

# Journal of Liberal



# HISTORY

## Election 2019

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**Gambling on Brexit** The Liberal Democrat performance in the 2019 election

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**Liberal Democrat leadership performance** Comparative table updated

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Stephen Ridgwell

**The 'Mangold's Champion'** Lloyd George, the Game Laws and rural land reform

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Ian Cawood

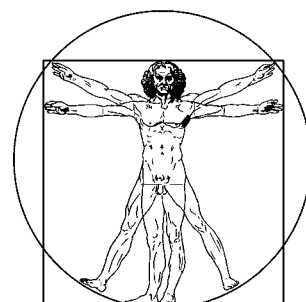
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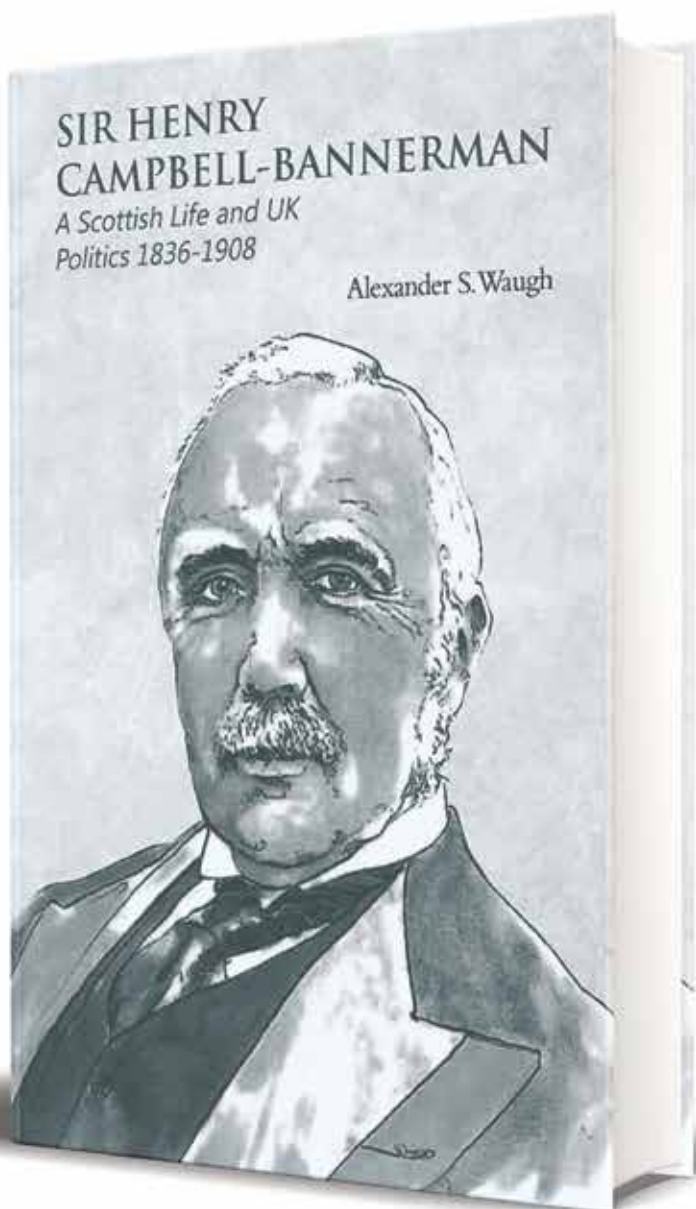
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## Journal of Liberal History

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Cover photo: Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Jo Swinson, at a campaign rally on 9 November 2019. Photo by Andre Camara, Liberal Democrats Flickr.

### Liberal Democrat History Group

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](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk).

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# Liberal History News

## Winter 2019–20

### Unknown text by John Locke reveals roots of ‘foundational democratic ideas’

A ‘once in a generation’ discovery of a centuries-old manuscript by John Locke shows the great English philosopher making his earliest arguments for religious toleration, with the scholar who unearthed it calling the document ‘the origin and catalyst for momentous and foundational ideas of western liberal democracy’.

Dated to 1667–8, the manuscript titled ‘Reasons for tolerating Papists equally with others’, was previously unknown to academia. It had been owned by the descendants of one of Locke’s friends until the 1920s, when it was sold at auction to a book dealer. From there, it went into private collections until it was donated to St John’s College, Annapolis, in the latter half of the 20th century. It lay unstudied in archives until Locke scholar JC Walmsley noticed a reference to it in a 1928 book dealer’s catalogue, and raised an eyebrow: Locke, a hugely influential Enlightenment thinker, was not known to have extended his arguments for religious tolerance to Catholics.

‘This [title] sounded entirely unlikely to me,’ Walmsley said. ‘Locke was known for not extending his toleration to Catholics, and I checked through the online listing of Locke manuscripts to see if it even remotely matched a description of any known Locke manuscript. It did not. This suggested one of two things; that the manuscript described was misattributed to Locke – which happens more often than might be supposed – or there was an unknown Locke manuscript which had some very surprising content.’

Scans showed the attribution was correct, while further research revealed it had previously been unknown to scholars.

‘Locke is supposed to have never tolerated Catholics,’ said Walmsley. ‘All his published work suggested that he would never even consider this as a possibility. This manuscript shows him taking an

initial position that’s startling for him and for thinkers of his time – next to no one suggested this at this point. It shows him to be much more tolerant in certain respects than was ever previously supposed.’

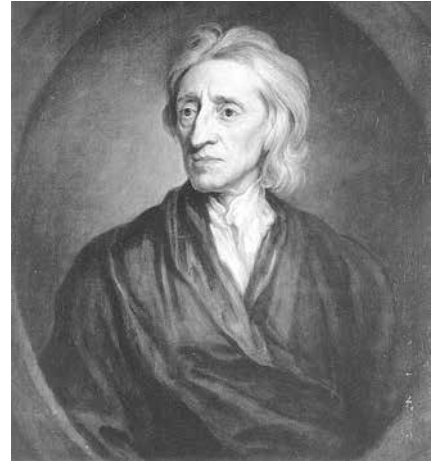
Locke, who died in 1704, is known for his *Two Treatises on Government*, which became a foundational text for modern western democracy. His other hugely influential texts included the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which provided philosophical grounds for the scientific revolution, and *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, which influenced James Madison’s thinking on the separation of church and state in his work on the US constitution.

In *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, Locke argued for tolerance at a time when religious uniformity was enforced by law in the wake of the Reformation. In the newly discovered manuscript, Locke first argues impartially for tolerating Catholics, and secondly against their toleration.

‘If Papists can be supposed to be as good subjects as others they may be equally tolerated,’ he writes. And: ‘If all subjects should be equally countenanced, & imployed by the Prince. the Papist[s] have an equall title.’

The work was written before 1689’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration* and is therefore the earliest outing for ideas that would make an indelible impression on western thought.

‘This manuscript is the origin and catalyst for momentous and foundational ideas of western liberal democracy – which did include Catholics,’ said Walmsley, who called the discovery ‘the culmination of a lifetime’s work’. He has just published an essay in the *Historical Journal* about the discovery, co-authored with Cambridge lecturer Felix Waldmann, who called the manuscript ‘a crucial and wholly unexpected part of Locke’s intellectual development’.



JR Milton, general editor of the Clarendon Edition of the *Works of John Locke* and a professor of the history of philosophy at King’s College London, called the discovery very significant, and ‘a valuable addition to the corpus of Locke’s writings’.

Joseph Macfarland, dean of St John’s College, said it was ‘an unexpected pleasure to find that we are in possession of a manuscript by Locke himself on a question so critical to American political life and to liberal democracy generally’.

‘I hope that this manuscript will draw further attention to the great debt we owe to Locke’s philosophic and pragmatic thinking,’ said Macfarland.

*Reprinted from The Guardian, 3 September 2019 (© The Guardian).*

John Locke is often described as the patron saint of Liberalism, due to his contention that the natural rights of the individual place a limit on the powers of the state, as well as his defence of the rule of law. Liberals also see Locke’s remarks on the separation of the executive and the legislature and on some form of popular representation within government as a precursor to the liberal democratic institutions that emerged following the American and French Revolutions. For more detail, see the Liberal Democrat History Group’s booklet, *Liberal Thinkers*.

## 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](http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk) or [www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup](https://www.facebook.com/LibDemHistoryGroup) or follow us at: [LibHistoryToday](https://twitter.com/LibHistoryToday).

### December

*30 December 1935:* Death of Rufus Isaacs, 1st Marquess of Reading and the last Liberal to hold the post of Foreign Secretary (from August to November 1931). Isaacs was the son of a Jewish fruit merchant in Spitalfields but rose through the law and politics to hold some of the highest offices of state, both legal and political. Like Lloyd George, Reading was almost brought down by the Marconi scandal of 1913; he was implicated in insider share dealing but survived. He went on to be High Commissioner and Special Ambassador to the US in 1919, served as Lord Chief Justice of England and was Viceroy of India from 1921–26.

### January

*28 January 1770:* The Duke of Grafton resigns as First Lord of the Treasury and is succeeded by the Tory Lord North. The Whig government did not so much fall as fall apart. Attacked by his predecessor, the Earl of Chatham, and pilloried in the press, Grafton struggled to get legislation through parliament. In early January Lord Camden, the Lord Chancellor, attacked his colleagues and was sacked. The Marquess of Granby resigned in support of Camden. Three days later, Charles Yorke, who had reluctantly agreed to become Lord Chancellor, committed suicide. This proved to be the last straw for Grafton, who resigned the following week.

### February

*4 February 1924:* Writing to his daughter Megan, Lloyd George discusses the recently formed first Labour government. 'What changes are taking place. A socialist govt. actually in power. But don't get uneasy about your investments or your antiques. Nothing will be removed or abstracted. They have come in like a lamb. Will they go out like a lion? Who knows? For the present their tameness is shocking to me. They are all engaged in looking as respectable as lather & blather will make them. They are out to sooth ruffled nerves. When you return you will find England quite unchanged. Ramsay is just a fussy Baldwin & no more. The Liberals were bound to turn Baldwin out & the King was bound to call Ramsay in & we are bound to give him a chance. That is the situation.'

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*'I had not expected to enjoy this book as much as I did, or to learn as much from it.'* William Wallace, *Lib Dem Voice*

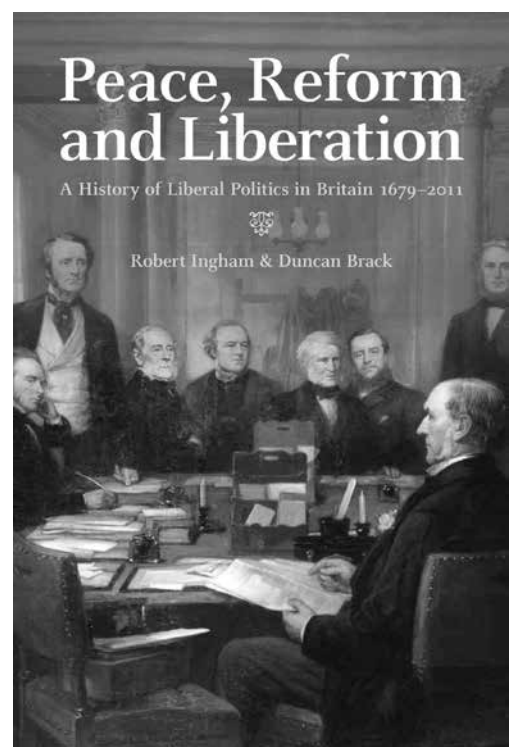
*'The editors and their fourteen authors deserve congratulation for producing a readable one-volume history of Liberal politics in Britain that is both erudite but perfectly accessible to any reader interested in the subject.'* Mark Smulian, *Liberator*

Edited by **Robert Ingham** and **Duncan Brack**.

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# The Liberal Democrat performance

**T**HE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS approached the prospect of an election in the autumn of 2019 with high hopes. Earlier in the year, the European Parliament elections had occasioned a revival in the party's electoral fortunes, the first it had enjoyed since it entered into coalition with the Conservatives in May 2010.<sup>1</sup> Not only did the party win a fifth of the vote in those elections, enough to come second, but ever since then it had consistently enjoyed an average rating of 18 per cent in polls of voting intention for Westminster. At the same time, the party had recruited as many as eight MPs who had defected from either the Conservatives or Labour (five of them via the short-lived Change UK party). Against this backdrop, a pre-Christmas ballot appeared to represent an opportunity for the party to reverse much of the damage it had suffered in the 2015 and 2017 general elections.

Indeed, so high were its hopes that the party helped pave the way for an election to be held. Thanks to the provisions of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act (FTPA) that had been passed by the 2010–15 Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition, the Prime Minister could no longer use the royal prerogative to call an early general election – instead, two-thirds of MPs needed to vote in favour of an early dissolution. Consequently, although the Conservative government had been eager to hold an election that might create a

House of Commons that was more amenable to passing the withdrawal treaty it had recently renegotiated with the EU, it had been unable to do so because on more than one occasion in September and October 2019 fewer than two-thirds of all MPs had voted in favour.

However, during the last weekend of October the Liberal Democrats signalled that, even though the party had originally been instrumental in putting the Act on the statute book, they, along with the SNP, were willing to support a step that would bypass the provisions of the FTPA. An election would be triggered by passing legislation that stipulated that despite the normal provisions of the FTPA an election would be held on 12 December. This legislation would only require a simple majority in the Commons (and the Lords) to be passed – and support from the Liberal Democrats and the SNP would ensure that such a majority was in place. But for this decision by the Liberal Democrats and the SNP, Britain would not have enjoyed its first December election since 1923.

The manoeuvre represented a last desperate throw of the dice by the party in its attempts to stop Brexit happening. It had come to the conclusion that the House of Commons remained unwilling to support a second EU referendum – a ballot that might pave the way for a reversal of Brexit. As a result, it seemed likely that the

Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Jo Swinson's, rally at the Esher Rugby Club during the last day of the 2019 election campaign, December 11. Photo by Andre Camara, Liberal Democrats Flickr.



# Gambling on Brexit

## Success in the 2019 general election

Conservative government would eventually be able to deliver Brexit anyway, if only by exercising what at the end of January 2020 would legally be the default position of exiting the EU without a withdrawal treaty. That prospect might be avoided if the electorally buoyant Liberal Democrats, either alone or in tandem with others, held the balance of power in a new House of Commons that was able to install an alternative administration that was willing to hold another referendum. Thus, the Liberal Democrats – who hoped that an election would pave the way for a reversal of Brexit – found themselves in agreement with the Conservatives – who hoped that an election would enable them ‘to get Brexit done’ – that it was time to go to the country.

In the event, it was the Conservatives for whom the gamble paid off. The election gave the government an overall majority of 80, more than enough to ensure that it would be to pass its EU withdrawal treaty into law. In contrast, the Liberal Democrats found themselves not only with ten fewer seats than the 21 the party had enjoyed by the end of the 2017–19 parliament, but even one less than the dozen it had won in 2017. In backing an early election, the party paved the way for the delivery of Brexit while failing to secure any enhancement of its own parliamentary strength. The decision to back an early ballot backfired spectacularly.

This article analyses why this proved to be the case. It begins by examining what underlay the party’s rise in the polls in the summer of 2019, and the opportunities and the challenges that its enhanced popularity appeared to create. We then examine how support for the party fell away during the course of the election campaign before outlining what eventually happened on polling day. We conclude with an assessment of what went wrong and why.

### A summer of promise

The UK was originally due to leave the EU on 29 March 2019. However, the government proved unable to meet this deadline. This meant that, as it was still a member state, the UK was obliged to hold European Parliament elections on 23 May. Even in normal times, such elections are often regarded by voters as an occasion to cast a ‘protest’ vote, thereby creating an environment in which smaller parties in general, and anti-EU parties in particular, tend to flourish.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, those tendencies were especially in evidence this time around. First place in the election went to the anti-EU Brexit Party, which was arguing that Britain should leave the EU without a deal, with 32 per cent of the vote (in Great Britain), while the Liberal Democrats, who were arguing that another EU referendum should be

**In backing an early election, the party paved the way for the delivery of Brexit while failing to secure any enhancement of its own parliamentary strength. The decision to back an early ballot backfired spectacularly.**

## Gambling on Brexit: The Liberal Democrat performance in the 2019 general election



Jo Swinson launching the Liberal Democrat manifesto, 20 November 2019

Jo Swinson and Liberal Democrat Education Spokesperson Layla Moran in Cambridge, at the Trumpington Park Primary School 20 November 2019. (Photo by Andre Camara.)

Liberal Democrat MPs after the 2019 election; from left: Wendy Chamberlain, Tim Farron, Layla Moran, Daisy Cooper, Baroness Brinton (Liberal Democrat President and interim co-leader), Christine Jardine, Sarah Olney, Edward Davey (interim co-leader), Munira Wilson, Alistair Carmichael, Wera Hobhouse (not present: Jamie Stone)

(All photos: Liberal Democrats Flickr)





held, came second with 20 per cent.<sup>3</sup> The two parties that have traditionally dominated post-war British politics, Labour and the Conservatives, found themselves with just 14 per cent and 9 per cent of the vote respectively. The Conservatives were punished for their failure to deliver Brexit. Labour, meanwhile, lost support in the wake of its adoption of a compromise position that opposed the government's plans for Brexit but indicated a willingness by the party to pursue its own proposals for leaving the EU should it win a general election, while the possibility of holding another referendum was held in reserve.

The European contest had a knock-on effect on the parties' standing in polls of voting intentions for a Westminster election. Both the Conservatives and Labour found themselves on average with little more than a quarter of the vote, with the Brexit Party enjoying about a fifth and the Liberal Democrats, on 18 per cent, just a little less than that. For a while at least, it looked as though Britain could have entered an unprecedented era of four-party politics (with a fifth, the SNP, dominating the electoral scene north of the border).

Occasioned as it was by the Brexit impasse, the new-found support for the Liberal Democrats was very distinctive. All of the increase in the party's support as compared to the 2017 general election came from those who had voted Remain in the EU referendum in 2016. In July, polls on average put support for the party among those who had voted Remain at 31 per cent, up 17 points on what (according to the British Election Study) it had enjoyed among this group in 2017. In contrast, just 5 per cent of those who voted Leave said that they were supporting the party, the same figure as in 2017. By September, support for the party among Remain voters was, at 35 per cent, if anything even higher, whereas it simply stayed at just 5 per cent among Leave voters. Although the Liberal Democrats (and before them the Liberal Party) have long been Britain's most Europhile political party, never before had the party's electoral support been so dominated by those with a relatively benign view of the European Union. Rather than enjoying a revival of the electoral base that had helped it gain a slice of power in 2010, the party had seemingly found new life as an anti-Brexit party.

In 2017, in contrast, Labour had clearly won the battle for Remain votes; according to the British Election Study just over half (53 per cent) had voted for Jeremy Corbyn's party. Now, however, the Liberal Democrats were almost neck and neck with Labour among Remain voters. Around one in five (20 per cent) of those who voted Labour in 2017 were saying in September that they would vote for the Liberal Democrats. At the same time, however, the party was also scoring among Remain voters who had backed the Conservatives in 2017; some one in eight (12 per cent) of those who had voted Tory in 2017 were also at that point backing the Liberal Democrats.

This newly buoyant Liberal Democrat vote inevitably put the party in good heart. However, it also posed questions. First, the party had performed so badly in 2015 and 2017 – including not least in many a seat where the Liberal Democrats had previously been very strong<sup>4</sup> – that there were relatively few seats where the party would start an election in anything like a close second place. There were just 16 constituencies in which the party had been less than 20 per cent behind the winner last time around. How well what was still no more than a modest recovery in the party's fortunes would translate into seats gained was thus open to doubt, especially after the Conservatives began to enjoy some improvement in their electoral position in the wake of Boris Johnson's election in July as the party's new leader.

