

insight into the clubs when dinners with celebratory speakers were laid on as part of a campaign or to bolster support for some threatened party leader. On these occasions the press could be invited to publish the guest lists and the text of the speeches.

For the party hierarchy, the most important role for the clubs was the way in which they facilitated the operations of the whips and Thévoz devotes two chapters of the book to their operations. In the eighteenth century, a government majority could usually be ensured by a mixture of patronage, jobbery and electoral influence. The Treasury controlled enough constituencies to make the difference and enough funds earmarked for the management of the governing party. These weapons were denied to oppositions who were forced to rely on the ideological fire of their members and voluntary management methods. By the 1830s the government's advantages were waning and both sides were more reliant on their own efforts. The whips had to become more professional. The activities of the whips within parliament still await the attention of an enterprising author but Thévoz has uncovered much of what they did outside.

All the chief whips or their deputies, of both sides, were members of the appropriate clubs, and in some cases, particularly among Conservatives, acted as the gatekeepers facilitating MPs joining. The Reform and Carlton each provided a basement office from which the whips could operate and by the middle of the century division bells had been installed. The presence of significant numbers of MPs corralled inside the clubs of an evening, within reach of the House, undoubtedly made it easier for the whips to produce numbers for a division and, though Thévoz does not mention this, no doubt occasionally to plan an ambush. The clubs provided ideal spaces for intelligence-gathering by whips at a time when whipping was less strict and party cohesion weaker than in the twentieth century. On the Conservative side, which, in this period, was more usually in opposition, MPs paid subscriptions for the circulation of a printed whip and hence provided the surplus for an election fund. Liberal evidence is less secure but something similar probably prevailed.

The role of the whips and the clubs in elections were among the most controversial at the time, as each side played up the nefarious activities of the other

with little concrete evidence. None of the clubs had the funds for widespread campaigning on the scale required for a general election, particularly when it is considered that fighting a constituency could cost more than it does today, without adjusting for inflation – treating and corruption were a regular feature. Thévoz provides examples of intervention in constituencies on a modest scale. He concludes that the provision of encouragement, coordination and basic expertise in registration and campaigning together with pairing willing candidates with vacant constituencies were the clubs' major contribution. Even so, the clubs provided what passed for national headquarters in a period when elections still retained a strong local component.

The final chapter attempts to justify the book's title and, while it does provide a very useful concluding analysis, to my mind it fails to prove that Victorian Britain, still less the early Victorian world was ruled from the London clubs. The phrase 'club government' originated with Edward Ellice, the Whig whip, but was seized on by Norman Gash for a chapter in his 1950s analysis of electoral politics between 1830 and 1850.³ Gash outlines the development and functioning of the clubs but does not define what he meant by club government and neither does Thévoz. Some of the clubs had a clear ideological basis, such as the free trade and the ultra-protestant establishments, with clear agendas which they pushed forward, but the big clubs such as Brooks's, the Carlton and the Reform

were broad based. Of course, they separated the Tory sheep from the Whig/Liberal goats, but their objectives were primarily utilitarian and social rather than the attainment of specific ideological utopias. The British Victorian world was governed from imposing, but modestly staffed, offices in Whitehall and accountable to the Palace of Westminster by men who happened to belong to clubs rather than because they joined. Neither Peel nor Palmerston chose ministers on the basis that they were good club men, though they probably were. Clubs may have provided the expertise that help elect MPs and provided comforting diversions on days when debates were less than enthralling but is that 'club government'?

This quibble with the title should not deter anyone from reading the book. Seth Thévoz has undertaken the most comprehensive and rational analysis of the part clubs played and how they were enabled to do so. He has demystified some of the aura that Trollope and Disraeli tried to create around clubland.

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- 1 See Caroline Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 2 Norman Gash, *Politics in the Age of Peel* (Longmans Green & Co, 1953), ch. 15.

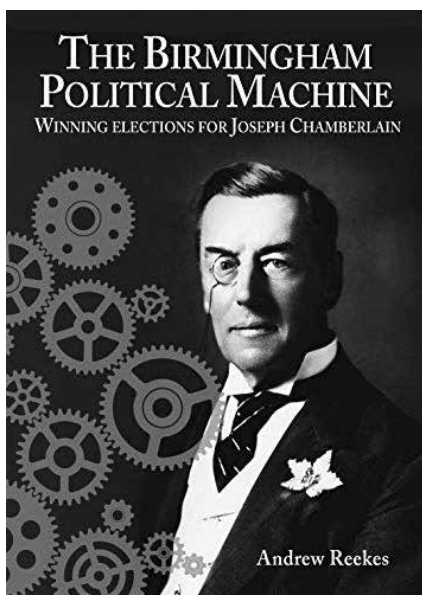
Chamberlain's machine

Andrew Reekes, *The Birmingham Political Machine: Winning Elections for Joseph Chamberlain* (West Midlands History Limited, 2018)

