purely defensive character'.⁷ Is it right to see this as betrayal, especially since Haldane and Grey neither in 1905 nor later said they had been let down? Grey got the job he wanted, Haldane secured an important Cabinet post – so it is less surprising they did not apparently feel aggrieved. But they had not achieved the main overt purpose of the compact – the elevation of Campbell-Bannerman to the Lords – and it was Asquith's failure, without consultation with Haldane and Grey, to use the threat of resignations which betrayed the strategy the three had agreed.

Love and betrayal

From 1912 Asquith and his closest circle came to resemble the participants in a play. Asquith himself, aged 59, was a successful Prime Minister but with a sometimes-transgressive interest in young women. His second wife Margot (aged 48) was dedicated to her husband's political interests, but often outspoken (or rude as some saw her) in a way which did not serve him well. Their married life was inhibited by their doctor's instruction that she should have no more children.

Violet, one of Asquith's five children from his first marriage, disliked Margot. She was also involved in assisting in Asquith's political life and was passionately fond of her father. She had become emotionally involved with Maurice Bonham Carter (Bongie), her father's private secretary.

Edwin Montagu was a frequent visitor to Downing Street and to the Asquith's country or holiday homes. He had been mentored by Asquith from the beginning of his political career, had served him as his parliamentary secretary and then as a minister. He was in love with Venetia Stanley. Montagu was the son of the strictly observant Jewish Lord Swaythling. Edwin unsuccessfully proposed marriage to Venetia. Venetia rejected him largely apparently because she felt no physical attraction to him (he was indeed regarded by many as ugly) but he did not give up. Asquith frequently used deprecating remarks about Montagu often referring to him as the

From 1912 Asquith and his closest circle came to resemble the participants in a play. Asquith himself, aged 59, was a successful Prime Minister but with a sometimes-transgressive interest in young women.



Asquith and Venetia Stanley in 1910

Assyrian – probably an oblique reference to Montagu’s Jewishness.

Venetia, Violet’s best friend, was also frequently a guest of the Asquiths but increasingly the initiator of Asquith’s visits to her family homes. In 1912 Venetia was 25. She was the daughter of Lord Sheffield and member of a well off aristocratic family. A close friend described her as dark eyed with aquiline good looks and a masculine intellect.⁸ In old age, Violet, when informed through Jenkins’ biography that her father had had an intimate relationship with Venetia, denied it saying, ‘But she was so plain.’⁹

This was the context in which Asquith fell in love with Venetia. ‘Suddenly, in a single instant, without premonition on my part or any challenge on hers, the scales dropped from my eyes; the familiar features & smile & gestures & words assumed an absolutely new perspective; what had been completely hidden from me was in a flash half revealed, and I dimly felt hardly knowing, not at all understanding it, that I had come to a turning point in my life.’¹⁰ This was Asquith’s recollection in April 1915 of how he came to recognise his love for Venetia Stanley in February 1912 following a trip to Sicily in which Asquith, Edwin Montagu, Venetia and Violet had enjoyed themselves.

It is not surprising that Asquith should seek relief in some form from the pressures of political life. Prime Minister since 1907, he had passed through the travails of Lloyd George’s budget, House of Lords reform, home rule and the direct personal and political pressures involved in

handling Lloyd George and Rufus Isaacs over the Marconi affair. There was more pressure caused by Germany’s ambitions to become a real imperial rival to Britain. The number, variety and constant turbulence of these problems were greater than those faced by any Prime Minister since Pitt.

Michael and Eleanor Brock were given access by Venetia’s daughter to the complete archive of more than 560 letters from Asquith to Venetia Stanley. The volume increased from 51 in 1913 to 279 in 1914 and 200 in 1915, obviously reduced following her decision to marry Edwin Montagu. (The Brocks published 425.) The letters demonstrate the importance of Venetia to him – the demands on his emotional resources and the actual time he expended in writing to her. Two or three letters in a day was not unusual, but several times he wrote four letters in one day. The myth that many of them were written in Cabinet was demolished by the Brocks and Buczacki confirms this. Fourteen were written while he was in meetings or on the front bench in the Commons.¹¹ (His revelations of military secrets was, however, another betrayal.) Perhaps as significant in terms of the time demands on him were his receipt of letters from her, which are unfortunately unavailable. But there are a number of references to him not merely reading but rereading her letters, for example: ‘My darling – you will never guess how many times I read over and over (on a very busy day) your precious letter of this morning’ (29 September 1914).¹²

Asquith’s 1915 lyrical description of his feelings in 1912 comes from what Asquith described as an

According to Asquith his relationship with Venetia was not simply one of love, but one in which he sought her counsel: 'every hour I think of you and refer things big and little to the unseen tribunal of your wise and loving judgement' (25 July 1914).

autobiography and sent to Venetia. It is interesting from several points of view. It clearly cannot have been really intended to be part of a published autobiography since he cannot have wished to publicise his affair with Venetia. But this account of his feelings about Venetia in 1912 seemed to be contradicted by Venetia's account of time she spent with him a few weeks later. She wrote in a letter to Montagu in 1912 after spending most of the week at Downing Street with Violet, 'do you remember saying how much he varied in his liking for me, and that sometimes he quite liked me and others not at all? Well this was one of the not at all times. He was horribly bored by my constant presence at breakfast, lunch and dinner.'¹³

There is also the question of why Asquith wrote this, and then why he sent it to Venetia. Perhaps it started as a reflection by him in glowing terms of the origins of his love for her, and then became a way of reminding her of the length and depth of his love.

Asquith was a frequent correspondent to a number of women before and after Venetia; for example, he wrote over 300 letters after the break up with Venetia to Venetia's sister Sylvia, and a large number to another correspondent, Mrs Harrison. There was an element of similarity in that in all cases he was fulfilling some need to record to someone else what was happening in his life, but they were dissimilar in the degree of his passionate involvement with Venetia nor was there any potential political impact as with Venetia's ending of their affair. In all cases, there were elements of seeking solace. In Venetia's case, he also thanked her for the counsel and advice she gave him about the political problems he faced. His letters to Venetia are in part a release from pressures in his political and social life but the passion he expressed may also have been a form of epistolary masturbation. That passion was expressed dramatically and frequently. The most revealing letter was written on 8 March 1915: 'My love for you has grown day by day and month by month & now year by year til it absorbs and inspires all my life. . . . It has rescued me from sterility, impotence, despair.'¹⁴ (This was not likely to be a reference to sexual impotence).

According to Asquith his relationship with Venetia was not simply one of love, but one in which he sought her counsel: 'every hour I think of you and refer things big and little to the unseen tribunal of your wise and loving judgement' (25 July 1914).¹⁵ On 30 March 1915, 'I cannot tell you my best beloved how wise I thought all you said in your letter today in these subjects: especially in relation to the personal qualities of Winston and McK'.¹⁶

There is very little to show us the frequency or content of her counsel, since none of Venetia's letters are available. What we have are references to her advice on a new Lord Lieutenant for Ireland and the appointment of Neil Primrose to the India Office and a new Viceroy of India. The most

significant politically was a letter on 18 March 1915 (marked 'Most Secret'): 'I may create a new office for Ll George, (Director of War Contracts or something of the kind) and relieve him of some of his present duties. I shan't do anything without consulting you, wh makes it all the more necessary that we shd spend tomorrow aft together.'¹⁷

Was Asquith's expressed love for Venetia just a fantasy? Surely the frequency and intensity of his declarations of love, and the indications in his letters of Venetia's response proclaim that he was indeed in love with her. Page after page declare his passion, a lava-like flow of love. (We do not have her letters to confirm or otherwise the intensity of her feelings for him.) There is no doubt that Asquith's involvement with Venetia was a betrayal of his marriage to Margot. That betrayal can be defined first in terms of their marriage vows. The 1662 Marriage Service, which would have been used in 1894, required of the prospective husband that he should 'love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live.'

Biographers of Asquith have chosen not to comment on the morals involved – neither the morality of the difference in power and status of this elderly man's relationship with the much younger Venetia, nor the morality of his betraying his wife. (Venetia's moral position is not germane to this article.) They have chosen rather to become detectives about whether or not they had full sexual congress (echoes of Clinton). Koss says yes, and Jenkins no. More extended arguments are provided by Judge Oliver Poplewell, who creates a lawyer's circumstantial case for yes,¹⁸ while Buczacki emphasises the lack of written evidence and the impracticality of full sexual contact.¹⁹

Perhaps for some people full sex is vital if they are to accept the word 'betrayal'. The view taken here is that it is not crucial, that the volume, the language, the frequency and the content of the letters breach Asquith's commitment to his wife, although he continued to proclaim to Margot his love for her. For this author, but not for biographers, they engender also a feeling of pity for someone so gripped by his infatuation.

