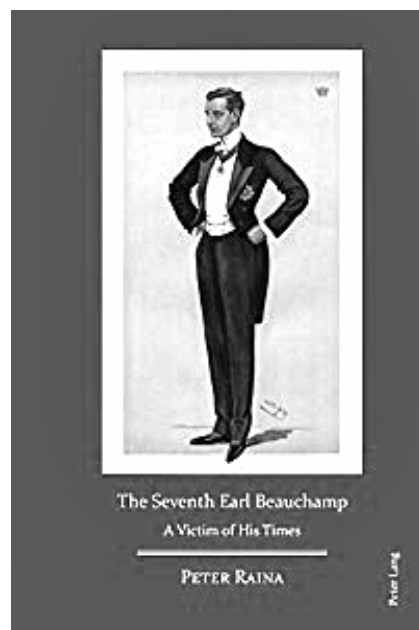


## Reviews

However, 2005 was different. Charles Kennedy had positioned a united party to oppose the illegal invasion of Iraq (Rennard's full account of this process is a useful historical record). The party was gaining ground on national issues, and appealing especially to young, well-educated voters. Yet well over a million extra Liberal votes produced only ten net gains. Did neither leader nor chief executive know how to make the best of the unexpected opportunity? It was these voters who skewed the party's electoral support to the left of the Blair government on both international and educational issues and so left the Liberal Democrats with a fundamental internal contradiction to be cruelly exposed when Nick Clegg led it into coalition with the Tories.

Rennard's account of these years is a contribution to understanding the base upon which the party sought bravely to exercise power after 2010. It would be a better contribution if he had faced up to the problems of winning only in particular places and to the nature of the party's vote that involved. If he produces a further volume of memoirs, it would be good if he used his undoubted acumen and principled commitment to Liberalism to explore the problems of only 'winning here'.

*Michael Steed has campaigned personally as a Liberal in innumerable national, local and European elections since 1959 and wrote (or co-wrote with John Curtice) the analytical appendix to the Nuffield series of general-election studies 1964–2005.*



probably for this reason, again rather than pure ability, that led to him being chosen as Liberal leader in the House of Lords in 1924, the more articulate and able candidate Lord Buckmaster being regarded as unacceptable because of his strong opposition to Lloyd George. Nonetheless, he seems to have brought energy if not ability to the role, for example speaking at more than 100 meetings during the 1929 general election campaign.

Despite his outward respectability, including marriage to the sister of the Duke of Westminster, which produced seven children, it was an open secret in aristocratic and political circles that he was also an active homosexual. He appears to have taken little trouble to hide this (Asquith used to refer to him as 'sweetheart') and his behaviour became increasingly reckless as the years went on. A visitor to his Madresfield country home, overheard him telling the butler 'Je t'adore'; while at Walmer Castle, his courtesy residence as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, he introduced a guest to his 'tennis coach', a handsome young man who, when tested, proved unable to play a simple shot. On a tour of Australia as chancellor of London University, a post he had been appointed to in 1929, he scandalised his hosts by openly living with a servant, whom he had to be asked not to bring to a formal reception.

Nonetheless he might have got away with it, but for the vindictiveness of his brother in law Bend'Or, Duke of Westminster, who appears to have been jealous of his happy domestic life and long record of public service, which contrasted

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## A scandalous leader

Peter Raina, *The Seventh Earl Beauchamp: A victim of his times* (Peter Lang, 2016)

Review by **Iain Sharpe**

**A** LIBERAL LEADER'S POLITICAL career comes to a sudden end as he takes desperate measures to avoid being exposed and prosecuted for homosexual activity. The story will sound familiar to readers of this journal. But it is not a reference to Jeremy Thorpe, but rather to William Lygon, Seventh Earl Beauchamp, leader of the Liberal Party in the House of Lords, who in 1931 was forced to flee the country after his homosexuality was about to be exposed and he was threatened with arrest. His subsequent prolonged exile inspired Evelyn Waugh, who was friendly with Beauchamp's children, to create the character of Lord Marchmain in *Brideshead Revisited*.

Today Beauchamp is better known for his downfall and fictional portrayal than for his long and varied public life. In his early twenties he became Mayor of Worcester, then served as a member of the London School Board, before becoming an imperial proconsul as governor of New South Wales. Rejecting the Conservatism of his father, who served as a junior minister under Disraeli, Beauchamp became a strong defender of free trade when Joseph

Chamberlain launched his tariff reform campaign. When the Liberals resumed power under Campbell-Bannerman, he was appointed as government chief whip in the House of Lords and then lord steward of the royal household, before achieving cabinet rank under Asquith as lord president of the council and first commissioner of works in 1910. He also held ceremonial appointments as lord lieutenant of Gloucestershire and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.