Having so Europhile a vote also raised its own questions about the party's prospects. Some of its traditional strongholds in the far south-west of England, such as North Devon, North Cornwall, and St Ives, voted heavily for Leave in 2016. More generally, the average vote for Leave in the dozen seats where the party was closest to an incumbent Conservative was as much as 47 per cent, indicating that what collectively might be thought to be the party's best prospects were far from being heavily pro-Remain in character. At the same time, the party's prospects appeared to rest heavily on its ability to retain the support of Remain voters who had switched to it from Labour, an ability that could not be taken for granted. After all, many Remain voters were still sticking with Labour, and perhaps Jeremy Corbyn's party would be able to win back some of those it had lost to the Liberal Democrats if Labour were to adopt a stronger stance in favour of a second EU referendum.

### Brexit manoeuvres

Labour did indeed shift its stance on Brexit. First of all, in July it said that any form of withdrawal proposed by the Conservatives should be put to a referendum and that in those circumstances Labour would back Remain – though at this point the party did not promise that it would put any deal that a Labour government itself might negotiate to a second ballot. By the time of the party's conference in September, however, the party was also indicating that any withdrawal deal that Labour negotiated (which would be much 'softer' than that envisaged by the current government) would also be put to a referendum, albeit the party would not decide until after that negotiation had been completed whether it was in favour of leaving with its own deal or remaining in the EU. While still a less straightforward pro-Remain position than that being offered by the Liberal Democrats, it was a stance that might be able to persuade some former pro-Remain Labour supporters that they should return to the fold.

**Occasioned as it was by the Brexit impasse, the new-found support for the Liberal Democrats [in the European election] was very distinctive. All of the increase in the party's support as compared to the 2017 general election came from those who had voted Remain in the EU referendum in 2016.**

**When the election was called, 56 per cent of Remain voters said the Liberal Democrats' stance of stopping Brexit without a referendum made it more likely that they would vote for the party, whereas just 14 per cent stated that it made them less likely to do so ... It is thus far from clear that the Liberal Democrats' revised stance was viewed unfavourably by the pro-Remain constituency to whom the party was trying to appeal.**

However, the Liberal Democrats themselves did not stand still on Brexit. Perhaps mindful of the possibility that Labour was gradually moving towards a position that might be more attractive to Remain voters, the Liberal Democrat leader, Jo Swinson, who had succeeded Sir Vince Cable to the position in July, announced in September that, should the Liberal Democrats form a majority government on their own, they would reverse the decision to leave the EU without first holding another referendum. The party was both signalling its determinedly anti-Brexit position in the clearest possible fashion and doing so in a manner that ensured that it was more or less guaranteed to have a position that was distinctive from Labour's. At the same time, however, the party was still indicating that it backed the idea of holding a second referendum in the event that it did not win (a seemingly improbable) overall majority.

Ms Swinson's move was undoubtedly a controversial one, attracting the charge that even many a Remain voter thought that it was undemocratic to reverse Brexit without first holding another ballot. Polling on the subject, however, does not clearly support this claim. BMG Research asked voters on four occasions between July and October what they thought should happen if no new Brexit deal had been agreed by what at that point was the deadline for leaving (the end of October), with both holding a second in-out referendum and revoking the UK's notice of withdrawal included among the possible options. While on average 30 per cent of Remain voters said that they favoured another referendum, rather more – 39 per cent – indicated that they were in favour of revoking the UK's Article 50 notice of withdrawal. Meanwhile, when the election was called, 56 per cent of Remain voters said the Liberal Democrats' stance of stopping Brexit without a referendum made it more likely that they would vote for the party, whereas just 14 per cent stated that it made them less likely to do so. And when during the election campaign itself YouGov asked whether revoking Article 50 would be a good or a bad outcome, two-thirds (66 per cent) of Remain voters said that it would be a 'very' or 'fairly' good outcome, while only just over half (53 per cent) said the same of the policy position adopted by Labour.

It is thus far from clear that the Liberal Democrats' revised stance was viewed unfavourably by the pro-Remain constituency to whom the party was trying to appeal. Perhaps a more subtle criticism is that it left the party trying to pursue two arguments at once – both arguing for revoking Article 50 and in favour of having a second referendum – and thereby lost some of the advantage of clarity that it had enjoyed over Labour. That said, as of the end of October at least, as many as 68 per cent of Remain supporters were saying to YouGov that the Liberal Democrat position on Brexit was clear, whereas just 27 per cent were stating the same of Labour's position. Similarly,

in mid-November 57 per cent of Remain voters agreed that they had a good understanding of the Liberal Democrats' Brexit policy, while only 40 per cent said the same of Labour. Brexit still looked like a potentially winning card for the party.

### The campaign

However, whatever the merits of the party's new position on Brexit, the campaign did not go well for the party from the outset. Even before MPs had vacated the Palace of Westminster and the election had got under way, the party's seemingly solid bedrock of 18 per cent average support in the polls had slipped back to 16 per cent. In contrast to the uplift the party has often enjoyed during election campaigns, when enhanced media coverage brings it to the attention of more voters, support then fell again by another couple of points in the third week of the campaign, and then gradually slipped further thereafter to what proved to be the 12 per cent with which the party emerged in the ballot boxes on polling day, 12 December. The four-point drop in the party's support between the beginning and the end of the campaign matched what had hitherto been the biggest drop in support for Britain's main third party during an election campaign, that is, the four-point fall in Liberal/SDP Alliance support in 1987. The party's 2019 campaign has thus to be regarded as one of the least successful in its history.

The explanation lay in a gradual erosion of the party's ability to retain the support of those who had voted Remain. As soon as the election was called, the party's average support in the polls among Remain voters fell to 29 per cent, with Labour now clearly ahead on 42 per cent. That gap continued to widen, such that in the polls taken just before polling day, support for the party among Remain voters stood at just 20 per cent. Instead of competing with Labour to be the most popular party among Remain supporters (48 per cent of whom were now backing Labour), by the end of the campaign the party found itself struggling to stay ahead of the Conservatives (on 21 per cent) as the second most popular party.

The picture painted by the final polls was broadly corroborated by the two polls of how people actually voted that were conducted immediately after polling day, one by Lord Ashcroft and one by YouGov. Both reported that 21 per cent of those who backed Remain in 2016 had voted Liberal Democrat, just slightly more than had voted Conservative (19 per cent according to Ashcroft and 20 per cent YouGov), and well behind Labour (47 per cent and 49 per cent). Meanwhile, just 3 per cent of Leave voters had backed the party. The party ended up with a vote that was still heavily tilted in the direction of Europhile voters, but at a markedly lower level than the party had enjoyed just a few weeks earlier.

Much of the Remain vote that switched away from the party consisted of Labour voters returning to the fold. Just before the election was called the polls were reporting on average that as many as 18 per cent of those who had voted Labour in 2017 were saying that they would vote Liberal Democrat. But, according to Lord Ashcroft, by polling day that figure had fallen to just 7 per cent, while YouGov put it only a little higher, at 9 per cent. In contrast, the Liberal Democrats appear largely to have retained the support of those who had switched to the party from the Conservatives. That proportion stood at 9 per cent of the 2017 Conservative vote just before the election was called and was still estimated to be as much on polling day as 8 per cent by Lord Ashcroft and 7 per cent by YouGov. Even though Remain voters were far more numerous in Labour's ranks than they were among Conservative supporters, in the event the Liberal Democrats secured the support of former Conservatives at much the same rate as Labour voters, implying that in the event the votes the party gained between 2017 and 2019 had little net impact on the size of the Conservative lead over Labour. In any event, it is clear much of the eventual weakness in the party's election performance is accounted for by what proved to be a marked decline and relative lack of success in getting Labour Remain voters to back it in the polling booths.

**Defeat**

The result was a crushing disappointment. True, at 11.8 per cent, the party's share of the overall vote in Great Britain was as much as 4.2 points above what it had secured in 2017 (even though it had stood down in 21 seats, primarily as a result of a partial electoral pact with the Greens and Plaid Cymru), but even that share of the vote was well below the level that it or its predecessor parties had won between 1974 and 2010. Meanwhile, with just 11 seats, the party ended up with one less MP than it had won in 2017. Although some of them secured a considerable increase in the Liberal Democrat share of the vote (on average, 15.4 points), none of the seven former Conservative

or Labour MPs who had defected from their own parties and stood under the Liberal Democrat banner were successful in securing re-election – or even came close to doing so. That outcome is hardly likely to encourage other Conservative or Labour MPs to embark on the same journey in the future.

In part, the party was unlucky in failing to win more seats. Of the 11 seats that it won, only three were secured with a majority of less than five points. In contrast, the party lost out in ten seats by less than that amount, including the East Dunbartonshire seat of the party's leader, Jo Swinson, who became the first party leader to lose their seat in a general election since the then Liberal Party leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, (also very narrowly) lost his seat in 1945. Two other MPs, Tom Brake in Carshalton & Wallington, and Stephen Lloyd in Eastbourne, also lost their seats (as did Jane Dodds the Brecon & Radnorshire seat she won in a by-election in July), while the party proved unable to defend the North Norfolk seat that Norman Lamb opted not to defend. Just three seats, Richmond Park, St Albans and North East Fife, were gained in compensation. However, while only a somewhat better performance in a handful of seats would have left the party in a somewhat stronger parliamentary position, the outcome affirmed that the party's attempts to turn increased support into greater parliamentary representation rested on precarious foundations.

More generally, the geography of the party's performance reflected the Europhile character of its newly acquired support. Scotland apart, where half of the strong Remain vote there was secured by the SNP,<sup>5</sup> the party generally advanced more strongly the larger the Remain vote had been in 2016. Thus, as Table 1 shows, the party's vote increased on average by just over seven points in seats in England & Wales where more than 58 per cent voted Remain, but by only two and a half points in those where less than 38 per cent did so. No less than 17 of the 20 seats where the party's vote increased most strongly were ones in which a majority voted to Remain. All three of the seats that the party gained voted heavily for Remain, whereas all three of the seats that the party lost in

% Remain	All seats	England & Wales	Scotland
0–58	+5.5	+7.2	+2.8
53–58	+5.5	+6.0	+2.7
48–53	+5.5	+5.7	+1.9
43–48	+4.1	+4.1	–
38–43	+2.8	+2.8	–
38+	+2.5	+2.5	–
All	+4.1	+4.3	+2.7

Source: Author's calculations based on results collected by the BBC. Estimates of 2016 Remain vote in each seat from Chris Hanretty, 'Final estimates of the Leave vote, or "Areal interpolation and the UK's referendum on EU membership"' (2017); posted at <https://medium.com/@chrishanretty/final-estimates-of-the-leave-vote-or-areal-interpolation-and-the-uks-referendum-on-eu-membership-5490b6cab878>

## Gambling on Brexit: The Liberal Democrat performance in the 2019 general election

England & Wales were ones where a majority had voted to Leave the EU.

However, some parts of Remain-voting England proved more amenable to the Liberal Democrat message than others. All but two of the largest increases in the party's support were in seats in London and the South East, while the remaining two were in the South West. At the same time, all but one of these seats was a constituency being defended by the Conservatives. In general, the Liberal Democrat vote rose on average by as much as 17 points in the South of England where more than 55 per cent had voted Remain in 2016 and over 45 per cent had backed the Conservatives in 2017. It seems that the party's relative success during the election campaign in retaining the support of Conservative Remainers paid off in particular in seats where such voters were relatively common. In contrast, the Liberal Democrat vote only increased by 2.3 points in seats in the North of England where more than 55 per cent had voted Remain, most of which were seats with a very substantial Labour vote in 2017.

The converse of the party's new-found success in parts of Remain-inclined southern England was a further decline in the party's vote in areas of past strength. All but just two of the 25 seats in which the party's vote fell by one and a half points or more were constituencies that had had a Liberal Democrat MP no longer ago than 2005 – and in many cases much more recently than that. This pattern often represented a further erosion of the local strength that the party had established in these seats at the beginning of the twenty-first century but which fell away after they were lost in 2015 and 2017.<sup>6</sup> It is a further indication of how the party's advance in 2019 was less of a revival of past strength and more the acquisition of a new electoral base that in some respects is markedly different from the one the party has enjoyed in the past.

The reliance of the party on Remain voters is also reflected in the demography of its support. Remain voters consist disproportionately of university graduates, who, in turn, are more likely to be in middle-class occupations.<sup>7</sup> Both groups moved particularly heavily towards the party. According to YouGov's post-election poll, 17 per cent of university graduates voted for the party, while only 8 per cent of those whose highest educational qualification was a GCSE or less did so. The figure for graduates represents a six-point increase on the party's tally for that group in the same company's post-election poll in 2017, whereas the statistic for those with less in the way of qualifications constitutes only a three-point increase. Meanwhile, at 16 per cent, the party's vote among those in professional and managerial (AB) occupations was, according to YouGov, up six points on 2017, and is twice the 8 per cent figure among those in working class (C2DE) jobs, among whom the increase in support on 2017 was just two points. Lord Ashcroft's poll paints a similar picture, with support for the Liberal Democrats

running at 15 per cent among those in professional and managerial roles, but only 8 per cent among those in working-class occupations.

These patterns are also reflected in the geography of the Liberal Democrat increase in support. The Liberal Democrat vote increased in England and Wales on average by 7.9 points in seats where, at the time of the last Census, 31 per cent had a degree, but by just 2.2 points in those constituencies where less than 21 per cent had a university education. Meanwhile, support for the party increased on average by 8.1 points in England and Wales where over 35 per cent had a professional or managerial job, but by just two points where less than 25 per cent did so. On average, the party won as much as 20 per cent of the vote in the most middle-class seats in England and Wales, but less than 5 per cent in the least middle-class ones.

The Liberal Party once prided itself on being Britain's non-class party, in contrast to the Conservatives whose support was concentrated in the middle class, and Labour's in the working class. However, that picture, which perhaps always understated the party's reliance on middle-class voters, no longer holds true. While the Liberal Democrats are now twice as popular among those in professional and managerial occupations than among those in working-class jobs, between them the post-election polling by YouGov and Lord Ashcroft suggest that the level of support for both the Conservatives and Labour varied relatively little between those in different occupational classes, not least because the Conservatives performed relatively well among working-class voters while Labour's support held up rather better among their middle-class counterparts.

Support for Remain and Leave also varied markedly by age, with younger voters being much more likely to vote to stay in the EU while older voters were more likely to want to exit. Of this divide, however, there was little sign in the Liberal Democrat performance. According to Lord Ashcroft, at 12 per cent the level of support for the Liberal Democrats among those aged 18–24 was the same as it was among those aged 65 and over. While YouGov did find that, at 15 per cent, support for the party among those aged 18 and 19 (who would have been voting for the first time) was higher than the 11 per cent recorded among those aged 70 and over, it was no more than 10 per cent among those aged between 20 and 24. The younger Remain voters, who provided the bedrock of Labour's support, largely eluded the party, a pattern for which there had already been evidence during the European election<sup>8</sup> and which will have been reinforced by the party's reliance at this election on Conservative Remain voters.

### Alliances

During the summer, the fact that the party preferences of Remain voters were now divided

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between those who said they would vote Labour and those who were backing the Liberal Democrats did not go unnoticed. Such a development would potentially be advantageous to the Conservatives if they, in contrast, were to be successful in squeezing the support of the Brexit Party and unite Leave voters behind them. Two initiatives were taken to try and overcome this potential split in the Remain vote. First, following on from a decision by the Greens and Plaid Cymru to stand down in the July 2019 Brecon & Radnorshire by-election in favour of the Liberal Democrats – a decision that may have been crucial to the party's success in narrowly wresting the seat from the Conservatives – the three parties agreed a limited electoral pact under which the Liberal Democrats did not nominate a candidate in 17 seats, while in return the party was not opposed by the Greens in 40 seats in England and by neither the Greens nor Plaid Cymru in three further seats (including Brecon & Radnorshire) in Wales. In addition, the Liberal Democrats decided not to stand against three pro-Remain MPs who had defected from the Conservatives and Labour but who had opted to stand under a variety of other labels.

However, the chances that this 'Remain Alliance' would make a significant difference to the Liberal Democrats' prospects of winning seats always seemed rather limited. In the event, the Greens did not nominate a candidate in 53 seats in England and Wales that they had contested in 2017. On average, the party had won just 2.0 per cent of the vote in these seats in 2017, and the polls suggested that the party was only likely to record a marginal improvement in its vote in 2019 – as eventually attested by what was an average increase in the party's support of one and a half points in those seats that it did contest again. Even if in seats where the Greens stood down, all of the potential 3.5 per cent of the vote that this implied they might otherwise have won had instead switched as recommended to the Liberal Democrats (a highly unlikely scenario, given the potential competition for their support from Labour), such a bonus could only make a difference in the most marginal of contests. Meanwhile, at 3.7 per cent, the average share of the vote won by Plaid Cymru in 2017 in the three seats where it stood down in favour of the Liberal Democrats did not suggest that rich rewards would flow from its involvement in the pact either.

Indeed, it is doubtful that the Remain Alliance delivered a single seat to the Liberal Democrats. As we have already noted, most of the seats the party won were secured comfortably. In England and Wales, only the result in Westmorland & Lonsdale, where the former party leader, Tim Farron, was defending his seat, was at all close – a majority of 3.7 points over the Conservatives. But even this figure is a little more than the average maximum benefit of 3.5 per cent that we have suggested might have accrued to the Liberal

**In practice there is little sign that the Liberal Democrats derived much advantage from tactical voting. On average, Labour's vote fell by 6.6 points in those seats where the Liberal Democrats were second to the Conservatives in 2017, rather less than the average drop of 8.3 points that occurred in all seats in England and Wales.**

Democrats from the absence of a Green candidate. True, we might note that when the Greens did last fight the seat – in 2015 – the party did win as much as 3.7 per cent of the vote, but in general the performance of the Greens in 2019 was, although stronger than in 2017, still weaker than in 2015. All in all, it seems unlikely that Mr Farron's seat was saved by the alliance.

However, the pact did not extend to some of the seats that the Liberal Democrats had hopes of winning. The Greens stood in Carshalton & Wallington, which was narrowly lost by the incumbent Liberal Democrat MP, Tom Brake. However, at 1.5 per cent the Green share of the vote was only slightly greater than the 1.3 point margin by which the seat was lost. Nearly all of the votes that went to the Greens would have had to have gone to the Liberal Democrats instead for the result to have been different. The Greens also stood in Sheffield Hallam, where the 2.9 per cent that the party won was well above the 1.2 point margin by which the Liberal Democrats failed to recapture the seat that former party leader, Nick Clegg, lost in 2017. However, this was a contest with Labour rather than the Conservatives, and it must remain uncertain as to what extent the Greens took more votes away from the Liberal Democrats than they did from Labour.

Not least of the reasons why the Remain Alliance could only have a limited effect was that it did not involve the party with the highest level of support among Remain voters, Labour. But if Labour voters could be persuaded to vote tactically for the Liberal Democrats in those seats where the Liberal Democrats appeared better placed to defeat the Conservatives – and vice versa – then the advantage that the Conservatives might derive from the split in the party preferences of Leave supporters might be reduced. No less than three organisations campaigning against Brexit attempted to promote anti-Conservative tactical voting by providing advice on their websites, based on recent polling, as to which party was best able to defeat the Conservatives in each seat. Given the evidence that voters were more likely to identify strongly as a 'Remainer' or 'Leaver' than as a supporter of any particular party,<sup>9</sup> it seemed possible that at least some voters might be willing to heed such advice.

However, in practice there is little sign that the Liberal Democrats derived much advantage from tactical voting. On average, Labour's vote fell by 6.6 points in those seats where the Liberal Democrats were second to the Conservatives in 2017, rather less than the average drop of 8.3 points that occurred in all seats in England and Wales. Even if we confine our attention to those seats where the Liberal Democrats started off within 20 points of the Conservatives (and where the incentive for Labour supporters to vote tactically might be thought to be strongest) we find that the average drop in Labour's vote was just 6.3 points. That Labour's vote did not fall more heavily in

these seats can in part be accounted for by the fact that Labour's vote was already relatively low – on average the party had won just 16 per cent of the vote in them in 2017 – and thus had less far to fall. Indeed, on average the party's vote fell on average by just 6.4 points in all Conservative-held seats in England and Wales where it had won less than 20 per cent of the vote in 2017. But even taking this into account there is no sign here of the Labour vote in general falling more heavily in those seats where the Liberal Democrats were starting off in second place. The one exception is St Albans, a seat where, exceptionally, the Liberal Democrats had gained second place in 2017 and where there was still as much as a 23 per cent Labour vote last time around. Here the Labour vote fell by as much as 14.4 points, 6 points above the England and Wales-wide average drop in the party's support. However, given that the heavily pro-Remain seat was won by the Liberal Democrats by a margin of almost 11 points, the additional tactical squeeze on the Labour vote that does seem to have occurred here appears not to have been decisive in enabling the Liberal Democrats to capture the seat.