Margot knew that Asquith liked the company of young women – she referred to them as his 'little harem'. She needed reassurance on this. She wrote to him on 30 December 1912, 'My darling, do write just one line, quite short, you've made me so unhappy – I am also miserable at having been sulky to you. Forgive me your loving'. Asquith's response was to return the note with 'Darling – why should you be unhappy? I love you and only you. Your H.'²⁰

However, Asquith had other feelings about her. He told Violet on 19 May 1915, 'I have sometimes walked up and down that room till I have felt as tho' I were going mad. When one needed rest, to have a thing like the Morning Post Leader flung at one – the obvious reasons for and against

things more controversially put even than by one's colleagues.²¹

Margot had become increasingly aware that her husband's involvement with Venetia was a threat to her relationship with him. It was another aspect of the tangled connections, the drama of the Asquith marriage that she confided her fears to Montagu. Although Margot described the situation as a trifling domestic discouragement, she expressed concern to Montagu about her husband's relationship with Venetia (the 'play' now verging on French farce). Montagu's reply on 8 March 1915 was, 'How amused you can afford to be at his relaxation. Those who know you both would laugh at a comparison between your relations with him and those of any other woman in the world. ... Show him you acknowledge his right to any amusement he chooses in order that he may give every ounce of himself for the struggle.'²² Margot also wrote to him on how every Friday she 'suffered tortures' during her husband's afternoon drives with 'the deceitful little brute', 'she is even teaching Henry to avoid telling me things. ... I am far too fond of Henry to show him how ill and miserable it makes me, it would only worry him at a time he shd be free'. As a final touch, 'Good God! To think you proposed to her.'²³

Margot was frequently physically ill, and often at the same time depressed. Asquith concealed his betrayal, as many before and since have concealed infidelities from their wives. It is however, painful to read his declarations of love for Margot, in response to her demands for reassurance. She wrote to Asquith in mid-April 1915, 'I told him how much I loved him and how well I knew that I was getting older – that I was irritable – that there were other females in the world etc., that I had no common jealousy that would deprive him of unshared leisure or pleasure.' Asquith wrote an immediate reply: 'My own darling, Your letter made me sad, and I hasten to tell you that you have no cause for the doubts and fears which it expresses, or suggests. But you would have just reason for complaint, and more, if it were true that I was transferring my confidence from you to anyone else. My fondness for Venetia has never interfered and never could with our relationship.' He refers to his occasional irritation and impatience, 'but believe me darling it has not been due to want of confidence and love. Those remain and always will be unchanged.'²⁴ (Mandy Rice Davis and Viscount Astor's denial of a relationship with her came to mind: 'He would say that wouldn't he'.)

Margot sent Asquith's letter on to Montagu, but added that she wondered if Venetia 'hadn't ousted me faintly – not very much – but enough to wound and humiliate me.' She went on to claim that Asquith 'shows me all his letters and all Venetia's and tells me every secret.'²⁵ Any letters Asquith showed her must have been very carefully selected, since otherwise she would have been in no doubt about the betrayal.

It may be that the weight put upon Venetia by the increasing volume and emotional intensity of Asquith's letters persuaded her to bring the relationship to an end. He received her letter announcing her decision to marry Montagu on 12 May 1915. (The letter has not survived.) Venetia finally decided to accept him, after several previous rejections, and to agree the concomitant requirement to convert to the Jewish faith, thus enabling Montagu to receive his inheritance from his father. Asquith was no longer in a play, but in an opera as he hit the high notes in his anguished response:

Most loved
As you know well, this breaks my heart
I couldn't bear to come and see you
I can only pray God to bless you – and help me

Although Asquith had apparently been feeling for several months that she might decide to get married he had no thought at all that she would make the decision so suddenly, and moreover to marry Edwin Montagu – his ex-protégé. When he told Margot, he presented it as concern for Venetia, not his own loss. He wrote more honestly to Sylvia Henley, Venetia's sister, 'I don't believe there are two living people who, each in their separate ways, are more devoted to me than she and Montagu; and it is the irony of fortune that they two shd combine to deal a death blow to me.'²⁶

There was a splendid irony in Asquith's letter to Venetia of 10 May, after a conversation with Montagu. 'I don't honestly believe that, at this moment, there are two persons in the world (of opposite sexes) from whom I cd. more confidently count, whatever troubles or trials ahead to encounter, for wholehearted love & devotion than you & he: of course, in quite different ways & senses.'²⁷

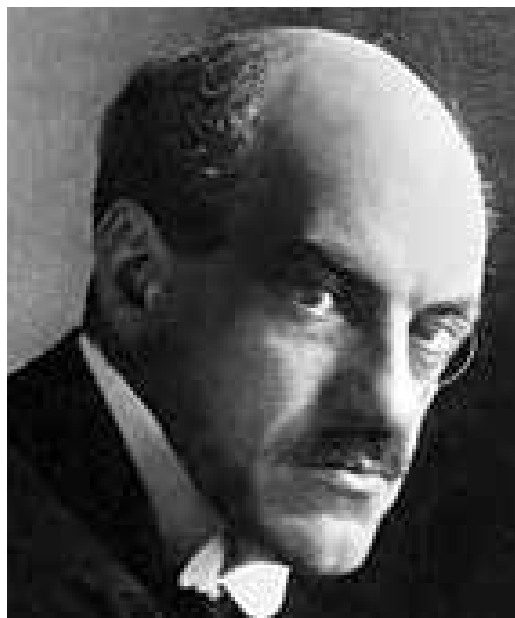
In a letter to Sylvia Henley on 12 May, Asquith revealed that Venetia wrote 'at the end of a sadly meagre letter today: "I can't help feeling after all the joy you have given me, that mine is a very *treacherous* return." Poor darling! I wouldn't have put it like that. But in essence it is true: and it leaves me sore and humiliated'.²⁸ In June, he told her she had been the centre and mainspring of his life.

There was one further betrayal, thirteen years later – this time of Venetia. There was no mention of her, however anodyne he might have made it, in Asquith's *Memories and Reflections* published in 1928. The letters he wrote to her were used but not identified as to her, unlike the recognition he gave to the letters to Sylvia Henley and Mrs Harrison.

Haldane betrayed again

Asquith declared on 12 May 1915 in the House of Commons that there was no question of forming a coalition. But on 17 May he agreed immediately

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Venetia Stanley
(1887–1948)

Edwin Montagu
(1879–1924)

R. B. Haldane
(1856–1928)

to a coalition when the proposition was put to him by Bonar Law with the support of Lloyd George but without consultation with Cabinet colleagues – a quick decision unlike his normal deliberative process. No ‘wait and see’ this time. The full story of the creation of the coalition is not told here, only the impact on Haldane. The most dramatic decisions were about Winston Churchill and R. B. Haldane. The Unionists in addition to their dislike of the ex-Unionist Churchill had grounds in weaknesses in his actions at the Admiralty. There were no performance issues with Haldane – only a response to a press campaign. Asquith circulated a letter to his Cabinet asking for their resignations and referring to the real pain he felt in parting with colleagues.

The first question which arises is whether Asquith’s decision was influenced by the termination of his relationship with Venetia. There is no direct evidence to show that it was. Of course, he made no suggestion to Margot or Violet that his decision was affected by Venetia’s defection. The Brocks thought not. Of his two main biographers, Jenkins comments on the unusual speed with which he made the decision. While he says nothing directly about the impact of Venetia’s letter, he describes Asquith as ‘Throughout the crisis he was preoccupied by private suffering.’²⁹ Koss takes a contemptuous view of the possibility of Asquith being affected, saying that he had in all areas of his life been able to separate the personal and the political. He said that ‘It is outrageously melodramatic to say – as one recent historian has done – that these convulsive struggles were those of a man enduring a private torment’. The anonymous historian was Cameron Hazelhurst – who had been critical of one of Koss’s books.³⁰

Perhaps Koss, the Brocks and others have themselves been too detached emotionally from the reality of Asquith’s involvement with Venetia and what he felt about the ending of it. He spent hours discussing it with Margot, without her apparently recognising that his anguish was about more than an inappropriate marriage to a Jew. Venetia was partially replaced by her sister Sylvia Henley. (Asquith wrote to her frequently with similar terms of endearment, and kissed and groped her. The betrayal continued.) He expressed his devastation in three letters to Sylvia on 12 May, before his decision on 17 May to form a coalition. So, had his despair been transformed into a wholly controlled decision on 17 May? On the 14 May he wrote to Venetia, ‘This is too terrible. No Hell can be so bad’.³¹ On the day he decided to form a coalition he wrote to her about her ‘most revealing and heart rending letter’. You were the centre & mainstay of my life; everything in it hung on you. There was not an act or a thought (as you know well) wh I did not share with you’.³²

It has been argued that Asquith’s decisions after 17 May about the composition of the new Cabinet and particularly his decision to place the

Unionists only in subordinate roles indicate that he was in full possession of his normal approach to political business, in this case to keep power in his own hands, and to preserve the most important jobs for Liberals. Some have argued that although his decision to act narrowly in this way was wrong, it was a consequence of a well-considered approach. Whatever the strength of these arguments, they do not apply equally to the decisions he made about Haldane. Perhaps it was emotional dislocation which reduced his capacity to fight for Haldane, and to fail to communicate with him.

The issue that seems not to have been considered is what was missing – the advice that Venetia might have given him both about the original decision and then about the composition of the Cabinet. Certainly, on the second he had been quite free in discussing potential appointments with her before, and there is every reason to think that he would have done so on this occasion. Of course, we do not know what her advice might have been and whether he would have taken it.