His usefulness to the Liberal Party probably derived more from the paucity of strength in the House of Lords, where it was vastly outnumbered by Unionists, rather than intrinsic ability. He rarely contributed to cabinet debates outside his own area of responsibility and when Asquith privately made a list of his cabinet members in order of ability, he ranked Beauchamp in joint last place. Unsurprisingly, his services were not retained in the cabinet when Asquith formed a coalition government in 1915. But he continued to be active in the House of Lords and tried to act as a peacemaker when the Liberal Party split on the formation of the Lloyd George coalition in 1916. It was

with his own three unhappy marriages and failure to achieve any higher office than lord lieutenant of Cheshire. Westminster told his sister and about her husband's sexual tastes and convinced her to begin divorce proceedings. He tried to persuade Beauchamp's children to give evidence against their father, but they stood by him. In the end Westminster only agreed not to insist on a prosecution for gross indecency on condition that Beauchamp resign all his public positions and leave the country. As a result, public scandal was avoided, but the Earl spent several years abroad in a peripatetic existence, hoping that the threat of arrest would be lifted. When this did happen in 1937, he struggled to settle in Britain again, finding himself ostracised from high society. He died on a visit to New York in 1938.

Although the story of Beauchamp's disgrace has been often told, in studies of Evelyn Waugh, or aristocratic life between the wars, or of homosexuality, his political career has been neglected, even though he was close to the centre of British political life during an important period in British (and Liberal) history. It is true that he was closer to having greatness thrust upon him than to achieving it, but other lesser lights of Liberalism from the first half of the twentieth century, such as Sydney Buxton, Charles Masterman and John Burns, have all attracted the attention of

at least one biographer. Beauchamp is a subject worthy of a proper biography.

So the appearance of this volume ought to be good news for anyone with an interest in Liberal history during this period. But, sadly, although Mr Raina is a historian with an impressive list of publications to his name and links to Oxford University, he has produced a distinctly odd book. It reads not so much as a narrative biography than as a collection of documents: letters, texts of speeches, records of official events and suchlike. This might not matter, but for the eccentric choice of material. For example, we are offered twenty pages on Beauchamp's installation as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, but the events from the 1909 People's Budget through to the passage of the Parliament Act in 1911 are dealt with in a cursory few pages. There is little attempt at analysis or explanation of Beauchamp's personality, opinions and motivations, merely a rather dry chronicle of his public life in which the trivial is given equal weight to the genuinely important. While there are a few curiosities along the way one sadly has to conclude that while the life and career of the seventh Earl Beauchamp should furnish enough material for a good and readable biography, this volume is not it.

*Dr Iain Sharpe studied history at Leicester and London Universities. His PhD thesis was on the career of Herbert Gladstone as Liberal chief whip.*

cupidity or desperation when scientific knowledge was inadequate and there was no consensus on practical solutions or who would take responsibility for them? Local authorities had only their own limited experience to help them differentiate the quack from the genius.

Parts of the public health story appear in school curricula or are retold in television documentaries. Joseph Bazalgette's magnificent London sewage system, still in use, John Snow's tracking down the cause of a cholera outbreak, Edwin Chadwick's famous report, and infamous personality, show us public officials as heroes, a designation rarely bestowed on their trade. But heroes are, almost by definition, exceptional. Securing the health of the growing urban masses was beyond the capacity of a few heroes. It required systems, which could be operated by the average manager, office worker and workman, and systems require governance. Naturally, governance brings us to politics.

Crook suggests that there were three approaches – the radical technocratic, the democratic radical, and the Whiggish-Liberal (pp. 34–52). The radical technocratic view is, to Crook, epitomised by Chadwick, who had, after all, been secretary to Bentham, the font of rational utilitarianism. The technocratic tendency was centralising, promoting the official and professional over the politician whether local or national. Increasingly the expert did know best, but the knowledge came from many trials and errors.

The democratic radical element was represented not only in the contribution made by activist local politicians such as Toulmin Smith or Joe Chamberlain but in the busy backbench MPs serving on committees and the lobbying of pressure groups such as the Ladies' National Association for the Diffusion of Sanitary Knowledge or the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science. They mobilised forces for change and guided them in practical directions.

Crook represents the more Whiggish position as that shared by the political elite, dominated by Whig ministers for much of the mid-Victorian period, who added a paternalising component to the more modernising Liberals. Their function was to reconcile the competing elements and to enforce necessary compromises, broadly along the lines that the centre provided the knowledge that the localities could utilise. Much

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## Doomed to live in towns

Tom Crook, *Governing Systems: Modernity and the Making of Public Health in England, 1830–1910* (University of California Press, 2016)

Review by **Tony Little**

**O**VER THE LATE eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Britain experienced what has since become commonplace – the transformation from a predominantly rural community enlivened by a scattering of market and harbour towns to a predominantly urban society. As the new technology of the Industrial Revolution transformed villages into cities, the commercial, financial and government bureaucracies required to support these factories intensified the demand for urban living. But the necessity to live in cities outran the

means of the municipal authorities to safeguard the health and safety of the new urban dwellers. Birmingham, Manchester, London and the other cities became death traps for too many of their inhabitants, the poorest of whom lived in appalling, overcrowded, insanitary conditions. Even the richest were subject to the deadly lottery of infectious diseases such as cholera.

Tom Crook's book analyses the responses to these novel problems. How were those 'doomed to live in towns', as a mid-Victorian categorised them (p. 36), to be saved from their own