Of course, the Liberal Democrats' hopes of winning over tactical votes from Labour were not necessarily confined to those seats where the party was second last time. If in some of the heavily pro-Remain seats in and around London where it came third last time but was now mounting a strong local campaign it could convince voters that it had a chance of winning it might hope to persuade some Labour voters to switch sides.

There were four seats (Cities of London & Westminster, Esher & Walton, South Cambridgeshire, Wimbledon) where, thanks to an average 23.3 point increase in support, the Liberal Democrats came within ten points of the Conservatives, even though the party only came third last time. In part the Liberal Democrat advance in these seats was a reflection of a poor Conservative performance – an average drop of 7.4 points, four points above what was typical of the most heavily pro-Remain seats in the south of England. However, it was also accompanied by an even bigger drop in the Labour vote – by as much as 13.5 points, seven points above the norm for such seats. So, it looks as though in some instances what was a new challenge locally by the Liberal Democrats did help to secure something of a tactical squeeze on the Labour vote – but not enough to wrest any of these seats from the Conservatives.

### Anatomy

Our analysis has identified one immediate proximate cause of the Liberal Democrats' failure to fulfil the high hopes that the party had at the beginning of the 2019 election campaign – a failure to retain the support of, let alone win further ground among, those who had voted Remain

in 2016 and Labour in 2017. It was among this group that the party above all lost ground during the election campaign and among whom, in the event, tactical voting was largely notable by its absence. However, we have raised doubts about the claim that the reason for this failure lies in the party's decision to support revoking Article 50 without holding another referendum. Where, then, might the explanation lie?

Arguably of the two principal groups of Remain voters that the party had gathered during the summer of 2019 – those who had previously voted Conservative and those who two years ago had supported Labour – the latter was always potentially the more vulnerable. Labour's stance on Brexit may not have been particularly attractive to them, but, having edged to some degree in their direction, it might at least not necessarily prove an anathema to them. In contrast, the Conservatives' pro-Brexit stance was clearly at odds with that of their supporters who wanted to stay in the EU. As a result, Labour Remainers might need further reasons beyond Brexit to stick with the Liberal Democrats, especially given that during the campaign Labour regularly reminded voters of the Liberal Democrats' involvement in the public expenditure cuts that had been implemented by the 2010–15 coalition. At the same time, popularity on other fronts might have helped win over more of the Remain vote that was still inclined to vote Conservative.

Yet in practice the Liberal Democrats proved ineffective at communicating to voters anything much beyond the party's stance on Brexit. The party's domestic policy programme was not so much unpopular as largely unknown. This became evident in polling conducted by Lord Ashcroft towards the end of the campaign in which voters were presented with a range of policy proposals and asked to identify which party was backing each one. This revealed that much of what Labour was advocating had cut through to the electorate: on average across ten of the party's policy proposals, just over half of voters (51 per cent) were able to identify them as emanating from the party. The party's proposals for nationalisation were especially widely recognised. Less ambitious though the party's programme mostly was, many a Conservative proposal was also correctly identified – on average by 43 per cent. In contrast, when voters were asked about eight policies that appeared in the Liberal Democrat manifesto, on average just 27 per cent associated them with the party. Indeed, if we leave aside the two-thirds (66 per cent) of voters who recognised revoking Article 50 as a Liberal Democrat policy, the average across the remaining domestic policy items was just 19 per cent. Even the party's distinctive policies of increasing the basic rate of income tax and the legalisation of cannabis were only recognised by 28 per cent. The position among Labour

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Remainers was little different from that among voters as a whole. In short there was little in the Liberal Democrats' campaign on domestic issues that might help persuade this group (or anyone else) to stick with the party.

At the same time, the party lacked an asset that has often been crucial to its ability to gather votes during an election campaign – a popular leader. Jo Swinson began the campaign with a reasonably respectable approval rating. According to *Opinium*, 24 per cent approved of the job that she was doing as Liberal Democrat leader while 35 per cent said they disapproved. Most (41 per cent) simply said that they neither approved nor disapproved. However, the more that voters saw of the new Liberal Democrat leader, the less they liked her. By the end of the campaign, just 19 per cent said that they approved of the job that she was doing, while as many as 46 per cent indicated that they disapproved – an even larger proportion than disapproved of the job that Tim Farron was doing at the end of what was widely regarded as a rather hapless campaign in 2017.<sup>10</sup> As a result, her net approval rating of –27 among voters in general was little better than that of the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn (–30), while much the same was true among those who had voted Remain (amongst whom Ms Swinson had a net approval rating of –4, similar to the –5 enjoyed by Mr Corbyn). Ms Swinson's efforts evidently also did little to help make voting Liberal Democrat a particularly attractive option for Labour Remainers.

### Conclusion

In helping to precipitate an early general election the Liberal Democrats gambled that a ballot would result in both Brexit being stopped and their own parliamentary position strengthened. In the event, it did neither. While perhaps the alternative was to risk the prospect that the UK might leave the EU without a deal at the end of January 2020, the party's gamble clearly did not pay off. Backing the election must be regarded as one of the party's most serious political miscalculations in its history.

The principal source of its disappointing performance lay in its failure to retain much of the support of Remain voters that it had attracted from Labour in the wake of the European elections earlier in the year. That support was perhaps always potentially more fragile than it had seemed, given the possibility that Labour could, as it did, move in a more Remain direction. However, the party did not help itself by its apparent failure to give these voters reasons beyond Brexit to stick with the party. Even in the context of an election that had the potential to determine Britain's future relationship with the EU, a one-dimensional campaign in which the party failed to communicate its domestic agenda proved woefully inadequate.

The principal task now facing the party is to move its appeal beyond Brexit. Limited though it might have been, all the progress that it did make in 2019 in terms of votes won rested on winning over Remain voters. There was little sign of a renewed ability to restore the broader coalition that had ranged from the Celtic fringe to university towns, underpinned by strong local campaigning, that had delivered the party success in 2005 and 2010. Indeed, it looks as though much of the damage done to the party's image and reputation by its involvement in the 2010–15 coalition is still to be reversed. The task facing whoever succeeds Jo Swinson as party leader is a formidable one.

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**In helping to precipitate an early general election the Liberal Democrats gambled that a ballot would result in both Brexit being stopped and their own parliamentary position strengthened. In the event, it did neither. While perhaps the alternative was to risk the prospect that the UK might leave the EU without a deal at the end of January 2020, the party's gamble clearly did not pay off. Backing the election must be regarded as one of the party's most serious political miscalculations in its history.**

# Liberal Democrat leader

HAVING PUBLISHED THE last summary of Liberal Democrat leadership performance in the autumn 2019 edition of the *Journal of Liberal History* (issue 104), we had not expected to need to update it so soon. However, Jo Swinson's loss of her seat in the December 2019 general election, and her subsequent resignation as leader, means that, sadly, we need to.

The table here therefore compares the performance of the seven Liberal Democrat leaders to date in terms of their personal ratings and party ratings in the opinion polls, performance in general, European and local elections and numbers of party members, at the beginning and end of their leaderships.

Although these statistics of course ignore the political context of the leaders' periods in office, and can mask large swings within the periods – and other, non-quantitative, measures of a leader's performance may be just as, if not more, important – these figures do have value in judging the effectiveness of any given leader.

## Notes and sources

- a Ipsos-MORI series on 'satisfaction with party leaders'. Ratings are given for the nearest available date to the leader's election and resignation.
- b Ipsos-MORI did not ask this question during Jo Swinson's leadership after October 2019.
- c Ipsos-MORI series on 'voting intention trends'. Where resignation immediately followed an election, the election result is given.
- d Willie Rennie was elected in the Dunfermline & West Fife by-election during the 2006 leadership election.
- e In December 2018 Stephen Lloyd, one of the 12 Liberal Democrat MPs elected in 2017, resigned the whip to sit as an independent. In June 2019 Chuka Umunna MP joined the party.
- f Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, Elections Centre, Plymouth University. For voting figures, years in which local elections coincided with general elections are excluded.
- g The total number of councillors has been falling since the mid 1990s, as unitary authorities have replaced district councils in some areas; from 1994 to 2013, for example, the total number of councillors fell by about 15 per cent.
- h Before 2015: Mark Pack. 'Liberal Democrat

Leadership performance				
	Ashdown (1988–99)		Kennedy (1999–2006)	
<i>Personal ratings (net score satisfied minus dissatisfied (per cent) and date)<sup>a</sup></i>				
When elected	–4	Aug 1988	+11	Aug 1999
Highest during leadership	+58	May 1997	+42	June 2001
Lowest during leadership	–24	July 1989	+8	June 2004
When stood down	+39	July 1999	+20	Aug 2005
Range (highest – lowest)	82		34	
<i>Party poll ratings (per cent and date)<sup>c</sup></i>				
When elected	8	July 1988	17	Aug 1999
Highest during leadership	28	July 1993	26	Dec 2004, May 2005
Lowest during leadership	4	June – Aug, Nov 1989	11	Oct 99, July 00, Jan, May 01
When stood down	17	Aug 1999	15	Jan 2006
<i>Westminster election performance: Liberal Democrat MPs and vote (%)</i>				
MPs when elected	19		46	
MPs when stood down	46		62	
Highest election vote (%), date	17.8	1992	22.0	2005
Lowest election vote (%), date	16.8	1997	18.3	2001
<i>European election performance: Liberal Democrat MEPs and vote (%)</i>				
MEPs when elected	0		10	
MEPs when stood down	10		12	
Highest election vote (%), date	16.7	1994	14.9	2004
Lowest election vote (%), date	6.4	1989	n/a	
<i>Local election performance: councillors and vote<sup>f,g</sup></i>				
Councillors when elected	3,640		4,485	
Councillors when stood down	4,485		4,743	
Highest election vote (%), date	27	1994	27	2003, 2004
Lowest election vote (%), date	17	1990	25	2002
<i>Party membership<sup>h,i</sup></i>				
Membership when elected	80,104		82,827	
Membership when stood down	82,827		~72,000	
Change (per cent)	+3		–13	

membership figures', <https://www.markpack.org.uk/143767/liberal-democrat-membership-figures/>; 2015 on: Liberal Democrat HQ.

- i Ashdown, Farron and Cable announced their intention to resign in advance, and stood down on the election of their successor; the membership figures for the end of their period in office and the start of their successor's are therefore identical. Kennedy, Campbell and

Clegg all resigned with immediate effect; the exact membership figures are not available at the point of Kennedy's and Campbell's resignations, so figures given here are approximate. While we know that membership increased sharply after Clegg's resignation, in the run-up to the 2015 leadership election, it is not known whether this happened after Kennedy's resignation in 2006 or Campbell's in 2007.



# Leadership performance

<i>Campbell (2006–07)</i>		<i>Clegg (2007–15)</i>		<i>Farron (2015–17)</i>		<i>Cable (2017–19)</i>		<i>Swinson (2019)</i>	
+5	Mar 2006	-3	Jan 2008	-7	Sept 2015	-1	Sept 2017	0	July 2019
+6	May 2006	+53	Oct 2010	-1	Dec 2016	-1	Sept 2017	0	July 2019
-13	May 2007	-45	Oct 2012, Sept 2014	-19	May 2017	-19	Oct 2018	-12	Oct 2019
-11	Sept 2007	-21	April 2015	-19	May 2017	-7	June 2019	n/a <sup>b</sup>	
19		98		18		18		12	
19	Mar 2006	14	Dec 2007	10	Sept 2015	9	July 2017	20	July 2019
25	Apr 2006	32	Apr 2010	14	Dec 2016	22	June 2019	23	Sept 2019
11	Oct 2007	6	Feb 2015	6	Feb, Apr, Sept 2016	6	Mar 2018	12	Dec 2019
11	Oct 2007	8	May 2015	7	June 2017	20	July 2019	12	Dec 2019
63 <sup>d</sup>		63		8		12		12	
63		8		12		12 <sup>e</sup>		11	
n/a		23.0	2010	7.4	2017	n/a		11.5	2019
n/a		7.9	2015	n/a		n/a		n/a	
12		12		1		1		16	
12		1		1		16		16	
n/a		13.7	2009	n/a		19.6	2019	n/a	
n/a		6.6	2014	n/a		n/a		n/a	
4,743		4,420		1,810		1,803		2,536	
4,420		1,810		1,803		2,536		2,549	
25	2006	25	2009	18	2017	17	2019	n/a	
24	2007	11	2014	15	2016	14	2018	n/a	
72,064		64,728		60,215		104,925		110,960	
~64,000		44,568		104,925		110,960		127,577	
-11		-31		+74		+6		+15	



## Land reform

Stephen Ridgwell examines Lloyd George's attempts to reform the rural land laws in Edwardian England

# The 'Mangold

## Lloyd George, the Game Laws and the campaign

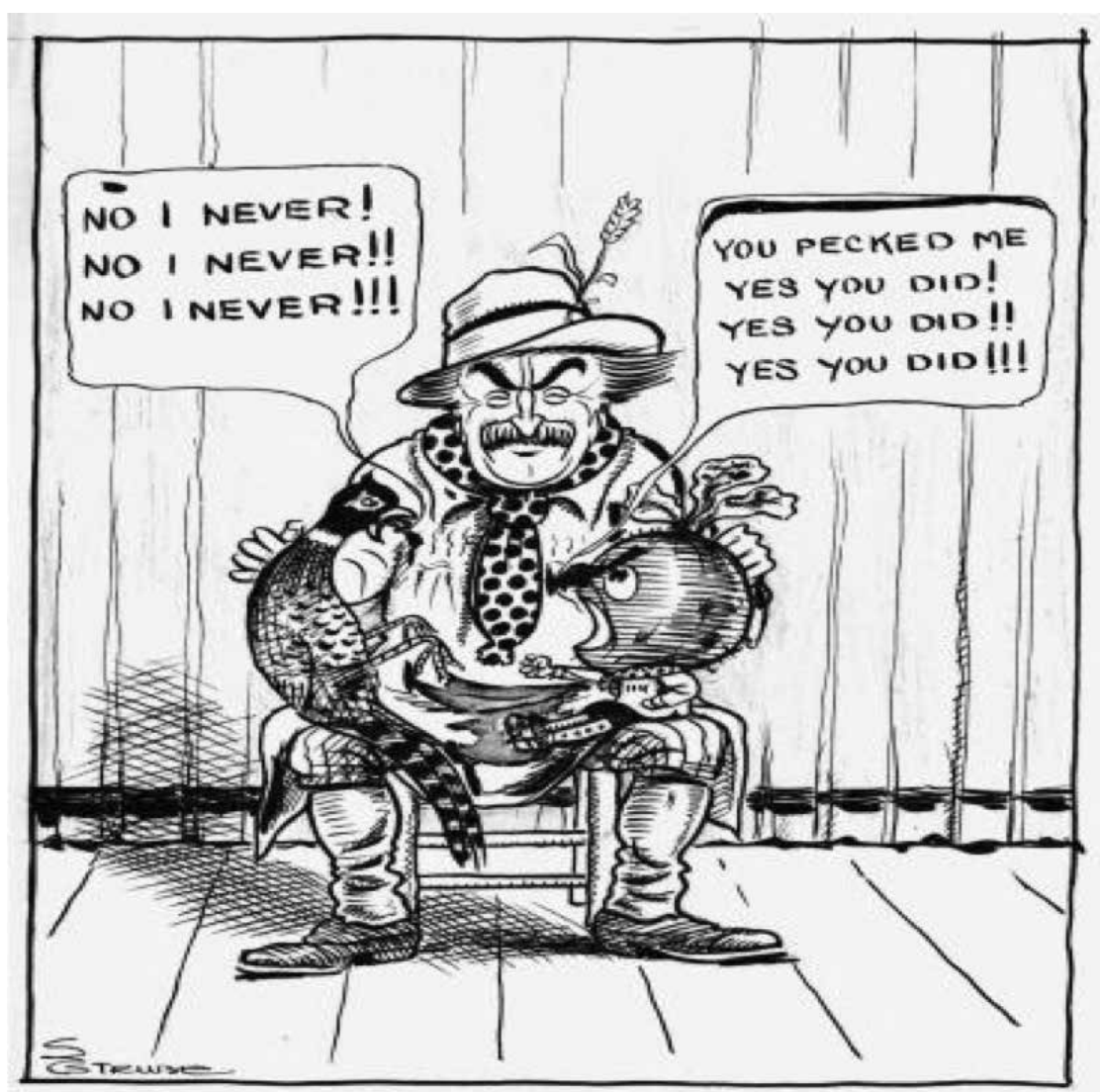


Fig. 1: *Daily Express* cartoon by Strube in the wake of Lloyd George's appearance at the Oxford Union.

**I**N NOVEMBER 1913 Lloyd George was the star attraction at the Oxford Union. He was there to defend the government's recently announced programme of rural land reform – the first step in a wider initiative that would also

incorporate urban land reform. The drama began early.

Upon arrival at the union building, the car in which Lloyd George was travelling was pelted with mangold wurzels and a dead pheasant was

# 'Mangold's Champion'

## Argument for rural land reform in Edwardian England

thrown at his head. This unconventional welcome, along with the inclusion of Welsh Rarebit and Pheasants à la Mangel Wurzel on the pre-debate dinner menu, had effectively been determined by Lloyd George himself.

Speaking for well over two hours at Bedford the previous month, the greatest platform orator of the day had controversially claimed that 'there is no country in the world where cultivated, and even highly cultivated land is so overrun and so continuously damaged by game.'<sup>1</sup> Having offered the striking statistic that between 1851 and 1911 the number of gamekeepers had increased from 9,000 to 23,000, while over the same period the 'labourers on the soil' had declined by 600,000, the chancellor told the story of a hardworking tenant farmer whose mangolds had been destroyed by pheasants from a nearby estate.<sup>2</sup>

Dismissed by cabinet colleague John Burns as 'ragtime statesmanship', there was more to Lloyd George's alleged recourse to fake news than headline-grabbing populism.<sup>3</sup> While his sense of showmanship led other critics to compare him to the music hall star George Robey, in taking careful aim at the sporting landlord he was wholly serious in intent.<sup>4</sup> In putting the case against the modern game preserver, and making it an integral part of what was then termed the land question, the only contemporary politician who fully grasped modernity drew on a well-established rhetoric of opposition. An opposition, it should be stressed, that went beyond the confines of Radical politics.

Widely seen as an epitome of class legislation, the laws attaching to the preservation and shooting of game were viewed with a dislike that permeated the culture at large. This in turn fed back into politics. Shortly before his speech at Bedford, Lloyd George told his friend and confidant, George Riddell, how a painting of a poacher on sale in a London gallery had recently caught his eye. Impressed by the look of 'gloomy determination' on the poacher's face, it was only the

price that had kept him from buying it.<sup>5</sup> With the game laws a matter of long-standing interest and concern to Lloyd George, as indeed they were to many others, this article examines the use he made of them in his pre-war assault on the well-defended ramparts of landlordism.

