

Liberal History News

Winter 2020–21

Editorial

Welcome to the winter 2020–21 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*.

We include three main articles in this issue: on the broadcasting career of Honor Balfour, by Helen Langley (who wrote on her political career in issue 78 (Spring 2013)); on William Ewart Gladstone, by Simon Heffer (a reprint from Iain Dale's new book, *The Prime Ministers*); and on the Liberal Party's efforts to retain and articulate its political distinctiveness in one of the darkest periods in its history, 1945–55, by Tudor Jones.

We also record, in 'Liberal History News', the sad deaths of long-time Liberal activists Roy Douglas and Ann Winfield. Roy Douglas must have been amongst the last – perhaps *the* last? – of those Liberals who fought the 1950 general election. (As far as we are aware, there are no survivors of any earlier election.)

In 1950 the party made a major effort to contest as many seats as possible, and in the end fought 475; many candidates were recruited at the last moment, often from university Liberal societies. No fewer than 319 of them lost their deposits (candidates then had to win 12.5 per cent of the vote to retain their deposit), which helps to explain why the party fought only 109 and 110 seats in the following two elections, in 1951 and 1955.

The large number of – often obscure – candidates in the 1950 election means that it has been hard to track their whereabouts. If any reader has any information on any still-living Liberal candidates from any election in the 1950s, we would be glad to hear of it; please email me at journal@liberalhistory.org.uk.

Duncan Brack (Editor)

Roy Douglas

My father, Roy Ian Douglas (95), who died following a brief illness, was an academic specialising in modern history, law and politics. Born in 1924, he was the only child of Percy Douglas, Company Secretary at *The Lady*, and his wife, Lilian (nee Bowley).

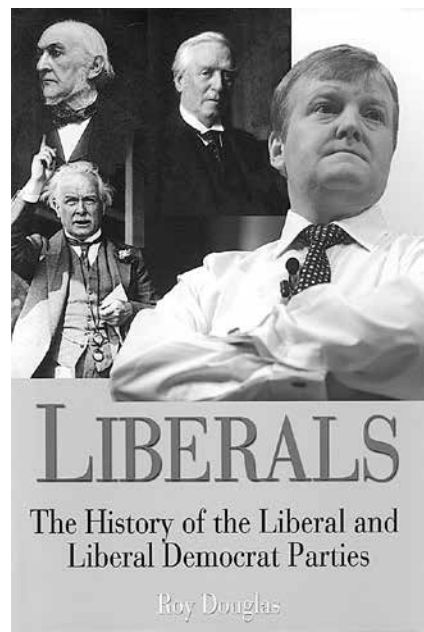
Following his BSc at Kings College, London, he completed a doctorate in zoology at Edinburgh University. He subsequently decided to read for the Bar, hoping eventually to make use of his scientific background to work in patents; he was called to the Bar in 1956 as a member of Gray's Inn.

Roy's academic career commenced at Battersea College of Technology, which became the University of Surrey in 1966. Roy became Emeritus Reader at the university, where he lectured for over 50 years. He formally retired in the late 1980s, but continued to lecture part-time until his late eighties and produced books in his nineties. His final lecture was given at Guildford Institute in January 2017. Throughout his teaching career he invested his knowledge into thousands of under and post-graduate students, many of whom still kept in contact with him. He wrote or contributed to more than twenty books on UK or international history, local history and law.

Roy joined the Liberal Party (Streatham Liberal Association) when he was sixteen. While at King's College London he served as Chair of its Liberal association, and later served as President and then Chair of the National League of Young Liberals. He stood for the Liberal Party at five parliamentary elections: in Merton & Morden in 1950, Bethnal Green in 1951 and 1955 and Gainsborough in 1959 and 1964. By this time, he was serving on

the council of the Liberal Party. In the run-up to the 1975 European Communities membership referendum, he chaired the Liberal 'No to the Common Market' campaign. He knew all Liberal and Liberal Democrat leaders since Jo Grimond.