Review by James Brennan

THE POLITICAL CAREER of Joseph Chamberlain continues to excite historians, and *The Birmingham Political Machine* is one of the latest to join the historiography. However, rather than offering a straightforward biography, Andrew Reekes charts the development of a highly efficient political organisation. This was a group of influential politicians whose electoral tactics dominated municipal politics in Birmingham, and were applied nationally

through issues such as tariff reform. Reekes focuses on these instrumental figures, with Joseph Chamberlain as the key leader, who designed and operated this 'Machine' to great electoral success. Their methods have left an enduring legacy. In one of her first speeches as prime minister, Theresa May referred to Chamberlain as a key influence, and this was acknowledged in subsequent media coverage. The prime minister was referring to the political beliefs of



Chamberlain, his Liberal Unionism, which was influenced by the ideal of the Civic Gospel. The strength of Liberal Unionism in Birmingham, and in the West Midlands more broadly, was a direct result of the political machinery forged by Chamberlain and his allies. A question that Reekes wishes to resolve is how this group of politicians achieved long-lasting success.

The book is organised chronologically with each chapter charting a specific phase in the group's development. Whilst Joseph Chamberlain is the central figure, he shares the stage with other important personalities. For instance, each chapter concludes with a biography of key individuals who were crucial to a certain era of the organisation. The first chapter provides the context. Here we see the influences on the Machine from Thomas Attwood and Joseph Sturge, to John Bright and George Dawson. With the assistance of William Harris and Jesse Collins, Chamberlain would build on the political structures that had been present in Birmingham. Following this we have Chamberlain's fight for education reform via the National Education League. Here lies the importance of Nonconformity in the character of Birmingham's politics as he fought against the Forsters proposal which favoured Anglican schools. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the Machine's capture of the Birmingham School Board and the development of municipal politics respectively. The next two chapters focus on the Machine's application on a national level through the National Liberal Federation and the Home Rule Crisis. Interestingly, both highlight the Machine's appeal to other political parties as Conservatives

began to emulate the Birmingham group (p. 111). The final chapter discusses the Machine's work on Tariff Reform. Here Reekes explores the ways in which the Birmingham Machine utilised printed material and appealed to women through the Women's Unionist Association (p. 167). Reekes concludes by noting how the Machine continued to fashion electoral successes up to 1945.

The arguments made in this study have similarities to E. P. Hennock's *Fit and Proper Persons*, and Anne Rodrick's *Self-Help and Civic Culture*. Both acknowledge the importance of this group of politicians in directing the development of municipal politics in late nineteenth-century Birmingham. However, Reekes delves slightly deeper by detailing the contributions of certain individuals during specific phases of the Machine's development. There are instances, admittedly a minority, where personal relationships are shown to be rather more tense. The first example is the problematic relationship between Joseph and Arthur Chamberlain over the issue of tariff reform. The second instance can be found in the biography of William Harris who supported Gladstone after the 1886 Home Rule Crisis. These demonstrated how big political issues could have major consequences for the Machine.

This work is part of an impressive research output that includes *Speeches That Changed Britain* (2015) along with *Two Titans, One City* (2016). However, it is inevitable for minor errors to occur. For instance, on page 19 he refers to

George Dixon's attempts as mayor of Birmingham to calm the 'Catholic riots' of 1867. This is a reference to the Murphy Riots whose leader, William Murphy, was a Nonconformist preacher. This unrest was directed against the Catholic population, and therefore the terminology may be misleading. Furthermore, on page 126 he writes that Mrs George Dixon had been a key part of the Birmingham Women's Liberal Unionist Association, formed in October 1888. However, records demonstrate that her death occurred three years before the founding of this organisation.

Regardless, this is a fascinating contribution to our understanding of electoral machinery. The continued legacy of Joseph Chamberlain, as demonstrated by references made by modern politicians, demonstrates the relevance of this Machine. Reekes expands our understanding of the key figures and influences of Joseph Chamberlain's career. These underpinned his political success and saw great transformations within Birmingham's municipal politics. The arguments presented are accompanied by a number of colour illustrations drawn predominantly from archives in Birmingham, such as the Cadbury Research Library. These are a great addition and add to a work that will appeal to both general and specialist readers.

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Liberalism in world history

Helena Rosenblatt, *The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton University Press, 2018)

Review by Alex Tebble

WHAT WE ASSUME liberalism to mean can often obscure more than it clarifies. From the crudest individualism to the most intrusive collectivism, many 'true' liberalisms are distinguished from some ill-fated perversion or façade. It is an omnipresent term used not only to describe a variety of incompatible and incommensurable meanings, but also to both revere and revile those meanings

with equal ferocity: 'it's morally lax and hedonistic, if not racist, sexist, and imperialist', and yet responsible for a great deal that is politically valuable within 'our ideas of fairness, social justice, freedom, and equality' (p. 1).

The Lost History of Liberalism aims to illuminate what the word meant to those who originally used the term and gives an account of how those meanings have evolved through a 'world history' of its