In his *War Memoirs*, Lloyd George says that the Unionists blamed Haldane for not warning the Cabinet about German preparations for war. 'All these criticisms were in my judgement fundamentally unjust, and inflicted a deep wrong on a man whose patriotic energy had rendered greater service to the nation in the reorganisation of the Army than any War Secretary since the days of Cardwell. However, temper was bitter and unconscionable on this subject, and Mr Asquith and Sir Edward Grey sacrificed friendship to expediency. ... Mr Asquith saved [M'Kenna] and sacrificed Haldane. Lord Haldane was not qualified to fight a personal battle for himself. Mr M'Kenna was. So, Lord Haldane was driven in disgrace into the wilderness and Mr M'Kenna was promoted to the second place in the Government.'³³ (Lloyd George's spelling of McKenna.) He does not suggest he spoke on Haldane's behalf then. It should be noted that Lloyd George's statement was written sixteen to seventeen years after the event. Moreover, he had fought during this time long, hard battles with Asquith and Grey about the Liberal Party.

The Conservative veto on Haldane was firmer than that on Churchill; they would not serve in a Cabinet with him, and Grey, when he tried to intervene found them quite unshakeable on the point. 'But to Haldane he neither wrote nor spoke'. (Margot claimed differently – see below). 'It was the most uncharacteristic fault of Asquith's whole career.'³⁴ However, Jenkins' comment is seen in the context of a biography which is generally favourable to Asquith. The criticisms made by these two writers is based on different aspects of Asquith's decision. Lloyd George is critical of the act of removing Haldane, Jenkins is critical of the failure of Asquith to soften the blow by personal condolence.

Asquith and Grey in their memoirs twelve years later placed all the responsibility on

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insistence by the Unionists that Haldane had to go; he with Churchill was part of the price of Unionists agreeing to enter into a coalition. As we will see below, this version is largely supported as far as Asquith is concerned by the comments he made to Margot as recorded in her diary. However, Koss provided a different view when he found a diary entry written by Austen Chamberlain on the 17 May. He was not at the meeting but presumably wrote this following discussions he had had with either or both of Balfour and Bonar Law. Although second hand, it has at least the merit of being contemporaneous. In this Chamberlain recorded that it was actually Asquith who proposed the removal of Haldane at the first meeting with Bonar Law and A. J. Balfour on 17 May.³⁵ Adams, in his biography of Bonar Law, says merely that 'surprisingly the Prime Minister also seemed willing to include Carson but to exclude Curzon and to accept the Unionist black-balling of Haldane.'³⁶

Margot recorded herself as asking Crewe to intervene on Haldane's behalf as on 21 May 'I sat next to Crewe at dinner and begged him to join Grey in telling Henry [i.e. Asquith] that they would neither of them serve under Henry if Haldane was ousted by Bonar Law. He said he would do his best. I appealed for dear Haldane to whom we owe our whole army. (Letting him go looks terribly like giving way to Press and Rumour and Lies.)'³⁷

Margot recorded Asquith's view of his big meeting on 21 May with Bonar Law and Arthur Balfour with Lloyd George and 'by an accident McKenna'. Asquith said, 'I began quite informally saying this was the most painful position any public man could be put into – the knocking out of your oldest, most faithful servants to put in new men. They agreed. ... I began with Haldane. I said he was my oldest friend, that he had been subjected to a press campaign, led by Morning Post, etc., of the foulest, lowest, most mendacious character fostered by the anti-German mania; and to exclude him just now would not only be personally painful to me but would look as if we had given way to the Press, as well as to pressure. I said Grey felt it so strongly that he had told me that he would rather not join and altogether I made a very serious appeal to both of them. B Law was a little moved, and Arthur very much, but BL said that feeling on this side was so strong that it would be quite impossible to enter into a coalition at all if he was kept.' Asquith indicated when they moved to discuss Simon that 'I had asked Simon to succeed Haldane, you know, and he refused.' This shows that Asquith had in fact already given up the fight for Haldane before this meeting at which he made his grand appeal.³⁸ There is no indication of support for Haldane from Lloyd George, Crewe or McKenna at this meeting.

Of course, this account was written by Margot following her husband's version of what happened at the meeting. Knowing as he did her

Could it have been otherwise? Most historians are agreed that Asquith had little choice when Unionists and particularly Bonar Law put it starkly that they would not join the government with Haldane in it.

sympathies in relation to Haldane, and perhaps having reserves of guilt about the treatment he proposed for him, he no doubt emphasised how hard he fought for Haldane and the statement by Bonar Law of Haldane's total unacceptability. It was also far too late in the process of determining Cabinet appointments.

Bonar Law's personal views about Haldane are unknown, but some backbenchers had made their opposition to him plain, largely centred on the baseless accusations about his supposed love for Germany as described in the press. Bonar Law could give them the main victim they sought, Churchill, since Asquith actually agreed that he ought to be moved. Haldane was an additional item to show to Bonar Law's backbenchers as part of the price Asquith had paid for the Unionists joining in a coalition. Bonar Law wanted to avoid open conflict in the House of Commons, and to get a more effective prosecution of the war. Haldane was an easy additional target since, in his role as Lord Chancellor, he had little impact on the running of the war. While attention has often been directed to whether Asquith showed supreme political judgement or lack of personal ethics in disposing of Haldane, no attention has been paid to whether Bonar Law should have stood out against his backbenchers since the case against Haldane was, as he knew, invalid. But then, if Asquith offered no real defence other than his personal embarrassment, why should Bonar Law stand out against his colleagues?

Margot reported on 21 May that 'H [Asquith] was more shattered by his talk to Haldane this afternoon than by anything else in this crisis. All Haldane had said, when H told him that B Law would not have him, was 'I owe you everything. I would not have gone to the War Office but for you; I would not have gone to the Woolsack but for you; I have nothing to complain of.'³⁹ She does not report Asquith as making the obvious response of how sorry he was about the decision.

It is unclear when the executioner's axe finally descended on Haldane. Haldane received a scribbled note on 17 May. There has been no revelation of its content. It may merely have confirmed that Haldane had to go. It seems certain that it contained no deep sense of regret. It is true that in those days there was no routine arrangement for an exchange of letters between Prime Minister and departing, even if sacked, colleague as there is nowadays. Thus, departed Asquith's oldest friend.

Could it have been otherwise? Most historians are agreed that Asquith had little choice when Unionists and particularly Bonar Law put it starkly that they would not join the government with Haldane in it. Bonar Law's biographer, Adams, and less reliably Beaverbrook, both emphasise that Bonar Law's policy throughout was driven by his wish to create a more effective government to win the war, and that he was prepared otherwise to surrender party interests to that end. This was evidenced by his acceptance of

Asquith's arrangement to exclude Unionists from all the most important posts and specifically to give Bonar Law the unimportant Colonial Office. Would he really, given that policy, have refused to join the government if Haldane was included? Yet the complementary view is that Asquith was also intent on a patriotic arrangement, not just survival as Prime Minister, and that therefore Haldane was a necessary gift to the Unionists. Asquith's decision to sack Haldane reminds one of Jeremy Thorpe's sardonic reaction to Macmillan's 'night of the long knives' when he sacked a large number of his current Cabinet – 'greater love hath no man than this that he lays down his friends for his life.'⁴⁰

Should Asquith's decision have been different because he was a friend? Asquith had grown to be less tolerant of some of Haldane's political views and perhaps more importantly his inability to express them in a way which created less opposition or confusion. In the letter he wrote to Venetia on 26 February 1915 'classifying' his Cabinet members, Haldane came ninth. Perhaps Lloyd George had it right: 'There is no friendship at the top'. However, surely the Unionist demand based on uninformed prejudice and a campaign in the Press should have been rejected for any minister. Friendship added to the betrayal. Of course, there had been no promise to keep Haldane in office, any more than would have been likely for any other minister. Asquith had attempted no prior defence of Haldane against the press attacks based on his supposed friendship for Germany. Indeed, he and Grey had explicitly refused to allow the publication of material which would have removed at least one of the charges against Haldane. Nor had Asquith complimented Haldane on his work as Secretary of State for War, which had made the British Army much more effective. In fact, only Churchill had spoken in Haldane's defence during 1915.

As Prime Minister, he had the responsibility of protecting Haldane because there is an implied contract between a Prime Minister and his ministers to defend them, particularly when no fault in performance can be attached to a minister. Asquith was prepared to defend his colleagues over the Marconi affair, not because of loyalty to them but in order to prevent a Conservative victory.