He maintained his membership of the party until they entered into coalition with the Conservatives in 2010, a topic about which he had a robust exchange of views with Nick Clegg at the time. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of UK-wide constituencies, by-elections and national election results and a phenomenal memory for minutiae and obscure facts. Two of his books were on Liberal history: *The History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 1971), and *Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democratic Parties* (Hambleton & London, 2005). He also served as a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Liberal History* and contributed a



number of articles and book reviews to it. In July 1996 he spoke at a Liberal Democrat History Group meeting on the Liberal Party and the question of land policy, called 'God Gave the Land to the People!'

He retained a boyish curiosity about all subjects and retained his enthusiasm for life. He was exceptionally well read and could converse on a variety of topics. He was actively working on his latest book on World War One (which will be published posthumously) right up until a few months before his death.

In 1955 he married Jean Roberts, whom he met through the Young Liberals. He would often say his marriage to Jean was the wisest and happiest thing he ever did in his life, and he would not have achieved half what he did without her. It is a measure of

his devotion to Jean that he agreed to move from his beloved Coulsdon in Surrey to Wannock in East Sussex in 2008. Roy attached enormous significance to both his immediate and extended family. He was closely interested in the lives of his four children and four grandchildren, and is survived by Jean, their children Alison, Mick, Claire and Nigel and grandchildren Aimee, Mollie, Kate and Callum.

Alison Grover

Ann Winfield

My wife Ann Winfield, Liberal Parliamentary candidate for Newham North East in the 1983 general election, former Assistant Secretary of the London Liberal Party, and Leader of the Liberal

group on Newham London Borough Council from 1982 to 1986, died in Bronglais General Hospital (Aberystwyth) at 8pm on Christmas Eve, 24 December 2020. She was 69 years old.

Born Ann Spriggs in Ladywood, Birmingham, in mid 1951, she was recruited into the Liberal Party (at the tender age of 9!) by Wallace Lawler, who subsequently became a councillor and later (briefly, 1969–70) Liberal MP for Ladywood. Wallace was the pioneer in the 1960s of what became known as community politics, prior to the Eastbourne declaration by the party in 1970; Ann was his lieutenant in that early period. Ann remained a committed and active Liberal for the next sixty years. Due to the extreme poverty of her (non-political) family, Wallace paid her sub for the first few

On This Day ...

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

December

29 December 1809: Birth of William Ewart Gladstone. Born in Liverpool, the son of a prosperous merchant, Gladstone's political career lasted for over 60 years and included four periods as Chancellor of the Exchequer and four as Prime Minister. Gladstone entered parliament in 1832 as the Tory MP for Newark and served in both administrations of Sir Robert Peel. Gladstone's devotion to Peel led him to side with him in the Tory split over the Corn Laws and to serve as Chancellor under Aberdeen, Palmerston and Russell. As Prime Minister, Gladstone and his ministers instituted profound changes to British society. His first administration, arguably the greatest of the nineteenth century, reformed the army, opened up the civil service, reformed the Poor Law, established elementary education and brought in secret ballots for elections. During his third government, Gladstone's espousal of Irish Home Rule split the Liberal Party and led to its defeat. His popularity earned him the sobriquet 'the People's William'. When he died in 1898 he was given a state funeral, and two future kings acted as pallbearers.

January

10 January 1919: Following victory in the 'Coupon Election' at the end of the previous year, Lloyd George makes changes to his wartime government. He retained the small war cabinet which he had set up on becoming Prime Minister in 1916 and which was not disbanded until October 1919. Labour MP George Barnes and South African leader Jan Smuts left the war cabinet, although Barnes remained in the government as Minister without Portfolio until January 1920, and were replaced by the Unionist Sir Eric Geddes. Although the government was dominated by Unionists, Lloyd George was able to ensure that Coalition Liberals headed a number of important departments, including Edward Shortt (Home Office), Herbert Fisher (Education), Christopher Addison (Local Government Board), Winston Churchill (War Office), and Ian Macpherson (Ireland).