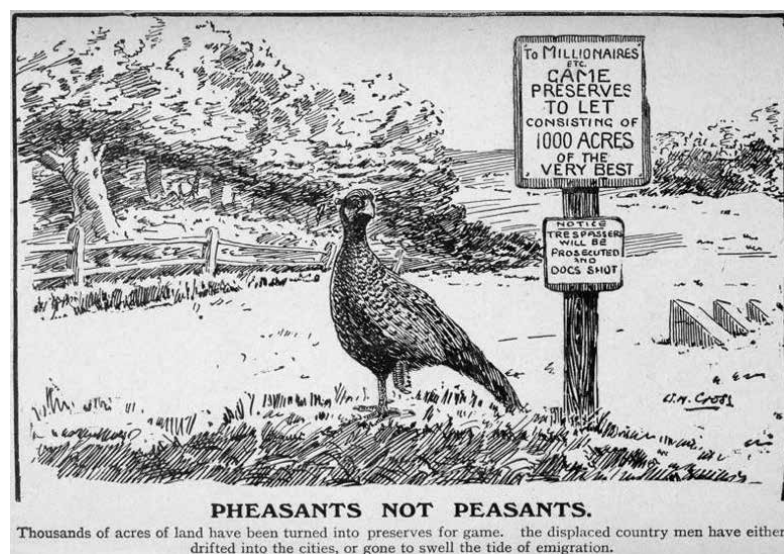
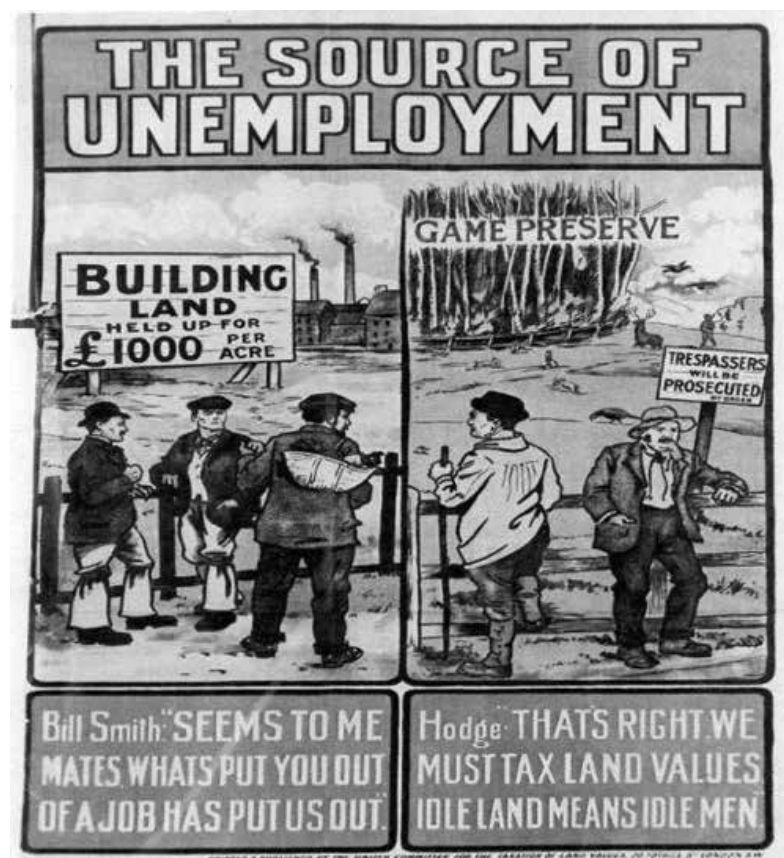
The first section focuses on the general nature of the land question, and the place that game preserving had within it. Some game-related moments in Lloyd George's own political formation are also considered. The article then traces the development of anti-game-law sentiment within the Radical/Liberal tradition from the 1840s to the opening decade of the twentieth century before returning to the Land Campaign of 1912–14. While the absence of an election makes its impact difficult to judge, on a personal level it played well for Lloyd George. By making himself the 'Mangold's Champion' at the moment when the politics of the land was at its height, he not only gave cartoonists a field day, but in the wake of the scandal over Marconi his credentials as the driving force of modern Liberalism were firmly restated.<sup>6</sup>

### Pheasants not peasants: game and the land question

The economic and legal resources devoted to the preservation and shooting of game meant that it was never far from the issue of power. When, in the summer of 1880, Lord Beaconsfield (Disraeli) prophesied that the coming political struggle would be focused on the nation's landholding and constitutional arrangements, the subject under discussion was a Liberal reform to the game laws. Giving tenant farmers some limited means of controlling the hares and rabbits found on their land, including the restricted use of firearms, the Ground Game Act became a reliable source of discord between those it was meant to assist and those who took it as an unwarranted

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## The 'Mangold's Champion': Lloyd George, the Game Laws and the campaign for rural land reform in Edwardian England



interference into their contractual and sporting rights. Long before the Conservative MP and estate owner, George Pretyman, was driven by the terms of Lloyd George's 1909 budget to establish the Land Union, anxious preservers of game had formed the National Sports Defence Association as a means of resisting any future incursions by 'organised land robbers'.<sup>7</sup>

Raised at a time when poaching was a common activity in rural Wales (to which an emerging national consciousness gave a patriotic twist), Lloyd George was well aware of the symbolic resonance of game. In a seminal early speech to the quarrymen of Blaenau Festiniog on the pressing need for land reform, an occasion inspired

by Michael Davitt's visit in February 1886, the 23-year-old solicitor from Criccieth outlined the social cost to the poor of landowners primarily concerned with 'fattening their partridges, their rabbits and their dogs'.<sup>8</sup>

Observing how the speech had 'gone like wildfire thro' Ffestiniog', Lloyd George noted the following day that as a fully fledged participant in radical politics he was now wholly committed.<sup>9</sup> Even if the partridge gave way to the more discursively useful pheasant, at a skating rink in Bedford over a quarter of a century later the sentiment was the same.

The Liberal attempt to achieve a comprehensive package of rural land reform has, until relatively recently, not received the attention it merits.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the outbreak of major hostilities in August 1914 killed off the land campaign before it could yield any legislative results has made its inconsequentiality easy to assume. This, however, is to read history backwards. Though farming now contributed less than 10 per cent of gross national income, and under a quarter of the population still lived on the land, the agricultural sector remained an important source of employment and was central to the debates over national efficiency and tariff reform. Moreover, with constituency boundaries unaltered since 1885, the English countryside was over-represented and capturing the rural vote was a high priority. In the view of a leading expert on Edwardian Conservatism, 'the land was neither separate nor peripheral' and across the ideological spectrum it was 'seen to intersect "modern" issues at every point'.<sup>11</sup> For example, the belief that the continued 'rural exodus' would depress the urban labour market, as well as creating physically damaging levels of overcrowding, was a major national concern.

An obvious way to counter this trend was to improve the material conditions of life on the land. Proposing, amongst other things, the establishment of minimum wages for agricultural labourers, along with a system of land courts to ensure greater security for tenant farmers, the content of the rural land campaign, to say nothing of its paired equivalent for towns, was intended as much for the urban voter as the rural. In promoting the interests of the more 'productive' elements of society, the campaign was deliberately trans-class in its appeal. Helping to bind this bundle of interests together was the endlessly repeated image of the game-preserving landlord. Speaking in Middlesbrough in November 1913 on the Urban Land Problem, Lloyd George moved seamlessly from the country landlords whose souls were 'centred on sport' to the insistence that 'the rural policy is vital to the towns, and the urban policy is equally vital to the country'.<sup>12</sup> In a similar way, the shared hardships of urban and rural workmen at the idle hands of landlords were routinely highlighted by advocates of land value taxation – a cause supported by prominent

## The 'Mangold's Champion': Lloyd George, the Game Laws and the campaign for rural land reform in Edwardian England

Liberals like Josiah Wedgwood and Charles Trevelyan (Fig. 2).

But the land was more than just a valuable economic resource. Any account of the Edwardian land question, and the role of game preserving within it, must also recognise the cultural dimension. As a recent study of A. E. Housman suggests, 'statistical facts do not ... accurately reflect how people feel', and for much of the population 'the countryside remained the true locus of "Englishness."<sup>13</sup> Here of course was a highly emotive conflict of interest. If the 'essential England was rural', the ongoing struggles of open-air recreationalists and nature lovers for greater access further sustained the idea of a selfish elite taking their pleasure at the expense of the many.<sup>14</sup> Instances like the loss of Trevelyan's 1908 Mountains and Moorlands Bill added greatly to this view. *How the Tory Landlords Oppose the People's Right to the Land* ran the title of a Liberal pamphlet highlighting the role of northern game preservers in blocking the proposal.<sup>15</sup>

Inextricably linked to the issue of access were the laws that surrounded game. Since 1831 its pursuit had technically been open to anyone who purchased a licence, but in practice the so-called sporting rights were invariably reserved to the landowner. While the Ground Game Act eventually gave farmers limited rights in the matter, the game laws were synonymous with the protection of landlord interest. There was also the issue of enforcement. Although country magistrates often acted impartially, the idea of the poacher as a perennial victim of 'Justices justice' remained prevalent. It was certainly one that Lloyd George made use of. In a typical case at the police court in Pwllheli in 1896, the MP for Carnarvon Boroughs successfully defended a farmer's son accused of shooting pheasants. In a well-rehearsed move, Lloyd George started by questioning the motives of the gamekeeper who had brought the charge before informing the chairman of the court that 'you are known for your injustice, especially in poaching cases.' According to a report preserved in his personal papers, the dismissal of the case 'created much satisfaction amongst the public present'.<sup>16</sup> In terms of framing the future statesman as a tireless champion of the people against the forces of entrenched monopoly, episodes like this had a significant afterlife.

In his admiring 1914 biography of the chancellor, J. Hugh Edwards described how, in Lloyd George's early days as a solicitor, the local 'poaching fraternity' often turned to him for his services and that 'scenes were constantly taking place' in which he 'boldly and unflinchingly stood up to the Bench'. As well as Hubert Du Parc's multi-volume *Life of David Lloyd George (1912-14)*, potted biographies like the one published by the *Daily News* (1913) also recounted his battles with game preservers. This included the celebrated occasion when in a case involving the defence of four poachers the justices withdrew from court

'rather than withstand his onset'.<sup>17</sup> Coming at a time when Conservative MPs could blame electoral defeat on their involvement as magistrates in high-profile poaching cases, as happened to George Verall in the marginal constituency of Newmarket in December 1910, such stories were loaded with popular potential.<sup>18</sup>

But Lloyd George had not just been a poacher's lawyer. The self-styled 'cottage bred man' liked to reference his own poaching past – a point not lost on *Punch*.<sup>19</sup> Upholding his claim about pheasants in the second of his major speeches on land reform at Swindon, Lloyd George explained that 'I have not lived for 25 years in a rural area without knowing more about game than the gamekeeper would like'.<sup>20</sup> Four years earlier, he had responded to the Lords' rejection of his land-taxing budget by announcing them to be 'of no more use than broken bottles stuck on a park wall to keep off poachers. That is what they are there for – to keep off radical poachers from the Lordly preserves'.<sup>21</sup> Not only was this good political knockabout, it also emphasised his deep understanding of the land. That the violently anti-Lloyd George publication the *National Review* should damningly assign him 'no higher place in the hierarchy of sport than that of an ex-poacher' rather missed the point.<sup>22</sup>

The preservation and shooting of game had by this time reached its historic peak. More guns shot at more game than ever before or since. With around 50 per cent of agricultural land now subordinate to the needs of the shoot, and guide-books such as *The Pheasant: From the Cradle to Grave* proliferating, even the *Field* could warn that 'excessive preservation' was a mistake and liable to encourage the 'anti-game movement'.<sup>23</sup> Speaking privately in January 1913, Lloyd George noted that while modest shooting in the 'old style' at least had some merit, modern practices were simply a 'monstrosity'.<sup>24</sup> In the meantime, the historical accounts of the game laws contained within widely read works like J. L. and Barbara Hammonds' *The Village Labourer* (1911) not only reinforced the belief in their 'feudal' and 'tyrannical' nature, but made them indissoluble from the process of parliamentary enclosure. With the living memory of enclosure informing much of the debate on the present and future use of the land, the double enclosure represented by the game preserve became central to the narrative of loss and needful restitution that formed part of the rationale for state-led change.

Fleshing out the details of the government's reform programme at Swindon on 22 October, the 'architect of the new England' announced that, whatever gamekeepers and landlords might say, the 'full resources of the soil' would be developed through the creation of Land Commissioners.<sup>25</sup> Answering his own question 'Why Commissioners?', Lloyd George delighted in telling a cheering audience that 'It is an idea we get from the landlords. When they enclosed the

Fig. 2: Poster produced by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values, March 1910 (reproduced with the kind permission of the Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading)

Fig. 3: From the illustrated version of Lloyd George's Swindon speech published by the *Daily News*. The main notice board references the renting out of sporting estates to wealthy businessmen. (reproduced with the kind permission of Bristol University, Special Collections)

commons they did it through Commissioners ... the Commissioners having deprived the people of their interest in the land, Commissioners are just the people to restore the land to the people'.<sup>26</sup> With the army's summer manoeuvres an annual source of friction between estate owners anxious to protect their birds and the military authorities, criticism of the game preserver could be neatly folded into the patriotic crusade to open up the land (Fig. 3). But in making the case against the preservers of game and their pheasants, Lloyd George was not simply adding 'more tasty matter' to his prescription for reform but drawing on a rich tradition of populist anti-landlordism.<sup>27</sup>

### One of the oldest Radical bugbears: attacking the game laws c.1845–1909

John Burns might not have liked Lloyd George's style, but his views on the political uses of game preserving were essentially the same. Electioneering in Battersea in 1906, an area not known for its sporting estates, he declared how England should henceforth 'care more about the peasant than the pheasant'.<sup>28</sup> Not only was Burns echoing Campbell Bannerman's recent call for the countryside to become 'less a pleasure ground of the rich and more of a treasure house for the nation', he was also airing what has been rightly labelled one of the 'oldest Radical bugbears'.<sup>29</sup> Across the second half of the nineteenth century, and into the next, attacking the preservers of game formed a significant part of a Radical / Liberal *Kulturkampf* against the owners of landed property.<sup>30</sup> Often compared to Joseph Chamberlain in his more radical days, when his outspoken attacks on landlords were full of the 'philosophy of Robin Hood, or even Jack Sheppard', Lloyd George also stood in line to the dominating presence of mid-Victorian Radicalism, and a redoubtable critic of the game laws, John Bright.<sup>31</sup>

Bright's first intervention came in February 1845 when, in moving for a select committee on the game laws, he described to a packed House of Commons the 'Hundreds and thousands of persons ... fined and imprisoned for poaching' while excessively preserved game was significantly hindering agricultural output.<sup>32</sup> Not only was this a blight on the working part of the rural community, but a growing problem for urban dwellers forced to pay a higher price for their food. In attacking the preservers of game Bright was seeking to drive a wedge between farmers and landlords in the hope of persuading the former to turn against the Corn Laws and to bring the affronted interests of town and country together. Representing 'one of the strongest marks of landlord domination', and relatable to the Norman Conquest, the manifold injustices of the game laws were a constant theme in the literature of the Anti-Corn Law League.<sup>33</sup>

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**Successful in his bid to end the Corn Laws, Bright was unable to achieve the same for the game laws. Undaunted, however, he returned to the issue in 1865 when, in the process of calling for franchise reform, he stated that the 'evil' of game preserving had become 'not less, but greater' and that in future elections Liberals in towns would give their fullest support to anti-game law candidates.**

game laws. Undaunted, however, he returned to the issue in 1865 when, in the process of calling for franchise reform, he stated that the 'evil' of game preserving had become 'not less, but greater' and that in future elections Liberals in towns would give their fullest support to anti-game law candidates.<sup>34</sup> Not only did this greater evil consist of ever-larger concentrations of game, it was also contained in the recent Poaching Prevention Act. Initiated in the Lords in 1862, this controversial measure gave rural constabularies the power to stop and search anyone suspected of the crime. Almost as bad for the Act's many critics, the cost of turning policemen into 'auxiliary gamekeepers' would be met by the general county rate. Further evidence, it seemed, of landlords having their legislative cake and eating it – to say nothing of their well-protected pheasants.

With Bright continuing to speak on the need to repeal the whole of the game law system, other leading Radicals like W. E. Forster and the indefatigable MP for Leicester, Peter Taylor, were also taking up the cause. Devoted to female suffrage, Garibaldi and churchwarden pipes, Taylor was especially driven by hatred of the game laws and in 1872 established the Anti-Game Law League. Like many with similar views, Taylor was convinced that the laws surrounding game were 'in the nature of an outpost or rampart of the Land Laws' and continually restated the connection between landlord monopoly and sporting excess.

Anticipating a claim later made during the Land Campaign, the first of the league's reasons for abolition was that 'the Game Laws diminish the area of land under cultivation'.<sup>35</sup> In a way that Lloyd George would have appreciated, the league communicated its message through a combination of damning statistics and highly charged language. 'Anti-Game Law Rhymes' like the one in which the poaching Young Fustian is beaten to death by Lord Velvet's vicious gamekeeper, Old Bully, being a typical offering.<sup>36</sup>

Seeing it as a step towards abolition, Taylor and Bright both backed the Ground Game Act. The first law to be passed by Gladstone's second administration, it was indicative of what George Kitson Clark discerned as the decade's 'new politics'.<sup>37</sup> Central to this changing political landscape was the extension of the franchise in 1884, an event that afforded Bright a final chance to speak publicly on the game issue. Addressing himself to the agricultural labourers who had just been enfranchised, Bright claimed that only the Liberals could deliver on their legitimate aspirations and that by working together the 'land laws will be reformed' and the 'Game Laws, too, will come under revision'.<sup>38</sup> Yet if ageing Radicals like Bright remained a concern to game preservers, even more worrying was the emergence of his heir apparent, the man hailed by Lloyd George in 1884 as 'unquestionably the future leader of the people', the Birmingham-based Joseph Chamberlain.<sup>39</sup>

Formally launched in the summer of 1885, the 'Unauthorised Programme' was an ambitious attempt to establish Liberalism's (and thus Chamberlain's) relevance to this new political world. Alongside graduated taxation and more local government, it contained an eye-catching proposal to enlarge the number of smallholders. This evident anti-landlordism had been made even clearer by Chamberlain in a speech given in his home city in January. Demonstrating the more populist style of address that developed in response to the Third Reform Act, Chamberlain claimed that at one time every man had enjoyed 'a right to a part in the land of his birth.'<sup>40</sup> In developing his theme, the game laws were a valuable resource. 'Is it just to expect that the amusements of the rich, carried even to barbarous excess, should be protected by an anomalous and Draconian code of law' he asked, or that the 'community should be called upon to maintain in gaol men who are made criminal by this legislation?'<sup>41</sup> While the content of the Birmingham speech was subsequently moderated, with a general election drawing closer the anti-landlord line was resumed. Concluding his speech in Warrington in September, Chamberlain turned once again to the 'barbarous' laws that were intended for no other reason than to 'protect the sports of the well-to-do' and doubted that 'any Parliament freely elected by the whole people' would tolerate them for long.<sup>42</sup>

The coming split over home rule notwithstanding, use of the land and the workings of the game laws now formed an established part of the more radical Liberal platform and contributed to the party's 1885 success in the English counties. In Norfolk North-West, for example, a safe Conservative seat went Liberal as the agricultural labourers' leader, Joseph Arch, pushed the twin issues of land and game law reform.<sup>43</sup> The following decade found Arch as part of a group of MPs, including Lloyd George, that attempted to repeal the Poaching Prevention Act.<sup>44</sup> And while the Liberal MP and author of *Fishing and Shooting*, Sidney Buxton, might argue the contrary, moving into the Edwardian era the preservation of game continued to be a source of popular grievance and an abiding symbol of landlord tyranny and excess (Fig. 4).<sup>45</sup>

Although as the case of Buxton suggests, Liberal opposition to the game preserver was by no means universal, it suffuses *To Colonise England*, the 1907 collection of essays edited by the newly elected MP, and close associate of Lloyd George, Charles Masterman. Introduced by A. G. Gardiner of the *Daily News*, the tone was set by his poem 'A Song of the Land'. Using the kind of language associated with one of the great romantic heroes of nineteenth-century Radicalism, Ernest Jones, the poem recounts how 'The Squire has woods and acres wide, / Pheasants and fish and hounds beside, / A stable full of horses to ride'. In stark contrast the labourer, 'Giles', merely 'follows the plough to the workhouse door.' The

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poem concludes with the plaintive question: 'How long, O Lord, shall the people be / Aliens in their own country?'<sup>46</sup>

In 'A Parish Meeting', a later piece in the collection by another beneficiary of the 1906 landslide, Athelstan Rendall, the figure of the squire is once more encountered. Here he is shown opposing the recent legislation on agricultural holdings, which included a compensation clause enabling tenant farmers to claim for damage done by winged game.<sup>47</sup> Bitterly opposed in the Lords, the proposal to give farmers the right to shoot the pheasants and partridges found on their holdings had had to be dropped, while the process for claiming damages was in turn made significantly harder. Although an Agricultural Holdings Act was finally passed at the end of 1906, albeit with a two-year deferment, the hostility generated between a 'rapacious' land reforming government and an opposition determined to defend the full rights of landowners, including those to do with sport, was an indication of the battles to come.<sup>48</sup> Reviewing the inordinate difficulties in achieving this moderate change to the law, Campbell Bannerman expressed the determination of Liberals to continue along the road of land reform:

When I am told that the only class of rural workers, and the census shows it, which has increased during the past few years is the game-keeping class, and when ... demand for land for the purposes of use and labour is met by blank denial, I say we should fail entirely in our duty if we sat with folded hands consenting to such a state of things.<sup>49</sup>

By the time that the Agricultural Holdings Act came into force Campbell Bannerman was dead and the new prime minister was Asquith. Not an instinctive land reformer himself, and given at times to sitting with folded hands, his replacement as chancellor was of a very different stripe.