An additional betrayal was the failure to offer any condolence to Haldane after the event. This was even continued in Asquith's memoirs where only a couple of lines blaming the Unionists appeared, again without any reference to Haldane's contribution to the Liberal government. Jenkins, the admiring biographer of Asquith, gave his view that Asquith would have been expected to manage the attack on Haldane better, 'But he was not at his best. He capitulated, sadly and self-critically, but relatively easily.'⁴¹ Self-criticism is not evident in his sessions with Margot; there was rather extraordinary self-pity. 'No one knows

how much I have suffered,' he said to Samuel. 'Very gladly indeed would I have gone. No one has ever made a greater sacrifice than I have.'³²

It is difficult to understand why Asquith did not write or speak to Haldane. After all, he wrote letters of thanks to Crewe and Lloyd George for their efforts during coalition negotiations, and spoke emotionally to Samuel whom he had demoted. (There were several letters to Churchill as he tried to avoid demotion.) According to Margot, he was deeply upset about what he had to do both in general in forming the coalition and specifically about Haldane as described earlier. Perhaps he was unable to deliver a credible case on why he had to give way to the Unionists, and felt guilt about his surrender. (He did successfully ask the King to give Haldane the Order of Merit.) A further witness can be provided in the form of Violet Asquith who wrote that she saw her father in the Cabinet Room on the 16 May 'with a heavy look of unhappiness I have rarely seen on his face before. It rent me. Open beside him on the table was a letter from Haldane. I had a sudden flash of knowledge. "Father is it a Coalition?" "I am afraid so. All this butchery I've got to do." "Must poor Haldane go?" "Yes – one must harden one's heart about it."³³

The problem with this portrayal of Asquith's torment is that the diary was actually written on 22 and 23 May, and 16 May is the day before Asquith agreed to a coalition. Misplacing the day is understandable. More questionable is the reference to a letter from Haldane; there is no evidence elsewhere of Haldane writing to Asquith.

Fifty years after this diary entry Violet explained on BBC radio what she believed to be Asquith's inability to present his emotions to other people. This might seem a strange diagnosis in view of his letters to Venetia, but the circumstances are clearly very different. She attributed her father's silence 'not to lack of feeling but to its intensity. ... The Prime Minister was a shy man of strong emotions who often (to his detriment) left the deepest things he felt unsaid.'³⁴ Margot wrote that 'he and I cried together' on 18 May over the formation of a coalition. It is understandable that in discussion with his wife he should allow himself a purging of his emotions.

In July, a dinner was held at the National Liberal Club to enable 200 Liberal MPs to laud Haldane's services. Asquith was expected to be present, but did not go and instead sent a letter (finally!) read out for him. The letter has not been published.

The meaning of these episodes

There is confusion about what Haldane felt about his dismissal. We have seen earlier Asquith's account of Haldane's reaction, saying that that he owed everything to Asquith. The expectation apparently was that Haldane would be a gentleman and not kick up a fuss, which indeed turned

out to be the case. But what did Haldane actually feel about it? His first biographer Maurice is reported by Koss to have found no trace that Haldane bore any grudge.⁴⁵ Koss seems to accept this. Jenkins, without giving any references, says that Haldane 'went with some bitterness'.⁴⁶ Haldane wrote to Simon on 26 May 1915: 'as to myself I was not under the slightest illusions. If a Government was to be formed which was to have undivided public opinion behind it, I could not be there.'⁴⁷ In his autobiography, Haldane says that, when he got Asquith's circular letter asking for resignations of the Cabinet ministers, 'I made no difficulty'. Indeed, he felt that Asquith would have been worried about the necessity to remove him as they were 'very old and intimate friends'. 'So, I was concerned, but mostly on his account for the future.'⁴⁸ So far from looking back in anger when he wrote his autobiography twelve years after the event, Haldane was being very generous. His self-abnegation, however, does not excuse Asquith's action and inaction.

Historians and biographers have not seen Asquith's actions either as betrayals or as connected. They have not noted the similarity between Relugas and the sacking of Haldane. In both cases Haldane suffered because Asquith claimed he put party and national interests first – while securing the desired position for himself. Were Asquith's betrayals of Haldane only what any politician might do in those circumstances? This cynical view may be accurate, but it is equally possible to argue that something better should be expected of politicians, and that failure to meet higher standards must be identified.

Similarly, Asquith's betrayal of his wife can be viewed as only what many husbands do. Liberal leaders, most notoriously in Lloyd George, have given in to sexual temptation more often than Conservative and Labour leaders. Asquith's involvement with Venetia is an understandable escape from dealing with Margot. Again, are we to shrug our shoulders and excuse him?

This review of three unworthy engagements in a great politician's life is not just a piece of history. The questions it raises about Asquith's behaviour and appropriate descriptions of it are echoed in the constant repetition by the public of the view that politicians cannot be trusted.

Alan Mumford has written about Lloyd George and Churchill for this journal. His most recent book is David Lloyd George: A Biography in Cartoons.

Acknowledgement

This article is greatly indebted to the original work by M. and E. Brock on the love affair between Venetia Stanley and H. H. Asquith.

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Asquith: Friendship, Love and Betrayal

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Report

Election 2017 – A Missed Opportunity?

Evening meeting, 5 February 2018, with James Gurling and Professor Phil Cowley; chair: Baroness Olly Grender.

Report by Neil Stockley

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS entered the 2017 general election campaign with high hopes. They had left behind the grim years of coalition and now, as the only major UK-wide party unequivocally to oppose Brexit, the party had a defining issue and the basis of a distinctive appeal to 'the 48 per cent' who had voted at the June 2016 referendum to remain in the European Union. With the Labour Party bitterly divided under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, the snap election seemed to present the Liberal Democrats with new opportunities.

But the results were a huge disappointment. The party won 7.4 per cent of the votes cast, a drop of 0.5 per cent from two years earlier and the lowest share for the Liberal Democrats or their predecessors since 1959. Twelve Liberal Democrat MPs were returned, representing a net

gain of just four seats compared to the previous general election.

Professor Phil Cowley of Queen Mary, University of London explained the full extent of the party's failure. If the 2015 general election was a catastrophe for the Liberal Democrats, he told the meeting, then 2017 was 'catastrophe-plus'. The party suffered a decline in its share of the vote in all parts of England, except for London, where it rose by 1 per cent, and the south east, where it was up 0.8 per cent. In Wales, the party won no seats for the first time since the formation of the Liberal Party. In Scotland, the Liberal Democrat vote was down 0.8 per cent, although the party made a net gain of three seats. A total of 375 Liberal Democrat candidates lost their deposits, well up on the historic figure of 341 at the previous contest.

Professor Cowley reported that there was a 'single magic number of four' to the party's showing: just four constituencies elected Liberal Democrat MPs at both the 2015 and 2017 general elections, which demonstrated that the dream of a resilient 'core liberal vote' was even more elusive than ever. The party's electoral base had changed significantly since its heyday under Paddy Ashdown and Charles Kennedy, he said, and was now more focused on university graduates and the south east of England.

The meeting discussed why the party's hopes had been dashed so badly. James Gurling, chair of the Liberal Democrats' Federal Campaigns and Elections Committee, concentrated on the immense organisational and tactical challenges the party had faced during the campaign. James recalled how, unlike

many party colleagues, he had always doubted that the party would be able to marshal 'the 48 per cent' who had voted Remain to support the Liberal Democrats in seats that the party could win. Weaknesses in the Liberal Democrats' ability to run successful local campaigns had become apparent by 2010, he said. During the coalition years, its activist base had been hollowed out, leaving the party badly exposed for the 2015 contest. But the subsequent two years in opposition still had not 'cleansed the system', James argued, and the EU referendum had failed to 'reset' the Liberal Democrats' fortunes in the way that many people had expected.

James told the story of the Liberal Democrat campaign in some detail. In the second half of 2016, there were signs that the party was recovering, albeit slowly. The Liberal Democrats had made a strong showing at the Witney by-election of October 2016, which was followed two months later by Sarah Olney's victory at the Richmond Park by-election. From then on, James suggested, fate had not been kind to the party. A by-election in the Labour stronghold of Manchester Gorton had been scheduled for 4 May, and the Liberal Democrats' canvass returns were encouraging. But when the snap general election was called, the poll had to be cancelled, depriving the party of a chance to gain more momentum and credibility.

James recalled how he stood in 'silent horror' when Theresa May moved to call the snap election because 'we were unready' for a national contest. Some important elements of the campaign were in place. Candidates had been selected for the target seats and the manifesto was mostly 'ready to go'. But the party had concentrated its resources on the by-elections and, as a result, it entered the general election campaign without any opinion survey results from key constituencies or research to test its key messages.

James explained how the timing of the snap election had other consequences for the Liberal Democrats. First, it badly weakened the party's ability to communicate to voters in key seats that Labour had voted with the Conservatives to trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, giving two years' notice of the UK's intention to quit the European Union. Second, in the target seats, the early election diverted media and public attention from local issues and on to the national scene. Sections of the media

then reframed the election as a rerun of the July 2016 referendum, which was to prove fatal in areas such as Cornwall, where the party had performed strongly in the past, but where most people had voted Leave. Third, the calling of the snap election blunted the impact of the party's campaigns for the May local elections. The Liberal Democrats had polled well in local by-elections for some months and, although the party won 18 per cent of the national vote on 3 May, it was unable to capitalise on this respectable showing.

Then, James said, Tim Farron 'became unstuck with a disconnect between his personal faith and his responsibility to uphold party policy' on the issue of same-sex marriage. James chose his words carefully, but later acknowledged that it had eclipsed the party's more positive messages.