February

9 February 2006: Liberal Democrat candidate Willie Rennie wins the Dunfermline & West Fife by-election, turning a Labour majority of over 11,000 into a Lib Dem majority of 1,800. The by-election was caused by the death of the sitting Labour MP, Rachel Squire, after a long illness. Despite poor opinion poll ratings at the start of the campaign, and reports that Liberal Democrat ambitions were confined to holding off the SNP to retain second place, Rennie and his team pulled off the first by-election defeat for Labour in Scotland since they lost the Govan seat to the SNP in 1988. The by-election took place during the Lib Dem leadership election which followed the resignation of Charles Kennedy, a difficult time for the party. .

years, but by the age of 12 she was running his ward (or constituency) surgery in Ladywood.

In the 1970s Ann moved to Lytham St Anne's and later to Ferndown, East Dorset, where she stood for the council. In 1979 she and I met at Liberal Assembly in Thanet, and Ann soon moved in with me in Ilford; we married there in June 1980. Through campaigning in the next two years, we were both elected to Newham Council in 1982, gaining the 'safe' Labour ward of Little Ilford. Ann also became the PPC for the constituency, standing there in 1983. Seven-day-a-week activity sapped Ann's precarious health (she had a heart attack in 1984, in the middle of a notorious by-election campaign) and in 1987 we moved to Pembrokehire, where we lived for three years before repositioning to Ceredigion, our home ever since.

Here our joint role has been primarily cross-party, organising Charter 88 forums for all candidates in the 1992 and 1997 general elections, convening in Ceredigion the successful campaign for devolution in 1997, and taking a leading role in the voluntary sector and on the Community Health Council. Ann also served as National Secretary of the residual (post-merger) Wales Liberal Party until its final dissolution. Increasing disability left her wheelchair-dependent from 1982, but did not impinge on her commitment to campaigning. In 2001 she was appointed as an independent member of Ceredigion County Council's Standards Committee on which she served the maximum allowable term of ten years, first as Vice-Chair and subsequently as Chair.

Notwithstanding her disabilities, we travelled widely together, from the Mediterranean to the Far East. But by the time her term of office ended in 2011, Ann's eyesight was failing as well as other deteriorating physical conditions, and she swiftly became totally blind. Intellectually unimpaired, she remained a well-known campaigner (especially as an acknowledged expert advisor for disability rights) right up until her last cardiac attack on Tuesday 22 December.

Rif Winfield

Commemorating Asquith

I am writing to you on the recommendation of Cllr. John Pugh of Southport, who kindly suggested that I get in touch with you regarding a query that I had about an old Liberal Party commemorative item.

The object, which I recently acquired, is a Victorian paperweight in the form of a book (see pictures), which was inscribed as a presentation gift to H. H. Asquith upon his appointment as Secretary for Home Affairs under Gladstone's government in 1892. As the front inscription follows a general form, with Asquith's name and the word 'home' appearing to have been carved in separately (owing to a different preparation of the surface beneath them) I wondered if a few of these paperweights might have been made to form and then carved for individual presentation, perhaps being commemorative gifts presented by Gladstone's government to members of his 1892 cabinet?

I was wondering if you might know whether any records of such presentation gifts might exist, or if you had come across such an object before and might be able to shed a little light on the thing? I am aware that Gladstone was a prolific reader and collector of books, so thought that a gift in this form might make sense as a commemorative piece commissioned by him.

Tom Farrow

Response

I am afraid I cannot give a definitive answer to your question but my best guess would be that it is more likely that Asquith's local constituency Liberal Association or a working men's group made the presentation to him, or a regional Liberal Association sought to commemorate a particular occasion, than that Gladstone presented this to his cabinet.

I have visited Gladstone's study and it is peppered with the gifts (axes especially) and scrolls presented to him but there is no sign of such a presentation from any of the prime ministers he served. I have not noted any comment in his diaries that he made any such gift to colleagues. While no doubt many of



The full inscription reads –
Front: THE RT HON H. H. ASQUITH
QC MP. COMMEMORATIVE OF
YOUR HONORABLE POSITION AS
SECRETARY FOR HOME AFFAIRS
Back: 1892

Gladstone's books are collector's items now, I came across a 1534 religious text lying casually on a window ledge in the study; my sense is that he valued books primarily for the contents rather than their appearance.