### 'Down with Game and up with Lloyd George': the Land Campaign and the game issue, 1912-14

Late on the evening of 15 October 1912 the Commons descended into uproar. Amidst the unfolding scandal of Lloyd George's purchase of shares in Marconi, he was subjected to an aggressive line of questioning about the 'backstairs' committee he had established to investigate conditions on the land. Responding to Austen Chamberlain's enquiry as to the details of those giving evidence, Lloyd George seized his chance. 'Now I know what they want to get at ... They want to get the names of the men who dared to give information about wages, about the conditions of labour, about management, and about game'. It was at this point that the jeers and 'hooting' reached a crescendo: as a letter to his wife reported, 'Had a glorious row last night ... I ended deliberately on

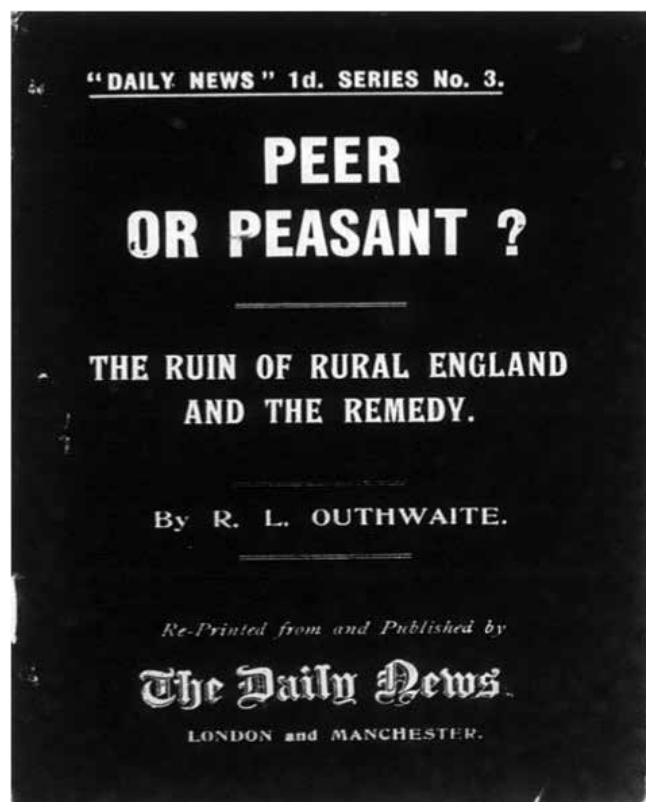


Fig. 4: Published in 1909, this collection of articles from the *Daily News* contained a fierce attack on game-preserves. The land-reforming Outhwaite won the industrial seat of Hanley for the Liberals at a by-election in July 1912.

Fig. 5: The poacher turned Chancellor – *Punch's* response to the uproar over Lloyd George's 'secret land enquiry', 4 November 1912.



the word "game". This produced pandemonium' (Fig. 5).<sup>50</sup>

Under the overall direction of Seebohm Rowntree, and with the full knowledge of Asquith, the Land Enquiry Committee had begun its work in the summer of 1912. At a time when sociological surveys and Cobbett-like journeys through the English countryside were commonplace, the establishment of such a group was not of itself unusual. What was unusual was Lloyd George's close involvement in the project, and the not wholly unjustified sense that its purpose was less to uncover the 'facts' of contemporary rural life than to furnish evidence for him to exploit on the platform. In other words, critics claimed, the 'secret' work of the committee – funded by personal friends and supporters of the chancellor – was an elaborate exercise in confirmation bias.

The stakes were certainly high. With the immediate future likely to be dominated by Irish home rule, and with National Insurance proving a hard sell, a sweeping package of land reform offered the chance to reconnect with the kind of popular reformist energy last seen during the constitutional struggle with the Lords. Enabling the Liberals to present themselves as the most effective counter to the wasteful privilege of the game preserve, while simultaneously pushing a commitment to improved national efficiency, this renewed focus on the land offered a powerful synthesis of 'old' and 'new'. It might also address the growing problem of Labour. If not yet able to offer a head-on challenge themselves, by-election results from the period show how the party's splitting of the progressive vote was indirectly beneficial to the Conservatives.

Contained within a wider package of land reforms, the offer to tackle the game laws (though not, as the *Daily News* reported, abolish them), and to rein in the excesses of the sporting land-lord, was to speak directly to Labour's own political base. This archetypally urban movement had a significant interest in the past and present state of the countryside and hostility to the game laws and sympathy for those who broke them were commonplace.<sup>51</sup> In what could easily have been a speech of Lloyd George's, an ILP pamphlet on the 'Curse of the Country' roundly condemned a situation where landowners were 'permitted to preserve game which devastates farmer's crops, but if a starving hind so much as kills and takes a rabbit he is liable to be sent to jail by a bench of landlord magistrates.'<sup>52</sup>

At the core of the rural land enquiry (a separate study was commissioned for urban areas) was the circulation of two questionnaires by teams of regionally based fieldworkers. The first was concerned with wages and housing conditions, while the second focused on land use, conditions of tenure and the presumed negative impact of game preservation.<sup>53</sup> With informants given the promise of anonymity, responses were quickly forthcoming. Referring him to a lengthy memorandum on the historical development of the game laws recently produced under the auspices of the Liberal MP and fellow member of the enquiry committee, Richard Winfrey, Rowntree was able to tell Lloyd George in September 1912 that 'we are getting a lot of information with regard to present conditions'.<sup>54</sup> And as those engaged on the report well knew, not least because Lloyd George told them, the worse the conditions the more usable they would be.



There was an obvious sense of regret, therefore, when a case involving smallholders and excessively preserved game fell through because of witness unreliability. Adding to the frustration was that the estate in question belonged to Lord Rendlesham, a former Tory MP and until recently the chairman of the Suffolk Quarter Sessions – the embodiment, as it were, of the game preserving Tory bigwig. More promising were the reports from Angmering in Sussex – a village where conditions were 'shockingly bad' and where 'memories of enclosure' remained 'vivid'. Eager to know more, Lloyd George instructed the enquiry committee's secretary to produce information relating to game in the area: 'what kind ... the number of gamekeepers [and] the extent of the preservation.'<sup>55</sup>

Appearing in the space between Lloyd George's speeches at Bedford and Swindon, the *Land Report* gave detailed testimony on the poor state of affairs in rural areas. While acknowledging that compared to the years of agricultural depression the countryside was now in a less parlous state, the serious difficulties remaining were repeatedly stressed. Citing crop damage and under-cultivation as major problems in game preserving areas, and recommending that significant parts of the Poaching Prevention Act be repealed, it concluded that 'considerable amendments' to the present laws were necessary 'both in the interests of agriculture and of the nation at large.'<sup>56</sup> Nowhere did the report give the positive arguments for game preserving. Whatever the benefits it might bring to its surrounding area, and arguably there were some, they were studiously overlooked by Rowntree and his team.

Published commercially by Hodder & Stoughton, the report coincided with a series of cabinet meetings to approve Lloyd George's plans. Not only did this mean that a well-funded publicity drive became possible, it also meant that other ministers were obliged to speak on the subject and would, if necessary, defend any of the more controversial claims made. A carefully produced memorandum circulated for use in these meetings had contained only a passing reference to the game issue and no indication of the extent to which Lloyd George would use it in the forthcoming campaign.<sup>57</sup> But although the chancellor could now claim to speak with the voice of the whole government, it also led to charges of hypocrisy. Not only did Lloyd George make frequent visits to land-swallowing golf clubs, but senior figures such as Sir Edward Grey, and especially the colonial secretary, Lewis Harcourt, were well-known shooters of game (Fig. 6). 'He speaks of pheasants and Mr Harcourt has a spasm', noted one 'exposure' of the chancellor's numerous expedients and inconsistencies.<sup>58</sup>

When Lloyd George took to the stage at the Bedford skating rink his purpose was less to outline the forthcoming programme of land reform, in part because it had not yet been agreed, than to

create a rhetoric for change. According to one of the event organisers, in decking the venue in red, white and blue the aim was not just to hide the ugliness of the building but to be 'emblematic of the new patriotism.'<sup>59</sup> In choosing this literal and figurative approximation to middle England, the electorally marginal county town of Bedford was a calculated choice. Reclaimed by the Liberals in December 1910, the town was closely linked to one of country's biggest landowners, and a 'Die-hard' in the recent struggle over constitutional reform, the Eleventh Duke of Bedford. Exemplifying the kind of 'feudalism' that many Liberals insisted was still to be found in rural areas, the game-preserving duke had engaged the distinguished agricultural historian, Rowland Prothero, to act on his behalf in local politics and in 1905 he had become a county alderman. With the magistracy in Bedford, and elsewhere, still dominated by the landed interest, it could be argued that on any number of grounds the 'landlord class' remained preponderant and that in essence the countryside was still the 'delectable pleasure ground of a fortunate minority.'<sup>60</sup>

During the periods when parliament was in recess, as it was between August 1913 and the following February, the public address became the principal means of shaping the political agenda. Rejecting Churchill's advice not to be too hard on the landlords, Lloyd George chose instead to give them 'snuff'.<sup>61</sup> Just as a cartoon from *Punch* predicted, game was once more included in his pungent blend of anti-landlordism. 'DIE HAPPY, BIRD!' a sporting Lloyd George exclaims to a pheasant awaiting its doom at the start of October, for soon 'I'M GOING FOR THEM!'<sup>62</sup> As he knew from earlier campaigns, popular prejudice could not only be used to sell a radical package of reform, but to keep the chief reformer in the public eye. It would also serve to move the focus on from Marconi as well as draw attention from other problems of the day. 'Down with Game and up with Mr Lloyd George' was Bonar Law's typically acerbic, but not wholly unfounded, response when forced to speak on an issue he considered far less important than events in Ulster.<sup>63</sup>

Compared to his critical references to game in 1909–10, those made around the launching of the Land Campaign were notably more specific.<sup>64</sup> They also substituted the pheasant for the partridge as the species to be singled out. In part this reflects the work of the land enquiry, but it also demonstrates Lloyd George's understanding of what would now be termed sound-bite politics. Central to the case against the landlord were two easily repeatable claims, neither of which appeared in the *Land Report* in quite the same form. The first was the growing number of gamekeepers alongside the falling number of agricultural labourers. Since 1851, 9,000 keepers had become 23,000; while the number of those working the land had declined by 600,000. What this 'perfect specimen of a Lloyd-Georgian syllogism'

**The *Land Report* gave detailed testimony on the poor state of affairs in rural areas ... Citing crop damage and under-cultivation as major problems in game preserving areas, and recommending that significant parts of the Poaching Prevention Act be repealed, it concluded that 'considerable amendments' to the present laws were necessary 'both in the interests of agriculture and of the nation at large.'**

## The 'Mangold's Champion': Lloyd George, the Game Laws and the campaign for rural land reform in Edwardian England

Fig. 6: The cartoon references a speech given by the Conservative MP and founder of the Land Union, George Pretyman, at Swindon on 17 October 1913. Lloyd George's love of golf was used as an example of his 'humbug' over game preserving.

Fig. 7: Such was the reach of Lloyd George's claims about the damage done by pheasants that manufacturers of avian pest repellents quickly recruited him to their cause.

overlooked, however, was that even if there was a causal relationship between the two sets of data, the most recent figures revealed that the rural workforce had, albeit slightly, begun to expand.<sup>65</sup> The 23,000 figure also included Scotland, an area where keeper numbers were rising more rapidly than elsewhere in Britain. Whether in error, or as deliberate distortion, a pamphlet produced in support of the Land Campaign would later give the figure of 23,000 for England and Wales alone.<sup>66</sup>

The second claim related to the damage done by game to crops, and especially that done by pheasants to the hitherto obscure mangold. From at least the time of the select committee initiated by Bright, the nature and extent of the damage done by winged game had been hotly disputed. Prone to roaming beyond their home preserve, and reared in increasingly large numbers, the brilliantly coloured and mocking pheasants of Byron's 'Don Juan' had become a highly visible, and audible, presence in many rural areas. Yet while its feeding habits were known to be omnivorous, just how destructive the bird was remained a moot point. Although the *Land Report* could claim that where large numbers of pheasants were preserved the damage was 'very great', the only reference to mangolds being harmed was in relation to hares – a species that in theory at least farmers had some control over.<sup>67</sup>

In producing the most controversial statement ever made by a British politician about a vegetable, Lloyd George was doing more than what his eldest son, Richard, later recalled as having a joke with Fleet Street.<sup>68</sup> Not to be found in the published version of the enquiry's report, Lloyd George was almost certainly influenced by an unsigned submission from one of its investigators. Though names and location are absent, the report recounts in some detail the losses sustained by an experienced farmer whose land bordered an estate that preserved pheasants. In addition to their being so numerous that labourers were 'unable to grow green stuff in their gardens', the individual in question had suffered the 'wholesale destruction' of his mangold crop because of the underfed birds that 'swarm[ed]' on his land. No doubt adding to the appeal of the case was the distinct odour of game law tyranny. Legally entitled to compensation, the farmer had apparently lowered his claim so as not to antagonise his landlord. Being a 'well known Liberal in politics' he felt himself to be a marked man already and did not want any further trouble.<sup>69</sup>

The example of a carefully tended crop being destroyed by an animal that existed merely to provide a pastime for a privileged few was too good for Lloyd George to miss. Not only might such a narrative appeal to tenant farmers, it could also play with those agricultural labourers with a long history of anti-game law feeling behind them. If Bright saw the game laws as a means of winning over the farmers, and Chamberlain saw the same possibility with the newly enfranchised

agricultural labourer, Lloyd George's deployment of the mangold-eating pheasant was aimed at drawing both camps to the cause of wider reform. Equally, there was a deep vein of dislike at the idea, if not necessarily the actuality, of the game-preserving landlord to be tapped in urban areas. Offering a striking image of landlord irresponsibility, the allegedly destructive habits of the pheasant reduced a complex problem to a more explicable form. 'The truth is', claimed the Yorkshire Conservative, Viscount Helmsley, that 'talk about game and the arbitrary power of the landlord is not so much for the consumption of the country voter as of the town voter' (Fig. 7).<sup>70</sup>

As he was fully aware, in attacking the landlord through his highly prized game, Lloyd George was bound to provoke a response. Speaking as both an expert in agricultural matters, and as the trusted land agent of a duke, Rowland Prothero contributed some of the most forceful criticism in the *Morning Post*. Characterising the speech as 'one long prolonged scream of violent and often ignorant abuse', he reported how 'English farmers grinned broadly at the fabulous pheasant which devoured the field of mangolds.'<sup>71</sup> Hoping to steer attention back to the Conservative's favoured ground of Ulster, the *Saturday Review* declared that 'fooleries over pheasants merely nauseate at a time when men are arming in defence against their fellows.'<sup>72</sup>

Yet it would be wrong to assume that this negative publicity was necessarily bad for the Liberal cause. From the perspective of the early 1920s, the journalist and political biographer, E. T. Raymond, felt that the 'fuss made about the habits of the pheasant ... confirmed popular suspicion concerning the pampered nature of these birds' and raised the profile of the issue with industrial workers.<sup>73</sup> Coming at a time when the Conservatives had more newsprint at their disposal than their opponents, any appearance in the 'enemy camp' was potentially useful and a detailed report on a Liberal speech was in effect a form of advertisement.<sup>74</sup>

Lloyd George readily joined the war of words. On the same day that Prothero's attack appeared in the *Morning Post*, other hostile publications such as *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* carried a letter from the chancellor in which studied incredulity was expressed at the outrage his comments had stirred. The accuracy of the claims made at Bedford were restated and a further point scored by noting that 'pheasants generally prefer to damage more expensive and luxurious fare than mangolds.'<sup>75</sup> By the time that Lloyd George appeared at Swindon, the Land Campaign was at the forefront of political debate and sales of the *Land Report* had risen sharply. With W. H. Smith carrying the report on its bookstalls, the Conservatives struggled to find an effective counter. Employing a suitably sporting simile, an internal party memorandum recorded how 'our own men are already going in all directions like foxes in a cornfield'.<sup>76</sup>

## The 'Mangold's Champion': Lloyd George, the Game Laws and the campaign for rural land reform in Edwardian England

Even the threat of major unrest had now to compete for attention. Likening Lloyd George to the Artful Dodger, Lord Newton observed tetchily that 'to judge from what appears in the press, it would almost seem that the question of whether pheasants eat mangolds or not is more important than the possibility of civil war in Ireland'.<sup>77</sup>

Having successfully defended the government's land policy at the Oxford Union on 21 November, Lloyd George was on excellent form when he took to the stage at the Holloway Empire at the end of the month. Although the speech was mainly focused on the Urban Land Problem, the game issue was referenced at several points. Unfairly dismissing Conservative proposals for reform as little more than the 'landlord must not be meddled with', and revelling in his own hyperbole, Lloyd George gleefully described the 'pagan thralldom that stifles liberty in our villages.' An appreciative audience went on to learn how in the depths of the English countryside the 'squire is god; the parson, the agent, the gamekeeper – they are his priests. The pheasant, the hares – they are the sacred birds and beasts of the tabernacle. The game laws – they are the ark of the covenant'.<sup>78</sup>

Judged by some to be his best effort since Limehouse, the speech was followed by a well-timed letter to the prime minister. On 5 December he told Asquith of the enthusiastic reception the government's proposals were getting 'from every part of England' and that according to the *Manchester Guardian's* editor, C. P. Scott, they had also 'given great satisfaction to the middle classes'.<sup>79</sup> At a National Liberal Club dinner a few days later – an event occasioned by the establishment of the Central Land and Housing Council (CLHC), the organisation now tasked with the promotion of land reform – Lloyd George reflected that over recent months his primary role had been to act as a 'sort of scout', locating the 'enemy' and drawing its fire, a phrase that was readily seized on by *Punch* (Fig. 8).<sup>80</sup>

But he had been much more than this. The public face of his party's last great reforming drive before the First World War, he was also its major creative force and chief attraction. More than two months after his appearance at Holloway, his mockery of the 'sacred' game laws and his claims about pheasants were topics for debate in the reopened parliament as Conservatives tried unsuccessfully to turn the tables. While expert barristers like F. E. Smith could point to 'the repeated inaccuracies of the Chancellor of the Exchequer', on the street it was apparently a different story.<sup>81</sup> In the view of another critic: 'If one were to collect a hundred men in any street of any town and ask them to describe Mr Lloyd George's land proposals, ninety-five per cent of them would reply, "He talked of how pheasants eat mangolds"'.<sup>82</sup> And if he now had less to say in public on game, behind the scenes Lloyd George was continuing to gather examples of pheasants damaging crops and receiving delegations of farmers

angry at the 'operative restrictions' attaching to the Ground Game Act.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, the game preserving landlord was given a significant role in the CLHC's widening propaganda effort. Moving in to the fateful summer of 1914, for all that it was being shot at game was still very much a live issue.