Despite these handicaps, he argued, the Liberal Democrats began to assemble an effective campaign. They had a positive and coherent message, presenting an alternative to the 'heartless' Conservatives and Jeremy Corbyn's 'divided, pro-Brexit' Labour Party; offering to 'give people a final say' on any Brexit deal, and promising better funding for hospitals and schools. He gave Farron credit for sticking to a clear position on Europe, with the promise of a new referendum on the final Brexit deal, in the face of a lot of internal arguments. The Liberal Democrats headed off the other parties' attacks by pledging to enter into no coalitions, pacts or deals with any other party. In his foreword to the party's manifesto, Farron opined that the Conservatives were set to win a majority, an unusual move designed to make it easier for voters in target seats to support their local Liberal Democrat candidates.

Some former special advisers and party staff returned temporarily to HQ to bolster its reduced campaigning resources and experience. The campaign saw innovations in the use of social media, helped massively by experts from Canada's Liberal Party, and in the Party Election Broadcasts. The leader's national tour was well organised and effective. Manifesto pledges were 'dripped out' successfully in advance of the formal launch and some attacks on the Conservatives, most notably over their proposed 'dementia tax', hit home. But James conceded that the campaign missed opportunities to 'land a decisive blow' on Jeremy Corbyn and the Labour Party, who were able to avoid taking a

clear position on Brexit and thereby keep inside voters from both sides of the issue. They were also able to cleverly exploit the issue of tuition fees.

The pattern of plans frustrated and opportunities lost kept repeating itself. James and his colleagues intended to highlight a positive 'message of the day', a gambit that had generally worked well in many previous campaigns, because broadcasters were obliged to cover the parties' activities, using a weighted formula. In 2017, new Ofcom regulations on election coverage, which worked on a programme-by-programme basis, gave broadcasters more editorial discretion on which of the parties' activities should be reported. This, and the removal of the previous requirement on broadcasters to 'inform and educate' viewers and listeners, meant that the Liberal Democrats suffered. With few MPs and no local momentum from the local election campaign, 'we were left out of the big media stories,' James recalled. The party lodged a complaint with the BBC about the lack of coverage, but, by the time it reached the director general, the whole media was focused on reporting the terror attacks in London and Manchester, which, understandably, had an ongoing impact on the way the entire general election campaign was reported.

Yet it was the party's own lack of resources that appeared to cause James the most frustration. He explained that in the target seats, especially those that had voted Remain, the Liberal Democrats tried to match the intensity of the Conservatives' efforts in 2015. These local efforts were always important, because the party could not match the much better funded Conservative and Labour campaigns at national level. Around fifty seats were in play, but the party could afford to campaign effectively in only thirty and by mid-campaign, he said, even this number had to be scaled back.

Professor Cowley acknowledged that the Liberal Democrats 'did a lot right' with their campaign, including having the manifesto ready early on, with candidates, including former MPs, selected in key seats, membership at record levels and, with the promise of a new referendum on Brexit, a distinctive issue. Like James, he always doubted that all of 'the 48 per cent' would base their vote, let alone switch to the Liberal Democrats, on the issue of EU membership, but pre-election polls suggested that around 25 per cent of voters may have at least

Report: Election 2017 – A missed opportunity?

considered it. The dramatic improvement in the party's electoral fortunes after the June 2016 referendum suggested that the decision to concentrate on Brexit was understandable and correct. The Liberal Democrat campaign's high command seemed united and coherent, whereas Labour and the Conservatives both had two parallel, conflicting teams in charge of their campaigns.

So, what went wrong for the Liberal Democrats? Professor Cowley was clear that the context of the election could hardly have been more difficult for the party. The electorate was more polarised than for many years: 85 per cent of voters opted for either of the two major parties. Jeremy Corbyn's party enjoyed the biggest increase in its vote at any general election since 1945 and the Conservatives also had a historic, if less-noticed achievement: the largest increase in support for a governing party since 1832. These shifts left the Liberal Democrats, along with UKIP and Plaid Cymru, caught in a huge electoral pincer movement.

Professor Cowley also agreed with James that the party had been squeezed out of broadcast media coverage. He argued, however, that at the very time that the Liberal Democrats needed an effective campaign that 'cut through' to voters, they committed two basic errors.

First, at the very start of the campaign, Tim Farron had taken 'an illiberal position' on homosexuality and same-sex marriage in an interview with Channel Four News. 'This was not sustainable for a liberal party,' he said, and had all but curtailed the Liberal Democrats' ability to project any other messages to the electorate. The party's own focus groups showed that Farron's stance on 'gay sex' was the only thing voters recognised from the Liberal Democrat campaign. Professor Cowley reminded the meeting that Tim Farron's views on homosexuality had come under scrutiny before, including during the party leadership election in 2015. The tough questions the Liberal Democrat leader faced from the very start of the campaign had hardly 'come out of the blue', he maintained, and the party could and should have anticipated them.

Second, whilst the Liberal Democrats had pledged not to enter government, they produced a comprehensive manifesto, full of detailed policies, almost none of which proved especially attractive to the voters. He cited a YouGov poll that tested the popularity of the main UK parties' key manifesto pledges.

Only one, a promise to increase NHS funding, came from the Liberal Democrat manifesto.

The promise of a new referendum on Brexit, by contrast, was well down the list of popular policies. Professor Cowley underlined how Brexit had not proved a vote-winning, 'turf issue' for the party when he pointed out that in the constituencies where the Remain vote was above 55 per cent at the EU referendum, the Liberal Democrat share of the vote had increased by an average of just 0.9 per cent. In those where between 45 and 55 per cent had voted Remain, the Liberal Democrat share was down by an average of 0.6 per cent. In those seats with a Remain vote below 45 per cent, the party was down by an average of just over 1 per cent. (In contrast, the Liberal Democrat vote went up by an average of 1.7 per cent in constituencies where a third or more of voters were graduates.) Earlier, James had suggested that the party's stance on Brexit had been 'too complicated' and too focused on process.

The party's approach to Brexit was a major point of interest when the meeting discussed how the Liberal Democrats might have run a better campaign. It soon became clear how limited were the options available to the party. One member of the audience suggested that the party should have committed to a straightforward 'exit from Brexit' rather than a referendum on the final deal. James Gurling agreed that such a stance would have been more comprehensible and that the party should have linked more clearly the process for 'giving people a say' to its desired outcome on Brexit. Professor Cowley replied that the problem was not so much the Liberal Democrats' precise position on Brexit, but the skillful way in which the Labour Party had straddled the issue to the satisfaction of both the 'remainers' and 'leavers' whose support it needed. He was sure that the situation would have been no different had the Liberal Democrats taken a more definitive position. He also reminded the meeting that a more 'straightforward' stance would also have been problematic for the party, given that a large minority of Liberal Democrat supporters voted Leave in the referendum.

Similarly, Professor Cowley gave short shrift to suggestions that the party could have expressly rejected the outcome of the referendum, and promised to remain in the European Union, given that it had previously promised voters an 'in-out' referendum on membership.

In considering 'what might have been', Professor Cowley pointed out, quite correctly, that the results could very easily have been much worse for the Liberal Democrats. Some pre-election forecasts suggested they would win a mere three seats and at one stage of the campaign, the Conservatives' modelling suggested that a single Liberal Democrat MP would be returned. He suggested that not much separated the 'catastrophe-plus' from a less disappointing result. After all, the party failed to win four more seats by a combined total of just 350 votes. And the immediate aftermath of polling day could have been much more problematic. Had the Labour Party performed only marginally better in a few dozen seats, Tim Farron and his colleagues would have been forced to decide whether Theresa May or Jeremy Corbyn would occupy Number 10.

Members of the audience offered some alternative histories of their own. Lord Rennard opined that the 2017 general election was a 'lucky break' for the Liberal Democrats, compared to what might have happened had the contest not taken place until 2020. For instance, five former Liberal Democrat MPs contested their old seats, three of them successfully, but may not have been available had the 2015 parliament been allowed to run its full term. A 2020 general election would have been fought on new constituency boundaries, which would have been very challenging for the party. Given that all Liberal Democrat leaders have found their early years in the role the most challenging, Tim Farron, like his predecessors, may eventually have established himself and learned how to handle the difficult media interviews. James replied that from his position, it was very hard to see the results as a lucky break!

Looking to the future, Professor Cowley offered one crumb of comfort. He cautioned the audience against believing simplistic notions that 'two party politics were back'. The multi-party electoral contests in Scotland disproved such claims, he maintained, and the class-based voting alignments that underlay the two-party system of the 1950s and 1960s were now gone. Professor Cowley was sure that future elections would be marked by voter volatility rather than any solidity.

But he had a grim warning too. As Professor Cowley spoke, seven months after the general election, the Liberal

Democrats had still failed to break through in the opinion polls. (At the time of writing, they still have not.) This suggested that the party faced challenges that were bigger and more fundamental

than anything relating to the campaign it ran for the 2017 general election.

Neil Stockley is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

Reviews

A truly remarkable man – but not a universal man

Richard Davenport-Hines, *Universal Man: The Seven Lives of John Maynard Keynes* (William Collins, 2015)

Review by **Ed Randall**

KEYNES LIVED A truly exciting and eventful life; one that had a huge impact on his fellow human beings, not just those who were part of his immediate and extensive social circle (many of whom he knew intimately), but vast numbers of people he could never have known personally. This book does more to convey that excitement and eventfulness to a general readership than any other I have read about John Maynard Keynes. No doubt that is because Richard Davenport-Hines did not set out to write another intellectual biography of Keynes.