If you will excuse my saying so, and judging solely from the appearance in the pictures, the engraving has a 'rural' character rather than the professional appearance one would expect from something professionally commissioned by someone of Gladstone's wealth. None of this detracts of course from the historic character of the artefact.

Tony Little (Chair, Liberal Democrat History Group)

Thanks to Patrick Mitchell

Patrick Mitchell has decided to stand down from the management committee of the Liberal Democrat History Group at the 2021 Annual General Meeting.

Patrick has been with the History Group from its beginning when it started to publish the *Liberal Democrat History Group Newsletter* (now the *Journal of Liberal History*), and has served on the committee in a multitude of roles.

Patrick drafted the constitution of the Group, which has been sufficiently brief and clear that it has served efficiently, and virtually unchanged, for the thirty-plus years of the Group's

existence. He was the Group's treasurer for some years and was the membership secretary for an even longer period.

Chair of the Group, Tony Little, said: 'Patrick brought a quiet efficiency to his roles on the committee, particularly as our membership secretary. We have been very fortunate to have had his diligent services over such a long period.'

'I would like to express the gratitude of his fellow committee members for his help and advice and wish him well for the future.'

Letters to the Editor

Lady Howard of Llanelli

I was interested in the article on Lady Howard of Llanelli in the last issue (Jaime Reynolds, 'Another Madam Mayor: Lady Howard of Llanelli and the strange case of the Cowell-Stepneys', *Journal of Liberal History* 108 (autumn 2020)). Although the authors writes that it became an absolutely safe Labour seat after 1922, citing as evidence the 1931 majority of 16,033, this was simply because no Liberal stood in 1931. In the four elections between 1922 and 1929, the Labour majority over Liberal never reached 10,000 and was only 2,259 in 1924. Thereafter the constituency did become very strongly Labour indeed, but its Liberal vote resisted the rapid erosion which occurred in most of industrial south Wales.

There are only rare three-cornered fights, in 1929 and 1950, to show this. Most seats had these in 1929: in Llanelli, the Liberal vote (37 per cent) was higher than in any of the industrial South Wales valley seats and much higher than the average Liberal vote in Glamorgan and Monmouthshire (27 per cent). By 1950, the average Liberal

vote in industrial South Wales had dropped to 11.8 per cent (based mostly on coastal towns, as the party was too weak to fight most mining seats), but Lanelli still pulled in 14 per cent, the only industrial Welsh seat in which the Liberal vote was ahead of the Conservatives (by 7,700 to 6,362) and one of only a handful across Britain.

Then, despite this second place, Liberals dropped out in Llanelli until 1964. Nationally, in seats fought in both 1950 and 1964, the party's percentage share rose by 5.4; in Llanelli, the vote dropped to 12.2 per cent. Its locally higher parliamentary support had by then evaporated. Maybe that vote had simply reflected its more Welsh linguistic character, or maybe the influence of Meriel Howard-Stepney can be discerned.

Michael Steed

Lady Howard of Llanelli: response

Michael, many thanks for your comments on the article.

I am sure you are correct about the enduring Liberal strength in Llanelli

into the 1950s, which is not surprising given the Liberal hold on the surrounding Carmarthenshire seat and the presence of a sizable Welsh-speaking and Nonconformist population in the constituency. There may also have been some residual Howard influence, though I suspect that this was on the wane after the 1920s. Interestingly, Stafford Vaughan-Howard, Meriel's son, was mentioned as a possible Liberal candidate for Llanelli in 1948 but he chose instead to stand for South Gloucestershire in 1950 and Penrith & the Border in 1951. Instead, the candidate for Llanelli was Hywel Gruffydd Thomas.

The fact remains that Labour polled over 50 per cent of the votes in every election from 1922, and even where there was a single Liberal or Tory candidate, as in 1924 and 1931, this was insufficient to overturn the Labour lead (perhaps, as you suggest, because a significant number of Liberal voters preferred Labour).

Jaime Reynolds