### Conclusion

In February 1917 an order for the destruction of pheasants was issued by one of Lloyd George's first appointments as prime minister, the Liberal peer and founder of International Stores, Lord Devonport.<sup>84</sup> Formalised as Regulation 2R of the Defence of the Realm Act, the order allowed for the killing of pheasants beyond the close season and, more importantly, by tenant farmers whose crops were at risk of being damaged.<sup>85</sup> With agricultural production at an absolute premium, there was little objection from game preservers. But the war that gave Lloyd George his victory over pheasants also meant that the vote-winning appeal of the Land Campaign was never tested.

THE DAILY GRAPHIC, MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1913.



**THE COUNTER ATTACK.**  
In sporting circles it is believed that pheasants will, in view of the Chancellor's rude remarks, abandon the mangold-wurzel habit in favour of golf balls.



Mr. Lloyd George on Bird Pests.

**PROTECTION**  
**CORVUSINE D.G.**

The wonderful non-poisonous  
Liquid Seed Dressing

The Chancellor  
of the Exchequer  
draws your attention  
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Qrs.	Wheat, Oats, Rye, Barley, Malt, Buckwheat, etc.	Wheat, Oats, Rye, Barley, Malt, Buckwheat, etc.	Wheat, Oats, Rye, Barley, Malt, Buckwheat, etc.	Wheat, Oats, Rye, Barley, Malt, Buckwheat, etc.	Wheat, Oats, Rye, Barley, Malt, Buckwheat, etc.	Wheat, Oats, Rye, Barley, Malt, Buckwheat, etc.
100 lbs.	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6
50 lbs.	8d	8d	8d	8d	8d	8d
25 lbs.	4d	4d	4d	4d	4d	4d
10 lbs.	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6



**CORVUSINE D.G.**






Fig. 8: Lloyd George of 'Pheasant Patrol' reports to his scoutmaster (Asquith) on the progress of the campaign. Note the banner. *Punch*, 17 December 1913.

On the evidence available, however, historians of the Land Campaign have suggested that if the planned abolition of plural voting is also factored in, a gain of around twenty seats 'probably the absolute minimum' the Liberals could have expected from rural England at the election scheduled for 1915.<sup>86</sup>

On the basis of reports received by the CLHC, it would indeed appear that the Liberal package of rural reform was finding its mark – at least amongst those farmers and labourers who were not 'hopeless Tories'.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, a Conservative Party investigation into the 'effect of Lloyd George's propaganda' concluded in the spring of 1914 that the campaign was working well.<sup>88</sup> While, in the final analysis, the pledges relating to minimum wages and greater security of tenure were likely to have been the key determinants on voting behaviour, the commitment to reform the almost universally disliked game laws, and to make the game preserver more socially responsible, had an obvious attraction. In criticising one of John Bright's statements on the game laws in the mid-1860s, the *Saturday Review* nevertheless agreed that the issue provided 'a desirable opening for an attack upon landowners because preserving is really one of the weakest points in the character of their class.'<sup>89</sup> With much greater quantities of game now being preserved, and with more being said and written about it than ever, this point of weakness was increasingly visible.

The level of hostility that Lloyd George's comments on game generated in the Conservative and sporting press was not only fuelled by anger at

what was seen to be an ill-informed and overly personal attack, but by concern at their possible influence on wider opinion. Reflecting on his speeches at Bedford and Swindon, the *Gamekeeper* worried that the 'words of so eminent a speaker cannot fail to carry weight' and that it will be 'difficult to correct his misstatements.'<sup>90</sup> More specifically, the *Shooting Times* believed that it was among town-dwellers that Lloyd George's 'wild talk about game' was likely to do the most harm.<sup>91</sup>

Fusing personal belief with political opportunism, the perception of the game-preserving landlord as a regressive presence in the countryside whose selfish interests were entirely against modern needs and moralities was pushed to its maximum extent by Lloyd George. He spoke so fluently, and so frequently, on game partly because he enjoyed doing so, but also because he thought it made good politics. Following his highly publicised speeches in the autumn and winter of 1913–14, his enemies accused him of 'vote-catching' because that is what they feared he was doing. In what was likely to be a tight election, the game issue had little chance of alienating traditional supporters, but every chance of helping to rally possible waverers to the cause of Liberal reform. And almost as importantly for Lloyd George, by focusing on the unreformed Edwardian countryside, and the unpalatable amounts of vegetable-eating game that roamed it, he also reasserted himself as the best political show around.

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## Elections and party organisation

Ian Cawood examines the emergence and impact of the Birmingham Liberal 'caucus'

# Birmingham, the 'Caucus' and



Election hustings in the 1860s

'I've got it,' said he with a face full of glee,  
'Dame Virtue shall no longer baulk us;'  
Then with a jubilant cry, he winked his left eye,  
Gave a laugh and invented – the caucus!

**I**N THE NATIONAL historiography of the Victorian Liberal Party, Birmingham holds an ambiguous position. On the one hand, it pioneered a new approach to political organisation and electioneering, most spectacularly in the 1868 general election which saw all three of the seats for the city won for the Liberals, thanks to the work of the Birmingham Liberal Association (BLA). On the other hand, the BLA later proved to be a troublesome ally for Gladstone

and its founders, as Andrew Reekes has recently described.<sup>2</sup> And, in some ways, its actions were manipulative of the electorate and not fully representative of the political complexion of the city. If the BLA has been considered to be the prototype of modern political organisation, owing to its success in 1868, it has nevertheless been suggested by some commentators this was not entirely beneficial for the development of participative democratic politics in Britain nor for the long-term survival of the Liberal Party.<sup>3</sup>

Although the association was seen by Disraeli as an example of the growing 'Americanisation' of the English political system,<sup>4</sup> it was, in fact, a natural development of the progressive movement

# and the 1868 general election

in Birmingham.<sup>5</sup> The BLA arose primarily out of the close relationship between the Nonconformist churches in Birmingham. These had been fired with a spirit of public service by the radical preacher, George Dawson, who preached at the Church of the Saviour in Edward Street. Dawson wished to see the energy and the professionalism of the Birmingham middle classes, hitherto dedicated to making money for themselves, turned instead towards the benefiting of the whole community through the provision of cultural, social and economic 'improvement'.<sup>6</sup> As he famously put it, 'a great town exists to discharge towards the people of that town the duties that a great nation exists to discharge towards the people of that nation.'<sup>7</sup> Dawson saw the enemies of his vast ambitions for the 'civic gospel' in the dominant 'economist' group on Birmingham council, who famously met in the Woodman pub, in Easy Row near the canal wharf, to save the expense of erecting a proper Council House.<sup>8</sup> In 1861, he, together with like-minded progressives, such as the architects J. H. Chamberlain and William Harris, and the scholars Samuel Timmons and G. J. Johnson, founded the *Town Crier*, a satirical periodical which mercilessly lambasted the short-sightedness of the 'economists' who oversaw appalling rates of infant mortality due to the lack of adequate public health provision.<sup>9</sup> In their place, the *Town Crier* supported Thomas Avery who, although cautious in expenditure, began to tackle the town's sewage problem, in the first stirrings of the 'civic gospel'.<sup>10</sup> In Dawson's congregation were not only figures such as J. T. Bunce and Jesse Collings, who came to dominate Birmingham politics in the 1870s and thereafter, but also Harris, who has become known as the 'father of the caucus'.<sup>11</sup> Harris himself had been associated with Liberal politics since his support for nationalist causes in Hungary and Italy in 1848 and was at forefront of Liberal activity in the 1860s owing to his presidency of the Birmingham and Edgbaston Debating Society, where young professional and businessmen of all religious denominations such as George Dixon and Joseph Chamberlain, discussed how to improve their adopted town.<sup>12</sup> All

three were subsequently involved in the campaign for educational reform that would eventually produce the National Education League.<sup>13</sup>

Harris, the education reformer, George Dixon and the proprietor of the sympathetic *Birmingham Daily Post*, John Jaffray, founded the BLA in February 1865, shortly before Lord Palmerston called what was expected to be his last general election. The circular announcing the initial meeting noted that it was 'a matter of regret that the Liberal Party in Birmingham has had no recognised organisation by which its opinions can be expressed and its interests promoted.'<sup>14</sup> The first meetings of the BLA took place on 17 February in a committee room of the Birmingham town hall with a committee of twenty one members, Philip Muntz as president and Dixon as honorary secretary.<sup>15</sup> The title 'Liberal Association' was deliberately chosen instead of an alternative title to avoid alarming moderates who would be worried about a title containing words such as 'Radical' or 'Reform'.<sup>16</sup> The purposes of the new association were given as follows:

To maintain the Liberal representation of the borough.

To assist in obtaining the return of Liberal members for the county.

To promote the adoption of Liberal principles in the Government of the country.<sup>17</sup>

The BLA was outwardly, therefore, a more centrist organisation, appealing to respectable Birmingham progressives, but it masked a very radical agenda of municipal reform and support for expansion of the parliamentary franchise.

The association was notably ineffective at first, struggling to operate within the restricted franchise imposed in 1832. In July 1865, George Muntz was defeated in the North Warwickshire constituency in the general election. In response the BLA declared that it would not disband and would become a permanent organisation determined to drive forward a more radical agenda in Birmingham and Warwickshire's Liberal politics.<sup>18</sup> It funded the establishment

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## Birmingham, the 'Caucus' and the 1868 general election

of a Birmingham branch of the radical Reform League in November 1865 with the support of local trade unions.<sup>19</sup> One of the co-founders of the association, James Baldwin, was appointed as first president of the Midlands 'department' of the league. The 'department' was inaugurated with a meeting in Birmingham on 4 July 1866 with a march of the trades unions from the Bull Ring to the town hall.<sup>20</sup> Shortly afterwards, an enormous meeting was held at Brook Fields, near Icknield Street, attended by around 200,000 supporters of reform.<sup>21</sup> This was, in many ways, a return to the tactics of Thomas Attwood's Birmingham Political Union which had forged an alliance between the town's workers and businessmen in 1830 and which had held enormous meetings in May 1832 on New Hall hill, just outside the town centre, as a scarcely concealed threat of potential disorder if their demands for political reform were not met. The serious 'Murphy Riots' of late June 1867, the last anti-Catholic riots in nineteenth century Birmingham, added to the sense of tension, though the swift suppression of these by George Dixon, now Birmingham's mayor, did no harm for the reputation of the Liberals among the respectable of Birmingham.<sup>22</sup>

The immediate target of the BLA and the Reform League was the extension of the franchise, following the death of Lord Palmerston and the rise of the more reform-minded William Gladstone. That the leading advocate of 'the widest possible suffrage', John Bright, was one of the MPs for Birmingham, helped to focus demands for Reform in the city.<sup>23</sup> The BLA and the Reform League also agreed that the number of MPs representing Birmingham should be increased, to match the growth of the city in nineteenth century. They were aided by an increase in unemployment and a rise in interest rates (consequent on a stock market crash in May 1866) which encouraged the political mobilisation of the skilled workers.<sup>24</sup> Between summer 1866 and 1867 the Reform League held nearly 600 public meetings in the Midlands and signed up nearly 20,000 new members.<sup>25</sup> At this point, the BLA was virtually in abeyance, with only twenty-eight people attending the association's annual meeting according to the memory of one eyewitness.<sup>26</sup> The reward was not merely the passing of the Second Reform Act which trebled the electorate (mainly in urban areas), but also the redistribution of seats, which allocated an additional, third constituency to Birmingham (as was also the case in Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester). The BLA claimed the credit for this latter achievement, and as one commentator has claimed, it 'made Liberalism more than ever the uncontested political creed of the working classes.'<sup>27</sup> Another of the leading Nonconformist Liberal leaders, R. W. Dale, gave a lecture, entitled 'The Politics of the Future', in which he repudiated the arguments of those who had prophesied social upheaval as a result of the

increase in the electorate, largely as a result of the disturbances in Hyde Park in July 1866.<sup>28</sup>

I ask with whom does the blame lie of exposing us to this terrible danger – with those who endeavoured to keep the franchise from the most numerous class of the community, and so withheld from them the only weapon of self-defence, which is at once harmless and effective, or with me, for pointing out what would be the inevitable effect of that unjust and perilous policy in times of great popular excitement? With whom does the blame lie? With me, for maintaining that it is infinitely safer that the great masses of our countrymen should defend their rights by constitutional means than by the exercise of physical force, or with those who denied the people the suffrage, and were willing, if dark and calamitous times should come, to encounter the terrible risk of conspiracy and rebellion?<sup>29</sup>

Dale, and the other leaders of what Leighton terms the 'new Radicals', who went on to give speeches in the weeks that followed, focused on one crucial social issue to bring the newly enfranchised into the national polity – the development of the state provision of education.<sup>30</sup> The state had funded both Anglican and Nonconformist schools since 1833 (which was called the 'voluntary system'), but they had not kept pace with the expansion of the population, nor had they acknowledged that half the population never attended church. In Birmingham, the leading progressives founded the Birmingham Education Society in March 1867 to campaign for greater popular access to education and a reduction in church influence in schools. In a report in 1868, the society found that, although there had been significant improvements in provision in the town, 13,000 children still received no schooling whatsoever and that standards of attainment were fairly low.<sup>31</sup> George Dixon threw himself into promoting the cause of secular, free elementary education and is widely seen as the man who first transformed the aspirations of George Dawson into tangible policies and invigorated the Liberals and Nonconformists in Birmingham into political action.<sup>32</sup>

As the Birmingham Reform League had now fulfilled its function, it was swiftly disbanded, and the BLA took centre stage as Disraeli called an election in 1868 hoping to capitalise on the goodwill from the majority of voters whom his party had enfranchised. Dixon had been elected to parliament in a by-election in July 1867 and Harris had succeeded him as secretary of the BLA. Harris, equally inspired by the radicalism of Dawson and Dale as Dixon, was determined that three Liberal candidates should win the three Birmingham seats and so had to turn its attention towards the marshalling of the Liberal vote. As Joseph Chamberlain (who played a very minor role in the work of the BLA in 1868) later wrote:

**Harris, equally inspired by the radicalism of Dawson and Dale as Dixon, was determined that three Liberal candidates should win the three Birmingham seats and so had to turn its attention towards the marshalling of the Liberal vote.**



It is not only desirable but absolutely necessary that the whole of the party should be taken into its counsels and that all its members should share in its control and management. It is no longer safe to attempt to secure the representation of a great constituency for the nominee of a few gentlemen sitting in private committee, and basing their claims to dictate the choice of the electors on the fact that they have been willing to subscribe something towards the expenses. The working class, who cannot contribute pecuniarily though they are often ready to sacrifice a more than proportionate amount of time and labour, are now the majority in most borough constituencies, and no candidate and no policy has a chance of success unless their good will and active support can be first secured.<sup>33</sup>

Under the so-called 'minority clause' of the reformed political system, although Birmingham now had three MPs, the electors still had only two votes each and so there was a danger that all the Liberal voters would cast their ballot for the most popular candidate (Bright) and thus reduce the chances of enough votes being cast for each of the two remaining candidates (Dixon and Philip Muntz) to prevent the Conservatives from being able to elect one of their candidates (Sampson Lloyd or Sebastian Evans). Harris therefore re-organised the BLA into a hierarchy of committees, led by the management committee (the 'Committee of Ten'), with an executive and a general committee ('the four hundred') beneath it and permanent ward committees, of twenty-four members each, to direct electors in each ward to vote for a particular combinations of candidates. As the later constitution of the BLA revealingly noted, 'mere adherence to the objects and organisations of the [BLA]' was sufficient for membership of the ward committee.<sup>34</sup> Ward committees had been established for the purpose of fighting a forthcoming election in Birmingham since 1841, but these had been dissolved as soon as the election was over.<sup>35</sup>

Harris divided Birmingham into three areas. In area A, Liberal voters were instructed to vote for Bright and Dixon; in area B they were told to vote for Bright and Muntz. In the most challenging area C, voters would be directed not to vote for Bright, the 'People's Tribune', but for Dixon and Muntz.<sup>36</sup> As Harris put it, 'in this way unity would be preserved and the danger of a Tory being elected in consequence of difference among the Liberals would be averted.'<sup>37</sup> While national Liberal organs such as the *Daily News* predicted a sorry failure, Birmingham's Liberals were confident of success and a mourning card was circulated announcing the burial of 'Old Toryism' on polling day (17 November) and ironically lamenting:

A man that is born a Tory has but a short time to live and is full of humbug; he springeth up like

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a fungus and withereth like a cauliflower; and is seen no more; in the midst of life, we hope he meets his death.<sup>38</sup>

Conservatism in Birmingham had not been dominant since in the middle years of the century and had become locally identified with the 'economist' grouping on the town's council who oversaw the decline from the high standards of housing, health provision and sanitation in the town which had preserved Birmingham from the ravages of cholera in 1832.<sup>39</sup> While it was true that a substantial section of the local upper middle classes, particularly Anglican manufacturers and lawyers, had remained Conservative, this class was now out-numbered in the electorate by the newly enfranchised urban rate-payers. Socially aloof from the growing ranks of Nonconformity in the town and preferring to look to the neighbouring gentry of Warwickshire and Staffordshire for social alliances, this local elite had become increasingly removed from the practical concerns of Birmingham's citizens, as their inadequate responses to the calls for educational reform demonstrated. They claimed popular support for the causes of Church and Queen but in 1867 the Working Men's Liberal-Conservative Association could only claim 2,000 members.<sup>40</sup>

The main battle ground between Liberals and Conservatives in terms of policy in 1868, was on the question of the Irish church, which Gladstone had promised to disestablish in order to pacify Ireland. The Conservative candidates were both strong supporters of antidisestablishmentarianism. Sampson Lloyd, in an attempt to appeal to the anti-Catholic prejudices of the Nonconformist Birmingham voter, declared in his election address that Gladstone's proposed Irish Church Bill would lead 'to a great increase in the political power of the hierarchy and established in that country by the Court of Rome.'<sup>41</sup> The two sides produced short-lived, 'wretchedly executed' satirical journals for the duration of the contest – the Liberals printing *Toby* and the Conservatives, *The Third Member*.<sup>42</sup> A meeting at the town hall with Dixon and both putative Conservative candidates present on 22 April was disrupted when physical violence broke out and both Conservative candidates were howled down.<sup>43</sup> It was normal for violence to break out at the hustings; for example it was alleged that the BLA had hired thugs to intimidate Lloyd when he had stood against Dixon in the 1867 by-election.<sup>44</sup> But it was unusual for violence to occur in the confines of as august a building as the town hall and must serve as an indication of the passions provoked by the contest.