If Davenport-Hines had wanted to enter that market he would (as he clearly appreciates) have found a crowded field, populated with works by genuine authorities on economic ideas. Not least, he would have entered a field dominated by Robert Skidelsky's magisterial, three-volume account of Keynes' life. Skidelsky offers unmatched intellectual insights to readers who want help making sense of Keynes' very active and extraordinary participation in – as well as commentary on – the world-shattering events of the first half of the twentieth century. Skidelsky also happens to have been especially well equipped, when the opportunity arose, to make the most of an unprecedented opportunity (in his *Return of the Master* (Allen Lane, 2009)), to extol and celebrate the economic thought of his hero. Keynes may have been dethroned by many in the Economics profession from his lofty position as father of macroeconomics, but he appeared, after

the Crash of 2008, to have been restored to a place atop an Economics Olympus.

Davenport-Hines' mission, in *Universal Man*, was to share his sense and appreciation of a life lived to the full and more often than not for a greater good. For Keynes, his academic discipline of Economics was never the most important thing. Regarded by some as a kind of intellectual Hercules, Keynes himself anticipated a time when Economics would be a subject for technicians and specialists; they might make a worthwhile but necessarily modest contribution to humanity. In his essay *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren*, published in the shadow of the Great Crash of 1929, Keynes wrote:

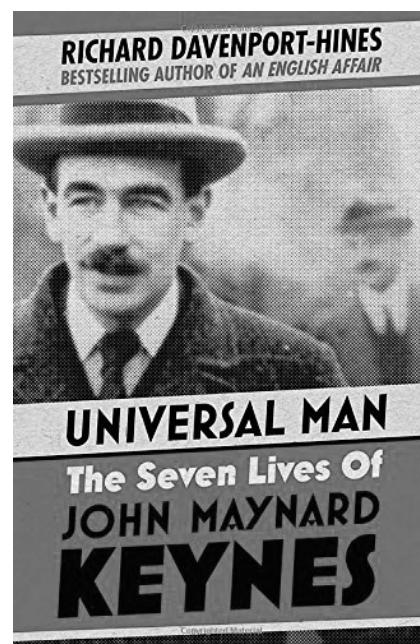
... do not let us overestimate the importance of the economic problem, or sacrifice to its supposed necessities other matters of greater and more permanent significance. It should be a matter for specialists ... If economists could manage to get themselves thought of as humble, competent people, on a level with dentists, that would be splendid!

So Davenport-Hines (who quotes Keynes' statement about the limitations of economic ideas and economists) sets out to convince his readers that Keynes' joie de vivre, and his engagement with his own and other people's humanity, had much less to do with the development of economic theory than it did with the huge pleasure he derived from his activities: as a benefactor, what

Davenport-Hines refers to as an *altruist*; as a man – especially young man – of curiosity, what Davenport-Hines calls a *boy-prodigy*; as a public official or civil servant, an *official*; as a *public man* (or what we nowadays often refer to as a public intellectual); as a *lover*; as a *connoisseur*; and, last, but by no means least, as an *envoy* – an able person committed to representing the culture to which they belong to the very best of their ability.

Let us start, as Davenport-Hines does, with the benefactor and philanthropist – a man who could have made and kept a huge private fortune. Keynes certainly made fortunes (and on occasion lost them), but he inevitably invested a great part of the money he made into the things he loved so that they would benefit others. That included the Cambridge Arts Theatre, to which Keynes lent a prodigious sum. But, more important still, he gave the theatre, and many other projects, his time and energy. In 1934, Davenport-Hines records, Keynes made 'eight speeches altogether' (in one day, in support of the Cambridge Theatre scheme). Keynes himself believed '... they must have got tired of me! But the scheme went through.' Giving his time and energy to the things he believed in – whether a theatre project, Kings College (Cambridge), or representing his nation in the US at the close of the Second World War – was the hallmark of a man willing to commit vastly more than his money to the things he loved and believed in.

Keynes' curiosity, as a young man, was not just expressed in his intellectual



pursuits and academic achievements, it was a very personal quest of self-discovery too. Davenport-Hines gives a fascinating account, based on information that Keynes himself ‘compiled and preserved’, about sexual encounters with ‘young men off the streets’ and amongst his own set. And, in this regard, Davenport-Hines refers to Keynes’ ‘principle of intelligent compartmentalisation’. It was an openness to new experiences, and a capacity to defy others’ expectations and to undertake a journey that did not follow an easily predictable course, but so far as possible a carefully managed one.

Early in 1922, Keynes arranged for the Russian ballerina Lydia Lopokova, whom he had met for the first time in 1918, to move into rooms in Gordon Square, just ‘a few doors away from ... where he lived’. In the course of Davenport-Hines’ account of Keynes’ sexual evolution, he notes that, by the time Keynes was set on marrying Lydia, he was also urging fellow Liberals to: ‘... break bounds by public discussion of “sex questions” ... [which are] widely discussed in private.’ One reason Keynes gave for talking more openly and honestly about sex was that ‘there are no subjects about which the general public is more interested ... [adding that it should not be doubted that] sex questions are about to enter the political arena.’

As Davenport-Hines reports, Keynes regarded himself as physically repulsive. Virginia Woolf compared him to ‘a gorged seal, [with] double chin, ledge of red lip, little eyes, sensual, brutal [and] unimaginative’. Yet, Virginia Woolf also wrote of Keynes: ‘[He seemed to be] a blank wall of disapproval; till I kissed him, [when] he talked of Lydia, having a book about the ballet, in his eager stammering way’.

In this review I have preferred the term public servant, to Davenport-Hines’ label – ‘Official’ – for one of Keynes’ seven lives; terminology can be very important! Indeed, Davenport-Hines quotes Sir Richard Hopkins, a Treasury mandarin who knew Keynes well, as observing of Keynes that: ‘He was not a minister, but he was a friend of ministers. He was not a civil servant, but he was a friend of civil servants. He was also a critic of both, and, if need be, a castigator.’ Keynes was, in his public service, exceptionally hard working and extraordinarily committed, once he had decided in favour of what he believed to be a good cause. *Universal Man* is full of

winning illustrations and accounts of the efforts that followed. But Keynes most remarkable skill was his unsurpassed ability to persuade. His life as a persuader marks him out as one of the most talented and successful communicators of the twentieth century. Keynes investment and engagement in trying to change minds often began with him changing his own mind.

One of Davenport-Hines’ best anecdotes is about Keynes’ success in changing Lloyd George’s mind at the beginning of the First World War. Keynes – then in his mid-thirties, and one of the youngest senior public servants in Whitehall – is portrayed as he sets out to convince Lloyd George to change his mind on a great issue of finance. And, change Lloyd George’s mind (about how the UK government should manage international and domestic banking debts and the UK’s stocks of gold) Keynes did. Yet, by the end of the war, his relationship with the Welsh Wizard had changed. As international leaders, including Lloyd George, met at Versailles, to agree the terms of the peace, Keynes – a British delegate to the talks – concluded that those leaders, including Lloyd George, were by far the greatest threat to world peace. He decided to write what is probably the most powerful, and certainly the most influential, polemic against the Versailles Treaty (and its ‘statesmen’ authors, including Lloyd George). His book, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, became a best seller. Keynes left the government service and was more or less immediately recognised for his extraordinary gifts as a public communicator and as one of the foremost controversialists of his day. Davenport-Hines tells the story very well.

Davenport-Hines has something very particular in mind when he refers to Keynes as a connoisseur. ‘Connoisseurs ... adopt or reject people and tastes according to a patrician sensibility [ignoring] the worlds of productivity and profit. Money is esteemed as a means to acquire what they value, but despised as a provider of power, showiness, luxury, over-eating and barbarous hobbies.’ This biography is full of engaging stories about Keynes’ love of collecting. He took considerable efforts to acquire works for his own collection of paintings (which he bequeathed to Kings College, Cambridge), and for the nation. The biography not only recounts stories

about Keynes’ collecting, it explores his motivations as a collector of books and paintings. At one point Davenport-Hines compares Keynes to Sir Kenneth Clark (‘Clark of Civilisation’) – they knew one another quite well and got on well. The former ‘had signalled his wish to democratise access to the arts by opening [the National Gallery] on Cup Final Day’ and, as Davenport-Hines puts it: ‘both felt, [they were] fighting for European arts and intellect against barbarism [and] believed that the arts intensified people’s appreciation of life.’ In July 1945 Keynes said, in the course of a BBC broadcast dealing with the foundation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, that the establishment of the Arts Council had ‘happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way’. And, despite very limited funds, it was a very public recognition that there was an ‘unsatisfied demand ... for serious and fine entertainment’.