It is striking how much Gladstone's name was already being used as a talisman by the 'new Radicals'. In a speech in late October, Muntz praised Gladstone as 'the finest financier of the age', while a Jewish member of the audience gave the Liberal leader sole credit for granting civil rights to those

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of his faith. The Conservatives were forced to resort to defamation to tarnish his obvious popularity, accusing Gladstone of being 'in league with the Church of Rome to fight her battles.'<sup>35</sup> On 16 November, at the hustings outside the town hall, nominations took place. Those for Dixon and Muntz stressed that both were 'supporters of Mr Gladstone' and that for Bright described him as 'the real great champion of the working classes of this country.' By contrast, the nominators for Evans or Lloyd warned of 'the shackles of Rome, the thumb-screw and the rack.' The mayor of Birmingham, Alderman Henry Holland, called for a show of hands and declared the three Liberals elected. Lloyd and Evans demanded a poll to be held (as was their right) and this was held at the same site on the following day, with the *Birmingham Daily Post* confidently predicting that 'today we are going to win a great victory at the poll.'<sup>36</sup> Voters declared their votes verbally to an election clerk who recorded these in a poll book for the last time in a general election, prior to the introduction of the secret ballot in 1872. The Mayor was given the poll books the day after and, after an hour of public arithmetic, he declared the following results:

Dixon	15,098
Muntz	14,614
Bright	14,601
Lloyd	8,700
Evans	7,061

John Skirrow Wright, president of the BLA, called for 'ringing and hearty cheers for Bright, Dixon, Muntz and for Gladstone' and then 'the immense and orderly assembly dispersed.'<sup>37</sup>

The campaign of the BLA had proved staggeringly successful as there was less than 500 votes' difference between the first and the third Liberal candidates. As Philip Muntz commented after hearing the declaration, 'had it not been for the magnificent organisation of our friends ... we had been in the same position as our friends in Manchester, where for want of organisation, they have lost a vote which ought to have been saved.'<sup>38</sup> All three Birmingham Liberals had secured enormous majorities and advice about electioneering was instantly requested by Liberals in many other constituencies.<sup>39</sup> In recognition of his achievement, Harris was presented with a cheque for £240 (worth well over £25,000 today) by Skirrow Wright in May 1869.<sup>40</sup> Gladstone won the election with a majority of 107, the largest since 1832, but even he recognised the significance of Birmingham's achievement. Bright was offered a cabinet position and accepted the post of president of the Board of Trade – Birmingham's first cabinet minister.<sup>41</sup> The 'new Radicals' were not entirely convinced that Bright sympathised with the Civic Gospel and Harris led a deputation in autumn 1869 to persuade Joseph Chamberlain to stand for election to the town council, convinced that

he combined the right political views and ability to replace Bright as the leader of Birmingham's Liberals.<sup>42</sup>

In response to this stinging defeat, the Conservatives attempted to improve their own organisation after 1868 and more particularly after 1874,<sup>43</sup> but the BLA went on to enjoy a monopoly of political power in Birmingham with the establishment of the National Education League in 1869 and Joseph Chamberlain's election as mayor of Birmingham in 1873. In the same year Harris stepped down as secretary following a minor stroke and was replaced by the young Francis Schnadhorst. The caucus was the means whereby positive, reforming local government was achieved, particularly during the period of Chamberlain's mayoralty from 1873 to 1876. In 1877 the BLA hosted a conference of ninety-five Liberal associations and Harris encouraged them to use the 'caucus' system to give voice to the popular mood over issues such as the 'Bulgarian horrors' then dominating the news. Harris was appointed as chairman of the Central Committee of a newly formed National Liberal Federation (NLF), with Chamberlain as president and Schnadhorst as secretary. As Robert Self has perceptively noted, 'although the ostensibly representative structure always concealed a high level of oligarchical control, its claim to legitimacy permitted the NLF to claim the right to control the destiny of the Liberal party.'<sup>44</sup> Hugh Cunningham disagrees that the NLF was ever that powerful, however, as Hartington, one of those Whigs whom Chamberlain had hoped to unseat from their position at the heart of British Liberalism came to respect the services that the NLF could provide, especially after the scale of the Liberals' election victory in 1880 became clear.<sup>45</sup>

It is true that the organisation of the BLA moved forward the 'improvement' of Birmingham which began spectacularly under Chamberlain's three-year mayoralty and continued to pursue 'gas and water socialism' under successive Liberal mayors. It also served as the springboard for Chamberlain's rapid ascent into national politics, with him becoming president of the Board of Trade only four years after his election as an MP in 1876. But its legacy is mixed, even for its progenitors. Bright remained Member of Parliament for Birmingham until his death in 1889, but he had little love for the new forms of political organisation which his thrusting young colleague had perfected. Dixon was forced out his seat in parliament by the ambitious Chamberlain in 1876.<sup>46</sup> Muntz, who had unwisely refused to give up his political independence to Chamberlain, unwittingly sealed his fate when he beat Chamberlain to second place in the 1880 election and he too was forced out in 1885 to make way for those more loyal to the 'Boss'.<sup>47</sup> After successfully capturing the council, the BLA became increasingly 'dictatorial and tyrannical', in the opinion of W. J. Davis, the leader of the Brassworkers'

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Union.<sup>58</sup> It refused to listen to the Labour Representative League's concern that working men were not being nominated as candidates for election, which led Davis to set up the Birmingham Labour Association. The BLA backed down and Schnadhorst agreed to let a few Labour figures such as Davis to stand as candidates for the school board or the town council without opposition from the BLA.<sup>59</sup>

Gladstone, in the midst of his campaign against 'Bulgarian atrocities' came to Birmingham in 1877 to speak at the inauguration of the NLF, but pointedly refused to do more than endorse it, having been warned by Granville of Chamberlain's ambitions.<sup>60</sup> He had been annoyed by the National Education League's campaign against Forster's 1870 Education Act and by Chamberlain's critical article, 'The Liberal Party and its Leaders'.<sup>61</sup> He was proved correct to be suspicious when the NLF was used by Chamberlain to promote his 'unauthorised programme' in the 1885 general election. Chamberlain's increased focus on his national career also proved disastrous to Harris and Schnadhorst, who refused to break with Gladstone, when the Birmingham Liberal MPs opposed his Irish Home Rule Bill in 1886. Schnadhorst made sure that the BLA (and the NLF) stayed loyal to the GOM but neither he nor Harris were able to advance their political careers significantly thereafter.<sup>62</sup> Chamberlain meanwhile was forced to found the Birmingham Liberal Unionist Association and to rebuild his caucus from the ground up.<sup>63</sup> He consequently became increasingly dependent on Conservative support to further his career, the contradictions of which position came near to forcing his retirement over the Leamington Spa candidature dispute in 1895.<sup>64</sup>

The National Liberal Federation grew in power and influence, however, moving to Westminster in 1886 and then establishing the Liberal Publications Department in the following year.<sup>65</sup> As the NLF stayed loyal to Gladstone, the new president, Robert Spence Watson, demanded a price from the leader in 1891 – the 'Newcastle Programme', which presented the party with a list of demands for radical reforms from the party's grassroots.<sup>66</sup> The Federation finally reached its apogee under the presidency of Augustine Birrell from 1902, who effectively coordinated the defence of the workers' 'cheap loaf' in the face of Chamberlain's sudden conversion to the cause of Tariff Reform.<sup>67</sup> In many ways, the NLF can be credited for the scale of the Liberal landslide, even if, ironically, it must thank Chamberlain for dividing both of the Unionist parties in one maldroit manoeuvre and handing the Liberals a cause on which they could reunite.

Political historians such as Jon Lawrence and James Vernon have worried that the political apparatus created by Harris and inherited by Chamberlain and then expanded nationally into the NLF amounted to a form of 'coercion'

whereby the representative nature of mass politics was subverted by powerful elite groups and used to silence minority voices.<sup>68</sup> In her study of the political culture of Victorian Birmingham, Anne Rodrick notes that 'the Liberal caucus closed off many avenues for service to those beyond the pale of the ruling party', as can be witnessed by the bitter attacks on the BLA by the anonymous authors of *The Dart* magazine after 1879 when it was bought out by a consortium of leading Birmingham Conservatives.<sup>69</sup> Lord Randolph Churchill described the caucus system of which the BLA was the central component as 'Tsarist despotism ... dispensing patronage to maintain 25,000 servants and to employ none but the blindly docile as chinovniks'.<sup>70</sup> This was popularly referred to as 'vote as you are told' (which was the verbatim message in the *Birmingham Daily Post* on the day of the 1868 poll).<sup>71</sup> Harris defended the scheme, however, on the basis that a political organisation 'should not only be a reflex of popular opinion, but should be so manifestly a reflex of that opinion that none could doubt it'.<sup>72</sup> As he put it in his *History of the Radical Party in Parliament*, it was 'in the borough constituencies where alone the Radical feelings of the People can obtain expression' and so it was his responsibility to maximise the political representation of that feeling, both to combat the Conservatives and also to challenge the Whig influence on the Liberal party itself.<sup>73</sup> Chamberlain himself offered a more typically vigorous rebuttal of the charge of tyrannical direction, though in private he admitted that he had 'almost despotic authority' over Birmingham, thanks to the caucus.<sup>74</sup> Asa Briggs' conclusion is that the BLA was in fact a form of 'democratic centralism' in which twenty members could demand a meeting of the general committee (which in time grew to number 2,000) which had considerable influence over the choice of candidates. He argues that in spite of the BLA's subsequent condemnation by commentators and historians, the association contributed significantly to the public interest in politics and the revival of local pride which manifested itself in support for ambitious spending plans and conspicuous philanthropy in Birmingham in the 1870s.<sup>75</sup> Given the considerable advantage in wealth, social connections, cultural authority and deference that both the Tories and the Whigs enjoyed even in Birmingham, it is possible to understand that the BLA, whilst not altogether democratic, was a necessary evil, if vested interests and entrenched institutional inertia in municipal politics was to be overturned. Moreover, as the 'minority clause' had been designed by a Tory government to increase Conservative representation in borough seats, it was beholden on the 'new Radicals' to use any means available to strike back at this blatant electoral manipulation with, in Harris' own words, 'the nicest calculation and the utmost subordination ... to carry the three Liberals'.<sup>76</sup>

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- 1 *The Dart*, 24 Apr. 1880.
- 2 A. Reekes, *The Birmingham Political Machine: Winning Elections for Joseph Chamberlain* (Aldershot, 2018). Reekes pays little attention to the 1868 election, however.
- 3 See for example, M. Ostrogorsky, *Democracy and the Organisation of Political Parties* (New York, 1902), pp. 161–78; J. Hanham, *Elections and Party Management* (London, 1959); J. Owen, *Labour and the Caucus: Working-class radicalism and organised Liberalism in England, 1868–1888* (Liverpool, 2014); K. Rix, *Parties, Agents and Electoral Culture in England, 1880–1910* (Woodbridge, 2016). Asa Briggs regards it as one of the key elements of a 'civic renaissance' in Birmingham, however: A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London, 1963), p. 197, *passim*.
- 4 G. E. Buckle, *Life of Benjamin Disraeli*, vi (London, 1920), p. 535.
- 5 F. H. Herrick, 'The Origins of the National Liberal Federation', *Journal of Modern History*, 17 (1945), pp. 116–29.
- 6 W. Wilson, *The Life of George Dawson* (Birmingham, 1905), pp. 148–52.
- 7 G. Dawson, Inaugural Address at the Opening of the Free Reference Library, 26 October 1866 (Birmingham, 1866), p. 23.
- 8 D. Leighton, 'Municipal Progress, Democracy and Radical Identity in Birmingham, 1838–1886', *Midland History*, 25:1 (2000), p. 129.
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- 10 E. Hopkins, *Birmingham: The Making of the Second City, 1850–1939* (Stroud, 2001), pp. 51–2.
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- 12 P. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics* (New Haven and London, 1994), pp. 15–6.
- 13 *Birmingham Gazette*, 27 Mar. 1911.
- 14 As recalled by Francis Schnadhorst, in a speech in Birmingham twenty years later. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 Mar. 1885.
- 15 R. K. Dent, *Old and New Birmingham: A History of the Town and its People*, iii (Birmingham, 1879), p. 542.
- 16 'Radical Reformers Association' was the rejected alternative title.
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- 18 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 Aug. 1865.
- 19 *Birmingham Journal*, 25 Nov. 1865, 18 Aug. 1866.
- 20 *Birmingham Journal*, 7 July 1866.
- 21 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 Aug. 1866.
- 22 V. Bird, *Portrait of Birmingham* (London, 1970), p. 102.
- 23 B. Cash, *John Bright: Statesman, Orator, Agitator* (London, 2011), pp. 118–9.
- 24 A. Briggs, *Age of Improvement*, p. 504.
- 25 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 6 Aug. 1867.
- 26 Francis Schnadhorst, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 25 Mar. 1885.
- 27 T. E. Tholfsen, 'The Origins of the Birmingham Caucus', *Historical Journal*, 2:2 (1959), p. 183.
- 28 *Manchester Guardian*, 26 July 1866.
- 29 R. W. Dale, *The Politics of the Future: A Lecture to the New Electors, delivered to the Town Hall, Birmingham on Tuesday evening, 19 November 1867* (Birmingham, 1867), p. 6.
- 30 Leighton, 'Municipal Progress, Democracy and Radical Identity', p. 116.
- 31 Birmingham Education Society, First Annual Report, 31 March 1868 (Birmingham, 1868).
- 32 J. Dixon, *Out of Birmingham: George Dixon (1820–1898): 'Father of Free Education'* (Studley, 2013).
- 33 J. L. Garvin, *Life of Joseph Chamberlain*, i (London, 1932), p. 85.
- 34 1875 Constitution of the BLA, quoted in E. P. Hennock, 'Fit and Proper Persons': *Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-century Urban Government* (London, 1973), p. 133.
- 35 *Aris' Birmingham Gazette*, 21 June 1841.
- 36 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 9 July 1868; 22 July 1868; 11 Aug. 1868; *Birmingham Journal*, 1 Aug. 1868.
- 37 Quoted in J. A. Langford, *Modern Birmingham and its Institutions: A Chronicle of Local Events from 1841 to 1871*, ii (Birmingham, 1877), p. 364.
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- 39 I. Cawood and C. Upton, "'Divine Providence'?: Birmingham and the 1832 Cholera Epidemic' *Journal of Urban History*, 39:6 (2013), pp. 1106–24.
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- 43 *Birmingham Daily Post*, 23 Apr. 1868.
- 44 R. Ward, *City-state and Nation: Birmingham's Political History 1830–1940* (Chichester, 2005), p. 64.
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# Report

## The Liberal Party, health policy and the origins of the NHS

Fringe meeting at Liberal Democrat conference, Bournemouth, 15 September 2019, with Lord Morgan and Chris Renwick; chair Baroness Judith Jolly  
Report by **David Cloke**

**T**HE CHAIR OF the meeting, Baroness Judith Jolly opened the proceedings by recalling that, during the seventieth anniversary of the NHS in 2018, she had to remind her Labour colleagues of the role of the Liberal Party in its birth. She argued that Beveridge's evils of poverty, ignorance, squalor and idleness still resonated today, as had been reflected in a debate that very morning.

Taking the speakers in reverse order so we move from the general to the particular, Chris Renwick gave a very crowd-pleasing speech without any loss of sincerity in his arguments. His aim was to try and escape 'socialist nostalgia' regarding the birth of the NHS: to put the events of 1945–8 into context and to understand why it happened and the form it took. To do that, he believed that it was important to understand the institutions of the previous 100 to 150 years. He also argued that Liberals and Liberalism were most important to achieving that understanding of the welfare state, except for the NHS.

Renwick started by asking where the NHS fitted into the wider welfare state. He noted that Beveridge mentioned health, but not in detail, though he appeared to assume that action would be taken on the issue. We now seem to believe that the way the NHS was eventually created was the only way, however Renwick argued that there were other proposals worth considering. These were part of a coherent story from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To understand and reconnect with that, it was important to understand the emergence of 'New Liberalism'.

Renwick argued that 'New Liberalism' emerged out of the failings of classical Liberalism. In the 1830s the pure form of Liberalism had been tried out with the reform of the Poor Laws. Those

reforms declared that if an individual wanted poor relief it had to be set at less than the earnings of the poorest paid person. Essentially this didn't work and ultimately proved to be more expensive than the system it had been designed to replace. New Liberalism, Renwick argued, emerged from an attempt to understand how classical liberal solutions had failed.

New Liberalism still believed in the freedom of the individual, they just argued that things needed to be organised differently. This led, for example, to the reform of educational provision.

Health had been identified early on as factor that made people more eligible for support. In trying to understand why more people were claiming poor relief, Edwin Chadwick went out into the country to find out. His conclusion was that more people were claiming because they were ill – and they were ill because of their environment and food. This led to the rise of the sanitary movement and ultimately to slum clearance programmes. The argument being that spending money of these things meant that there would be savings elsewhere. Renwick noted that housing was part of the mission of the post First World War Ministry of Health, and that it introduced legislation for free school meals.

Nonetheless, Renwick acknowledged that there were tensions in these developments: between the individual and the state and between local and national government. The New Liberal thinker Hobhouse argued that there were problems that only the state can solve but, conversely, other problems that it shouldn't try to solve: more local and smaller organisations being better placed to do so. Interestingly, Poor Law Reform had led to mass centralisation and the loss of local knowledge.

In the New Liberal period two kinds of legislation therefore emerged. First,

that on coordinating large-scale problems and, second, devolving responsibility to local authorities, which importantly included devolving tax-raising powers.

An example of the former was the 1911 National Insurance Act which provided access to sick pay, a panel doctor and a maternity system. What the Act did not cover was access to hospitals and why not, Renwick asked? He proposed that it was because there was a whole range of mutual schemes that provided access to hospital care and that such schemes were an important part of the identity of the Labour movement. He also noted that there were stories of local successes with the system being responsive to the needs of the local workforce. Hospitals also responded to the increased prevalence of road traffic accidents and other developments. The issue was identifying good practice and making it standard. One of the attractions of the NHS was the simplicity of the idea and the belief that it could meet the aim of standardising care. Renwick, however, questioned whether it had achieved that. He also noted that the NHS picks up problems caused by failings elsewhere. Throwing money at the NHS, therefore, won't solve those underlying problems.

Lord Morgan's address was on Christopher Addison, who, he argued, was a major pioneer of the welfare state and who bridged the new Liberals and the post-war Labour government. Indeed, he argued that he was the most important Liberal in this area as well as being the most important and distinguished doctor in the House of Commons, having been professor of anatomy in Sheffield.

Addison moved into politics in the mid-1900s and in 1907 was adopted as the Liberal candidate for Hoxton and Shoreditch. He emerged as a major figure when he was introduced to Lloyd George by Masterman. Lloyd George was impressed by Addison and his expertise. He defended the National Insurance Bill in the House of Commons and was much attacked for it by the British Medical Association. The association was very hostile to national insurance/national health insurance, but despite that Addison proved to be an effective spokesman for both sides, challenging Lloyd George when he thought that the doctors had a point and helping the BMA regarding remuneration. Lloyd George went as far as allowing him to move an amendment against the government which was

## Meeting report: The Liberal Party, health policy and the origins of the NHS

carried. In Morgan's view Addison's role was not fully recognised.

Addison continued to collaborate with Lloyd George on welfare matters including on the 1914 budget and on further welfare reforms in preparation for the 1915 general election. The team of Masterman, Montague Isaacs and Addison were anxious that the election be fought on a radical programme including using the panels of health insurance as a basis for a national health service.

With the First World War, Addison went with Lloyd George to the Ministry of Munitions and then followed him in that post when Lloyd George became prime minister. Indeed, during the events of December 1916 Addison was regarded as the kingmaker.

As Minister of Munitions, Addison was concerned about the needs of the workers, including women workers. He was able to develop his thinking further as Minister of Reconstruction from 1917. The aim of the post was to be forward thinking, with health as a particular priority. He then became the first Minister of Health in 1919 and, whilst setting an important precedent, was not, in Morgan's view, as efficient as he could have been. He had to deal with a range of competing interests, the Conservatives were very obstructive (notably William Hayes Fisher) and the old Poor Law continued which itself caused obstructions and conflict.

Indeed, Morgan suggested that one of his more important contributions was in fact the creation of the Medical Research Council. He also noted that he made an important contribution to Welsh devolution through the establishment of the Welsh Board of Health which took over the work of the National Insurance panels. He also worked on issues like the training of nurses.

His main area of work, however, was housing. He was a great proponent of subsidised public housing and took it very seriously as a part of social policy. Unfortunately, in Morgan's view, the programme didn't go very well, with finances getting out of control and the government ending up subsidising the builders. Nonetheless, 210,000 publicly supported houses were built, the first marked by the planting of Addison's oak in the Sea Mills Estate in Bristol on 4 June. Overall the programme made a significant difference in a number of towns and cities including Swansea and Wrexham. For Morgan he was the



From left: Chris Renwick, Lord Morgan, Baroness Jolly

embodiment of the policy ideal of creating a land fit for heroes.

Despite all this achievement he broke with Lloyd George and subsequently joined the Labour Party. The reasons for this were not made clear: whether it was personal estrangement, a change in his views over time, or a practical belief that the Labour Party represented a better vehicle for his policy ambitions.

Whilst Addison served as Minister of Agriculture in Macdonald's second government, he was largely a secondary figure in the 1930s. He did, however, lead the attack on Macdonald on welfare grounds and was the only middle-class rebel against him in 1931, helping to remove him as Labour leader. After that he was active in the Socialist Medical Association, an important body in the creation of the NHS. He regained importance as the Lead of the House of Lords in the post-war Labour government. Indeed, Morgan noted that he was the only man to serve on both post-war governments.

In the cabinet debate of December 1945, he strongly supported Bevan against Morrison on the public ownership of hospitals, believing that it would lead to a broad improvement in standards. He then helped to steer the NHS Act through the House of Lords. He proved to be close enough to Bevan to be one of the ministers that tried to persuade him not to resign over health service charges.