Close to the end of his life Keynes became Britain’s most important international negotiator at a series of talks held in the United States about the future of international economic relations. This part of Keynes’ life, as an envoy, is admirably clearly recounted. Keynes, the author of the *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, and the most eminent economist working at the British Treasury, had good reason to believe that his knowledge and experience equipped him to persuade Britain’s most important military ally that peacetime cooperation should and could match that required for prosecuting the war. But Keynes and his small team struggled to get their message across. One of those present, Dean Acheson, asked Lionel Robbins – a member of the UK delegation – why London sent ‘too many Englishman with the wrong sort of accent [to Washington]’. At subsequent talks, those held at Bretton Woods, agreement was finally reached on establishing new international institutions. Keynes contribution was acknowledged, but what was agreed fell far short of what he wanted. Davenport-Hines, in his account, does an excellent job of describing the process and the misunderstandings, which left both the British and the Americans frustrated.

I think it is unfortunate that Davenport-Hines’ title – for a biography of a man with at least seven lives (and the reader cannot escape the idea that it could have been many more) – uses

the phrase *Universal Man* to sum them up. Keynes was not a man for all times nor was he a man for all places. He was most certainly a multi-faceted and multi-talented human being (surely Davenport-Hines' object in deploying the term *universal*), but Keynes was also an Englishman, and an Englishman from a particular era. Keynes was an Edwardian Englishman. He was – as we all are – a product of his place and his times, even if he was often at odds with England's insularity and conservatism. He was the champion of an ethical outlook that was the very antithesis of values that had come to be associated with Victorian Britain, the world into which he had been born. But Keynes' embrace of individualism, his love of the arts and support for the avant-garde, rarely meant he was rejected by his English peers and contemporaries, or that he rejected them. They appear to have accepted him as the possessor of a fine English soul and of great English

sensibilities – even though he often articulated radical notions and endorsed unconventional morals. It is hard to imagine that such a prominent public figure could, in twenty-first-century Britain, have enjoyed the degree of freedom Keynes enjoyed from media curiosity and intrusion.

This is a book about a truly remarkable man, not a renaissance man or a superman or even a universal man. I thoroughly recommend it as a most enjoyable and informative read.

Ed Randall is a retired academic and former Liberal Democrat councillor. His publications include A Union for Health: Strengthening the European Union's role in health; Food, Risk and Politics: Scare, scandal and crisis – insights into the risk politics of food safety; How and How Not to Face the Future: A response to the Liberal Democrats' Facing the Future. He was joint editor of the Dictionary of Liberal Thought with Duncan Brack.

Heath abandoned his antipathy to 'lame ducks' by, in effect, nationalising Rolls Royce within five months of taking office. Benn later enjoyed describing the Labour Party programme of 1972 as 'The most radical and comprehensive programme ever produced by the Labour Party', which guaranteed a great embarrassment to the then deputy leader, Roy Jenkins. According to Harold Wilson, Jenkins held the 'lead position' as the putative leader of the party to follow Wilson until his resignation from the deputy leadership and from the Shadow Cabinet in April 1972. There is long detail on the events leading up to his resignation, with Wilson undermining him by changing his mind over a referendum on the Common Market.

Not all those on the right of the party were followers of Jenkins: there were some who hankered after Antony Crosland, but he never stirred himself to follow up his seminal book, *The Future of Socialism*, and thus disappointed his acolytes. Bill Rodgers – later the most effective operator of the SDP's 'Gang of Four' – applied his organisational and 'fixing' skills to the Campaign for Democratic Socialism in an attempt to make Jenkins' role more effective.

It is interesting that the Liberals do not rate even a footnote in this narrative. In different circumstances, such as during the Lib-Lab Pact of 1977–8, the Liberals might have had influence as a second opposition party making life more difficult for Edward Heath. However, the Liberals had polled just 7.5 per cent at the 1970 general election,

Social democracy versus socialism

Patrick Bell, *The Labour Party in Opposition 1970–1974* (Routledge, 2016)

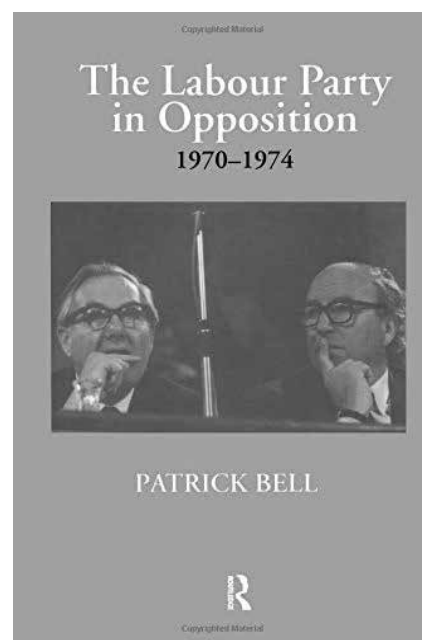
Review by **Michael Meadowcroft**

PERCEPTIONS OF HOW a party copes with the years of opposition usually rely on statements, interviews and its efforts to present a favourable and united front, illuminated from time to time by leaks and lobbying by dissidents. The value of an examination of the Opposition through a specific parliament is that, if rigorous, it draws aside the curtain and exposes the factions and tensions. Patrick Bell has done a very thorough job of trawling through all the available committee papers and interviewing key individuals. The result is that the reader gets a vivid picture of the deep left–right split at all levels of the party and the great skill of Harold Wilson as leader in keeping the whole show on the road. Bell also shows how senior staff at Labour headquarters were themselves partisan and on occasion resorted to somewhat underhand tactics in the preparation and timing of documents in order to pursue their views.

The roots of the struggle within the Labour Party between social democracy

and hegemonic socialism were planted during its time in opposition. The balance of power within the party shifted significantly from the parliamentary party to the membership and, often separately, to the major trade unions. Patrick Bell painstakingly traces the movement in policy via papers prepared for the national executive committees and, finally, to the party conference. With the accession of Jack Jones to the leadership of the Transport & General Workers' Union – the largest in the country – and with Hugh Scanlon heading up the engineering workers union, there were powerful figures on the left of the party who were ready and able to demonstrate their clout by going direct to the party conference with their block votes rather than participate in the deliberative committee process.

Tony Benn's skilful manoeuvring as de facto leader of the left is traced through his attention to committee detail and his ability to produce the apposite excoriating phrase, as when



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

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A daily posting of Liberal events on this day in history. Follow us at: [LibHistoryToday](https://twitter.com/LibHistoryToday).

electing only six MPs. They hardly figured on the electoral scene, slowly clambering up to 10 per cent in the polls by April 1972, but dropping back to 8 per cent in October 1972. Less than eighteen months later, at the February 1974 general election, the Liberals polled 19.3 per cent – equivalent to some 23 per cent if all the seats had been contested. What transformed the party into such an influential force? It was simply a run of by-election successes starting with Cyril Smith winning Rochdale in late October 1972, almost doubling the

party’s poll rating overnight. This was followed by gains in Sutton and Cheam, Ripon, the Isle of Ely and Berwick. These pushed the poll rating up to 28 per cent, but, with the lack of winnable seats thereafter, it slipped back to 20 per cent immediately before the February 1974 general election. On such electoral vagaries do the Liberal Party’s fortunes depend!

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

LI and preparing for his eventual return to office in 2010.

Lendvai chronicles all his splits with former friends and colleagues, his embracing of the church as a former atheist, his steady garrotting of free newspapers and broadcast media, his ending of an independent judiciary, his anti-refugee rhetoric and successful manipulation of the electoral system and the country’s constitution. He cites his popular football following with the dry comment that Orbán ‘always wanted to be the referee, the linesman, the centre-forward and the goalkeeper all at once.’ He also quotes his Hungarian biographer as being ‘a man who almost automatically believes in the veracity of whatever he considers to be politically useful to him’ (reminds me of a current cabinet minister here!) and an American political scientist describing his strategy as ‘a highly centralised, partially illiberal democracy, which systematically undermines the structures of checks and balances’.

The author clearly has come to hate his subject – his detailing of financial manipulation is one thing, but his hints at personal corruption lack substance. What is especially sad is that Orbán, who began his climb of the ladder with a Soros scholarship, has now run a virulent campaign against George Soros and his endowed Central European University. Altogether this is an alarming, worrying and illuminating tale.

David Steel (Lord Steel of Aikwood) was MP for Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles / Tweeddale, Ettrick & Lauderdale 1965–97, and Leader of the Liberal Party 1976–88.

From liberal to authoritarian

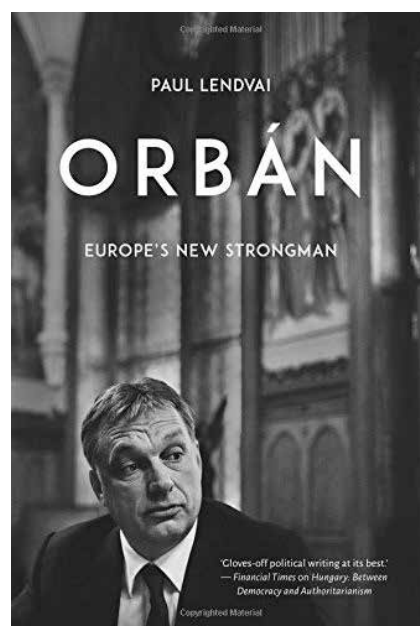
Paul Lendvai, *Orbán: Europe’s New Strongman* (C. Hurst & Co., 2017)

Review by **David Steel**

THIS NEW BIOGRAPHY of Hungary’s prime minister outlines his transition from young Liberal firebrand, in 1989 demanding the removal of all Russian troops, to the present-day right-wing autocratic ruler of his country and pal of President Putin. It is an astonishing story, told here in remarkable detail.