In summing up, Morgan argued that Addison was a very important figure and

Liberals could be proud of his role. He was a modest man who told the truth. In a way it seems that Addison embodied the shift from a localised mutual insurance model of healthcare provision to a national state one.

With that in mind, one of the questions from the floor was the extent to which Liberal and Labour policy differed on the subject during the 1920s and 1930s. There seemed to be a consensus round the 1911 settlement which, as Renwick noted was rooted in Liberal ideas. He added that, practically, some saw the Labour Party as the route to achieving their policies rather than the Liberal Party. Morgan added the importance of 'war socialism' on changing attitudes.

Another questioner asked about the social determinants of health, and Chris Renwick argued that, in public health terms, behaviour was a key issue and was hard to change. The NHS did not recognise social determinants and so had no effect on them. He noted, as a neat rounding off of the discussion, that the annual health needs assessment in the Lansley reforms was in fact from the Liberal Democrat health minister, Paul Burstow.

*David Cloke is the Secretary of the Liberal Democrat History Group.*

# Reviews

## But how to win elsewhere?

Chris Rennard, *Winning Here – My Campaigning Life* (Biteback, 2018)

Review by **Michael Steed**

**T**HIS BOOK HAS many merits. It is written in a very personal style and is rich in insight into how political activism can take hold of a talented teenager, giving him (it usually is) a meaning in life and sometimes a rewarding career – but often at a cost. For Chris Rennard, reward was a life peerage at a remarkably young age; the cost clearly included his health.

That insight makes it a valuable record of the sort of political activism and the specific methods of communication peculiar to an era in western democratic politics, from roughly the 1960s to the 1990s. Before that, politics (especially the political party) was too hierarchically structured and political messaging too linked to old printing technology for someone like Chris to have moved in and upwards so fast. By the beginning of the present century, political communication was succumbing to the digital revolution; how Lord Rennard operated in his time seems now to be from another age.

His very personal memoirs say much about his background and life that is more social history than political record – but they also include plenty of good political stories. There is historical value in vignettes such as Clement Freud MP on the day in 1979 when the Callaghan government fell or the nascent SDP's need to learn the point of tactical squeeze at the 1981 Warrington by-election. And there's lots more like that.

Indeed, Rennard provides a treasure trove of memories for by-election aficionados (I am one). For those less interested in such inordinate detail or more interested in how the party grew up to 2010, and then failed to make best use of that growth, his account is, perhaps, as significant for what is barely covered than for what is given prominence.

This includes a brief allusion to what he carefully calls 'personal allegations made against me in 2013'. This book is advertised as Volume I of his memoirs, culminating nicely in the Dunfermline & West Fife by-election victory in 2006

(one that was, indeed, a good example of Rennard's skill in spotting and cultivating a local opportunity); we must await his Volume II for the later episode.

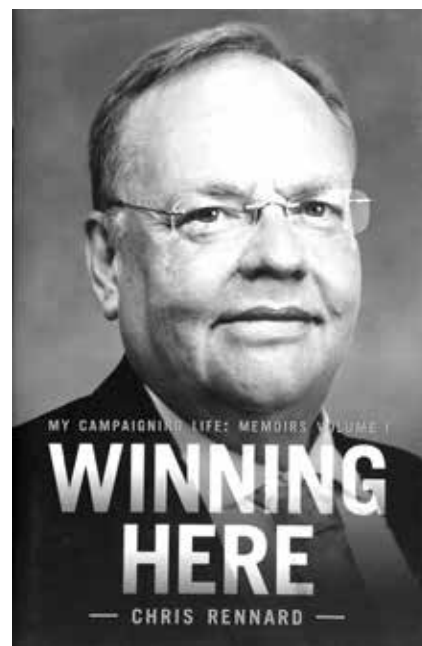
Far more significant for the history of the Liberal Democrats, Rennard inspired and directed electoral strategy in, arguably, the three most successful consecutive Westminster elections in Liberal history. Although the Lib Dem vote-share remained fairly stable in 1997 and 2001, to rise modestly in 2005, the party's MPs rose, successively, from twenty to forty-six to fifty-two and then sixty-two (peaking at sixty-three with the Dunfermline victory). His peerage, awarded by Paddy Ashdown in 1999, was widely regarded across the party as just reward, as well as a practical insurance that he would be available at the centre of politics, to go on running the party's election strategy, without having to devote himself to a constituency to win a seat himself – state aid for a political party in the form of Lords' attendance allowances.

His narrative of these years reflects his belief that the party's mounting successes reflected his 'Winning Here' strategy. His self-awareness of some personal weaknesses does not really extend to his own political role, though he is frank about internal party disagreements, in particular his unhappiness with what he calls Ashdown's 'precarious path on strategy'.

Yet the evidence of the biggest gain in seats under Rennard's stewardship – the 1997 jump of twenty-six MPs despite a slight decline in vote-share – suggests that Ashdown's anti-Tory recalibration of the party's stance produced more benefit than the Rennardian shuffling of resources around target seats. The Conservative vote was dropping so massively in 1997 that many of the Lib Dem gains were there to be made without the party gaining votes – indeed some were made despite a local drop in Lib Dem share; conversely, locally adding two points to the Liberal share did not save the seat vulnerable to Labour, Rochdale.

The party's vote was so distributed that it was bound to reap benefit from an anti-Tory tide. That benefit was boosted by widespread tactical voting in 1997, producing Lib Dem victories in genuinely two-horse races, as Labour-inclined voters were persuaded by – as Rennardians would say – targeted leaflets. Yet in three-way marginals (where a defending Tory faced a second-place Lib Dem with a third-place Labour candidate close behind) targeted leaflets failed to work; the Lib Dem share actually dropped by more than the national rate and there were two striking leap-frog Labour gains, in Hastings and St Albans, where nationally publicised constituency polls undid all the hard work of local Liberal deliverers. The national anti-Tory mood swept Labour to victory in such seats, while Paddy's 'precarious' left-inclined messaging ensured his party took Tory seats where it really was more credible. Rennard's local targeting played its part, but only where it slotted into Ashdown's national stance. In one seat, Kingston & Surbiton, a hard-working, locally well placed candidate took a Tory seat even though not officially targeted, and a young Ed Davey started his parliamentary career.

Four years later, Rennard was working with a new leader, Charles Kennedy, who lacked Paddy's focus. The 2001 election was really Chris's finest hour; his strategy boosted the party's seats as, in what was nationally a standstill election, local targeting worked better.

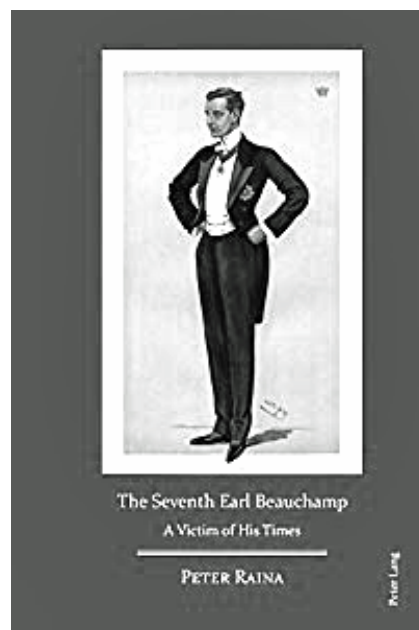


## Reviews

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.*



## 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

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



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

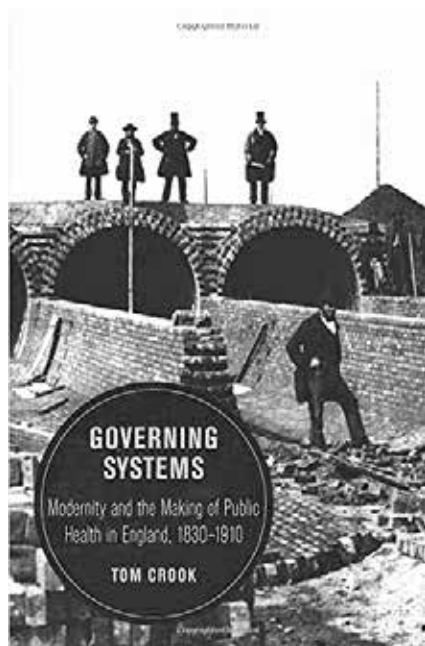
Tom Crook, *Governing Systems: Modernity and the Making of Public Health in England, 1830–1910* (University of California Press, 2016)

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



Victorian legislation was permissive rather than mandatory.

Curiously, Crook does not envisage a variety of Tory or Conservative approaches, though one could postulate a Tory paternalism to match the Whig, as exemplified by Richard Cross, whose housing and factory legislation was as effective as that proposed by the Liberal elite, and by Conservative local authorities forced to compete with their Liberal rivals. Of course, on the Tory side one must also place the obstructive power of ratepayers who opposed the cost of government intervention and the true conservatives resisting any change.

Having set a political framework, Crook then turns away from the party battle to achieve health reforms, at the national and municipal level, to investigate what represents the modernising elements that by the Edwardian period had made towns and cities safe environments. The components he identifies we now take so much for granted that it is hard to believe that most of them were novelties to the Victorians and they made this reader reconsider what he had learnt of the Chadwicks and Chamberlains in a new light. The heroes might instigate or drive the implementation of health reforms, but they only succeeded through the supporting infrastructure and interactions between local and national systems.

The first of these necessary elements, explored through the operations of the General Register Office, is statistics. The collection of data on deaths, their analysis into death rates and their

publication by cause of death and by local area set up a complex dynamic for improvement. Analysis allowed for ranking from the best to the worst and publication facilitated investigation and involvement – campaigning by individuals and groups. Best practice could be identified and adopted.

Bureaucracy is explored through the role of the sanitary inspector. As part of the legislative wave that followed the 1832 Reform Act, many government departments expanded. More law required more clerks, or bureaucrats, but effective intervention required, as the military jargon now has it, ‘boots on the ground’: inspectors for factories, inspectors for food standards, and sanitary inspectors. Sanitary inspectors – or, as they were initially known, inspectors of nuisances – were initially authorised in the 1847 Town Improvement Clauses Act but, as for most Victorian legislation, the development of this clipboard army depended on local initiative and in particular that of the leading cities with rural areas lagging behind. The haphazard development of functions and powers eventually required systematic tidying up by central government and, perhaps more importantly, the development of professional bodies and professional standards.

Inspectors had powers of entry and powers to issue notices requiring improvement supported by court action. While there were never enough inspectors to compel adherence to high standards, the possibility of inspection and the threat of notices to stop work did much to raise standards. Significantly, inspectors acquired powers to enter both commercial establishments and private houses, utilising personal intervention and moral suasion for improvement as well as ticking the forms. Obviously, an inspector’s visits were not regarded with unalloyed joy and examples are given of the obstructions placed in their paths. These ranged from the conflicts of interest between businessmen and councillors and the inspectors of their businesses to conflicts of opinion between inspectors.

The separation of sewage from other parts of the water system is taken so much for granted that it is something of a shock to realise how much of today’s technology is the result of trial and error and conflict between competing systems. A well-illustrated chapter, one of Crook’s best, tastefully entitled ‘Matter

in its Right Place’, deals with these scientific and engineering developments, ranging from the different types of toilet in the home through the optimum choice of piping to final effluent processing. He uses it to explore the role of the entrepreneur as well as the administrator and the necessity for technological as well as administrative systems.

Two chapters deal with the related topics of personal hygiene and stamping out infectious diseases. Preventing the spread of infectious diseases had to be achieved independently of any scientific knowledge of their causes and the mechanisms for transmission. Such ignorance obviously enhanced the chances of mistakes and made convincing people of their own best interest harder when it involved any personal inconvenience. State interference was seen as a loss of individual liberty and yet, by a series of fits and starts, appropriate hygiene, hospital, port and isolation techniques were developed and in time germ theory overcame that of miasma.

The concluding section of the book situates itself in relation to a number of theoretical considerations such as modernity, system and contingency. If the development of better public health is to be properly understood, we need to move beyond the myths of the heroic pioneers and, while Crook describes his work as anti-heroic, he is perhaps unfair to himself. He does not set out to denigrate the best-known workers in the field but presents the case for acknowledging the tools and methods with which politicians and bureaucrats are compelled to operate and the ways in which such complexity makes progress uneven in any society claiming to be Liberal.

Crook’s book is not a work of straightforward political narrative but rather a well worthwhile exploration of the components of pragmatic systems through which politicians advanced and stumbled towards healthy urban living. His story is not of a steady triumphant progress of ever more effective state intervention but a more subtle and interesting investigation of the negotiations between citizens, politicians, bureaucrats and technicians. Since much political history deals with the conflict between cabinet ministers, it is vital occasionally to be reminded of the systems on which they rely for the implementation of their grand projects.

Tony Little is chair of the Liberal Democrat History Group. He was joint editor of *British Liberal Leaders* and *Great Liberal*

*Speeches*. He contributed to *Mothers of Liberty* and *Peace Reform and Liberation*.

## The rivals

Dick Leonard and Mark Garnett, *Titans: Fox Vs. Pitt* (IB Tauris, 2019)

Review by **Andrew C. Thompson**

THE POLITICAL RIVALRY between William Pitt the younger and Charles James Fox was legendary at the time and the ongoing ramifications of that rivalry continue to affect politics even into the present day. In the early nineteenth century, as political parties in something approaching their modern form began to emerge, clubs named after these erstwhile antagonists sprang up in towns around the country, aiding the formation of the Whig and Tory parties. Indeed, in Cambridge a Pitt Club still exists, although its function is now much more social than political, and the ground floor of its clubhouse is rented to a branch of a well-known pizza restaurant.

Both Pitt and Fox, as the authors of this new dual biography note, have attracted considerable attention from historians and biographers in the intervening period. Yet, while such important political practitioners as Russell, Rosebery and William Hague have written about one or other of them, writing about their parallel lives has been less common. This volume seeks to give equal attention to each of them, sometimes through telling their stories in separate chapters and sometimes through focusing on their interactions, as the unfolding narrative dictates. One of the authors has written more about the politics of the Foxite tradition and the other of the Pittite (although in the much more recent past) and the idea is that this twin perspective allows for a greater degree of balance in the assessment of these parallel lives than has sometimes been the case in works that have often approached the hagiographic.

The parallel lives approach also allows the opportunity to consider properly some of the shared features of the careers of Pitt and Fox and draw attention to their similarities. Both came from families who had been involved in high-level politics for some time. Their fathers had been rivals, and occasional allies, during the tempestuous politics of the 1750s.

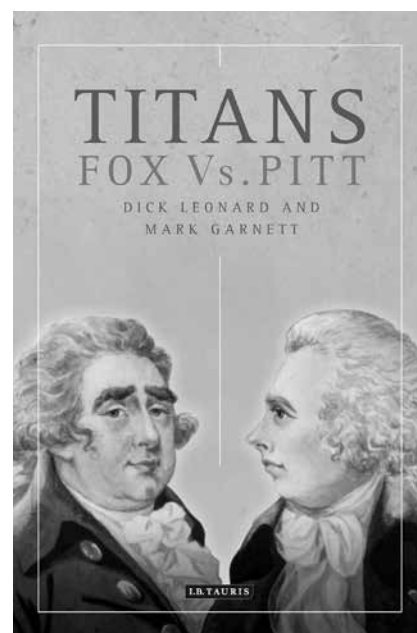
Both had a serious interest in the inheritance of the classical world and modelled their oratory on its best exempla. Both were interested in parliamentary reform and engaged with some of the ideas put forward by Edmund Burke to mitigate some of the worst excesses of the unreformed British constitution. Likewise, both expressed a degree of enthusiasm for the abolition of the slave trade, although Fox was ultimately more central than Pitt in pushing the legislation that led to abolition in 1807. Both also devoted their considerable reserves of mental and physical energy to the business of politics and their overall health suffered as a result – the impact of poor health on the careers of many politicians before the advent of modern medicine is often underappreciated.

The authors are particularly good at recreating the parliamentary dynamics of the contest between Pitt and Fox. They give a good impression of the ways in which they each used rather different techniques to get their respective messages across. Fox could be more brilliantly eloquent and able, for much of his career, to make emotional and persuasive speeches, regardless of his activities on the previous evening. Pitt, by contrast, was more forensic in his approach. He was able to weather the Foxite onslaught and, over time, incrementally won MPs over to his point of view. Two of the best examples of their contrasting oratorical styles are included in the appendices – Pitt's 1783 dissection of the formation of the Fox–North coalition and Fox's 1806 speech against the slave trade.

The narrative flows easily and some of the more complicated and confusing episodes of the period, such as the ministerial instability from the defeat at Yorktown in 1781 until the formation of Pitt's first ministry in late 1783, are well explained. The reader gains a good sense of the wider cast of characters involved in the politics of the period, as well as of the continuing importance of familial

connections and sociability. Fox was operating within an aristocratic Whig milieu, while Pitt's friends from his time at Cambridge remained important throughout his political career.

As the authors acknowledge, historians have disagreed considerably about several important aspects of Pitt and Fox's careers. The tone here is one that is generally more sympathetic to the view that Fox was the victim of royal prejudice, forced from office by unconstitutional actions on George III's part in 1783 and kept out for the next two decades because of the king's antipathy towards him. While the conclusion acknowledges that Fox was not without character flaws, it fails to draw the connection between subsequent efforts to memorialise Fox (and indeed Pitt) and the ways in which subsequent generations of historians viewed them. We know that Fox became a hero for nineteenth-century Liberals and that later Conservatives placed great importance on Pitt as their ideological and political forebear. This book has a tendency to assume that the divisions between Whigs and Tories that were central to nineteenth-century politics and the emergence of a two-party system were already readily apparent, even if not to such an extent, in the second half of the eighteenth century. In this it goes against the broad historiographical consensus that argues that Toryism disappeared as an effective political and parliamentary force at some point in the middle of the eighteenth century, only to re-emerge with the same name but arguably different central ideological concerns in the early nineteenth century. Thus,



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A Liberal Democrat History Group evening meeting

# The 1979 General Election

The 1979 general election inaugurated the premiership of Margaret Thatcher and an eighteen-year period of Conservative government. The results signalled the end of the post-World War II political consensus, based on an enhanced role for the state in economic management, strong trade unions, a broad welfare state and the pursuit of full employment. Despite the fact that the previous decade had seen two hung parliaments and record levels of support for the Liberal Party, the Liberals' share of the vote fell sharply, and two-party politics seemed to be back.

Join **Lord David Steel**, **Baroness Shirley Williams** and **Professor Sir John Curtice** (University of Strathclyde) to discuss the 1979 general election and its significance.

**7.00pm, Monday 3 February** (after the Liberal Democrat History Group's AGM at 6.30pm)  
David Lloyd George Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

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A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

# General Election 2019: Disappointment for the Liberal Democrats

The Liberal Democrats entered the 2019 general election campaign buoyed by their best opinion poll ratings in a decade, a second place showing in the recent European Parliament elections, impressive local election results in England and high-profile defections from the other parties. The party had a dynamic, young new leader in Jo Swinson and a simple, clear message: stop Brexit. But the party's campaign gained little traction and the results were hugely disappointing.

Discuss the 2019 election with **Professor Andrew Russell** (Head of Politics, Liverpool University) and **James Gurling** (Chair, Federal Campaigns and Elections Committee). Chair: **Wendy Chamberlain MP**.

**8.15pm, Friday 13 March**

Meeting room 1/2, Novotel Hotel, Fishergate, York YO10 4FD (no conference pass necessary)

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the more interesting question about the rivalry between Pitt and Fox is not so much about seeing them as representatives of opposing political traditions as about the legacy of earlier eighteenth-century Whiggery and the political lessons to be derived from the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Here, it might be said that Fox was interested in the spirit of 1688, while Pitt

was more concerned about the letter. For Pitt, 1688 had defined a once-and-for-all constitutional settlement that needed to be upheld, while Fox was willing to see it as encompassing a set of principles that might find new expression in changing circumstances.

Despite this caveat, the authors have provided a thoroughly readable account

of the political and parliamentary history of the period that amply illustrates why good political history remains attractive to publishers and readers alike.

*Andrew Thompson is a Senior College Teaching Officer in History at Queens' College, Cambridge.*