I first met Orbán together with his young Fidesz party colleagues in the dying days of the communist regime. They were an attractive and idealistic bunch and duly joined Liberal International very much under the tutelage of its then president, the former German economics minister Otto Graf Lambsdorff. Indeed Orbán, as the newly elected leader of his party, hosted a memorable congress of

Liberal International (LI) in Budapest in 1993. Shortly afterwards, I was president of LI and hosting a meeting of the organisation’s bureau at home in Aikwood Tower in my Scottish Borders constituency. We took over the next-door farmhouse to accommodate some of them, but in the tower we had Lambsdorff and the prime ministers of the Netherlands and Iceland. I told Orbán that, as he was both the youngest and the smallest, he would have to make do with the sofa bed in my study. He first became prime minister of Hungary in 1998–2002, and during that first period I called on him saying that now he was prime minister he could have a bed if he ever came back. But he never did, relinquishing his party’s membership of



Archive sources

Dr J. Graham Jones lists the archival collections of interest to students of the Liberal Party held at Newcastle University

Newcastle University Library Special Collections

THE PHILIP ROBINSON Library's Special Collections hold many unique archives and rare books. These materials provide great scope for original research for many subject areas and the potential to complement teaching and learning at the university. These materials comprise rare books and other significant printed works and also archives, which include a full range of materials such as photographs, audiovisual materials, illustrations and maps.

Not everything in Special Collections is old: the collections date from the fourteenth century to the present day. A collection item might be scarce because few copies survive or because it was issued in a limited print run; it might have been issued by a private press, have previously belonged to someone significant, have a fine binding, be annotated, have additional material tipped or pasted in, or be part of a person's private collection that the library wishes to keep together.

The following archival collections are of likely interest to students of the Liberal Party:

Walter Runciman Archive

The papers of Walter Runciman, 1st Viscount Runciman of Doxford (1870–1949), relate chiefly to his political career, but also include material concerning his personal and professional life. They cover his election campaigns and his political career during the years 1894–1938, and in particular they cover the different political offices he held, as a Liberal MP and cabinet minister, and as a member of the Board of Education, 1908–11, and the Board of Trade, 1914–16 and 1931–37. There is also material relating to Runciman's attempt to solve the 1938 Sudeten crisis through his mission to Czechoslovakia.

The collection also includes the diaries and some correspondence of Walter's wife, Hilda Runciman, herself briefly an MP. Hilda's diaries have been found

to be of particular value to researchers, providing as they do an insight into the world and circles in which she and her husband moved, sometimes revealing insider knowledge about the current talk in London society, a classic example being Hilda's remarks in her 1936 diary about the abdication crisis and the king's intentions.

In addition, there are 114 volumes of press cuttings, plus material relating to Walter Runciman's father, the 1st Baron Runciman, as well as documents relating to Sir Walter Leslie Runciman (1900–1989).

Link to Runciman Papers: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/collection_details.php?id=87

Trevelyan Papers

The Trevelyan Papers, deposited by the Trevelyan family, are those of several generations of the Trevelyan family whose home was Wallington Hall, Northumberland. The archive is rich and diverse, not least because the family had so many roles and indulged so many interests between them that the archive can truly be described as multi-disciplinary.

Charles Philips Trevelyan (1870–1958) was a Liberal and then Labour MP and thus his papers deal with early twentieth-century political issues, for the most part. He was a founder of the Union of Democratic Control in during the First World War and president of the Board of Education. His papers cover the Liberal and Labour parties, parliamentary measures, and contain cabinet papers and election material but also include items concerning education acts; school diaries; summer, vacation and Sunday schools; Parents' National Education Union schools, Catholic and London Board schools; school attendance; and specific UK schools and colleges. There are also some papers from his wife,

Molly (1881–1966), including her diaries for 1892–1917.

George Otto Trevelyan (1838–1928) was a historian, Liberal MP and chief secretary for Ireland after the Phoenix Park murders.

Charles Edward Trevelyan (1807–1886) worked for the East India Company and the Home Civil Service. He was assistant secretary to the Treasury during the Irish famine. Although his papers largely reflect his interest in Civil Service reform, the papers include some material relating to education. (He may be of interest to readers because of his family's political leanings.)

Link to Trevelyan Papers: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/collection_details.php?id=93

Mary Moorman

The archive does not include the papers of the historian G. M. Trevelyan, but there are letters from him to his family in the collections. However, the archive does hold the papers of Mary Caroline Moorman (1905–1994), historian, biographer and daughter of the historian G. M. Trevelyan. They mainly consist of letters from Mary Moorman's parents, George M. Trevelyan and Janet Penrose Trevelyan, née Ward.

Link to Moorman: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/collection_details.php?id=82

Other collections of possible interest are:

Ethel Williams Archive: Ethel Williams was Newcastle's first female doctor, and in 1906 became the first woman to found a general medical practice in the city. In 1917, Williams co-founded the Northern Women's Hospital. As a suffragist, she served as secretary of the Newcastle Women's Liberal Association and became president of the Newcastle and District Women's Suffrage Society

Europe: the Liberal commitment

Why have the Liberal Democrats, and their Liberal and SDP predecessors, always supported membership of the EU? Discuss the historical origins of the Liberal commitment to Europe with Professors **Anthony Howe** and **Eugenio Biagini**. Chair: **Baroness Julie Smith**.

6.15pm, Sunday 16 September

Sandringham Suite, Hilton Brighton Metropole (no conference pass necessary)

(NUWSS). As a pacifist, she was a founding member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, of which she was a secretary of the Newcastle branch in 1934. This collection includes letters from contemporaries of Ethel Williams, a number of photographs of her throughout her life, objects connected to the suffrage movement, and selected information about Williams collected after her death.

Link to Ethel Williams: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/collection_details.php?id=132

Spence Watson/Weiss Archive: This collection consists of papers relating to the Newcastle-born politician, co-founder of Armstrong College (now Newcastle University), and social and educational reformer Robert Spence Watson (1837–1911) and, to a lesser extent, his wife Elizabeth (1838–1919), a Quaker who was involved with many of her husband's projects, in particular with educational projects such as the Industrial or Ragged Schools. The papers were donated to the library by Miss Mabel Weiss (Spence Watson's granddaughter) and consist chiefly of correspondence sent to Robert and Elizabeth Spence Watson and also correspondence relating to Ernest F. Weiss. There is also some correspondence to named and unnamed individuals which found their way into the papers through Spence Watson's involvement with various committees and organisations. There are letters from Liberal politicians and statesmen, including Sir Edward Grey, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, W. E. Gladstone, John Morley, Joseph Cowen, and John Bright, as well as letters from associates or friends from the many areas in which the Spence Watsons were interested, such as the arts, literature, exploration and political asylum. In addition, there are

a number of family letters mainly from Robert Spence Watson to his wife and daughters and a few letters to Robert Spence Watson's father, Joseph Watson.

The material concerning Frederick and Evelyn Weiss also includes letters to and from friends and associates working in the various fields of politics, science, the arts and general education matters. There are also letters addressed to C. P. Scott interspersed with the collection, and some miscellaneous material including a collection of autographs and letters from well known characters of the nineteenth century, pamphlets and publications by Robert Spence Watson and some cuttings and newspaper articles.

Link to Spence Watson/Weiss: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/collection_details.php?id=97

Joseph Cowen Tracts: The Cowen Tracts are almost 2,000 pamphlets which were formerly owned by local (radical) MP, Joseph Cowen (1829–1900). The tracts date mostly from the mid-to late-nineteenth century and reflect Cowen's interest in the social, educational, political and economic issues of the day. (The Cowen Tracts can also be viewed through JSTOR, if the institution participates.)

Link to Cowen Tracts: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/collection_details.php?id=16

The Manuscript Album: This is a miscellaneous collection, but there are some letters relating to people of interest, such as Cowen.

Link to Manuscript Album: http://www.ncl.ac.uk/library/special-collections/collections/collection_details.php?id=79

There are also individual items held across the collections that may be of interest to the readership of this journal, such as 'The Boer War and the Liberal Party in Newcastle and Gateshead', 'The Speech of Mr. Hugh Mason, (Chairman), at an aggregate special meeting of the Liberal Committees of Ashton-under-Lyne, on Monday, May 25th, 1874', and Robert Spence Watson's 'The coming work of the Liberal Party'. They can be found by using the library's integrated online catalogue: http://libsearch.ncl.ac.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=NCL_V1

Whilst there are some items relating to the First World War, there is a significant amount of material relating to the Second World War – published 1939–1943, often by Penguin (or the Pelican imprint) in the iconic early paperback series. This material includes E. O. Lorimer's *What Hitler Wants* (1939) – a Penguin Special which achieved record-breaking sales, as well as F. Lafitte, *The Internment of Aliens* (1940) and E. Glover, *The Psychology of Fear and Courage* (1940).

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