

Liberal History News

Summer 2021

Editorial

Welcome to the summer 2021 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*. Our apologies for the late despatch of this issue, which should have been published in July. We will be back to our normal timetable with the autumn issue, which will be published in mid September.

This issue includes four main articles: a biography of the Liberal and independent MP T. Edmund Harvey; a study of E. D. Simon's role in revitalising Liberal industrial policy in the 1920s and 1930s; an analysis of Gladstone's evolving views on franchise reform, in 1864; and an appreciation of that great Liberal stalwart Tony Greaves, a good friend to the History Group, who died, much too early, in March this year.

A commemoration of that other Liberal (and Social Democrat) stalwart, Shirley Williams, will follow in our autumn issue. We also record, in 'Liberal History News', the sad deaths of Trevor Smith (Lord Smith of Clifton), who played a key role in the Rowntree Trust's support of Liberal politics, and of Professors John Vincent and Angus Hawkins, who both contributed to the study of Liberal history and the *Journal of Liberal History*.

Duncan Brack (Editor)

Trevor Smith

Trevor Smith (Lord Smith of Clifton) who died in April, aged 83, was an influential figure in Liberal/Liberal Democrat and academic circles for sixty years, mostly behind the scenes. After joining the Liberal Society at the London School of Economics in 1955, his only electoral contest came in the 1959 general election, when he achieved 11 per cent in Lewisham West – at 22, he was the youngest candidate in the UK.

He pursued an academic career, ending as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ulster 1991–99, the biggest university on the island of Ireland and based at four separate sites around the north. He successfully challenged entrenched attitudes at the university, and embarked on a number of imaginative and liberal initiatives including establishing Incore, the International Centre for Conflict Resolution, with the United Nations University, Tokyo.



He was a board member of the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust from 1975, and its Chair from 1987 to 1999; he retired from the board in 2007. During his time as Chair, the Trust saw a significant reorientation of its goals as a non-charitable trust geared towards funding political activity around democratic reform and social justice. In order to reflect this, it was renamed the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust in 1990. For more than fifty years the Trust had been the major financial supporter of the Liberal Party and Trevor continued this but, not being enamoured of the effectiveness of party headquarters, the Trust's grants were given directly to specific organisations, particularly the Association of Liberal Councillors.

He retained his Liberal and Liberal Democrat membership and became publicly active politically when appointed as a life peer in 1997, serving as spokesperson on Northern Ireland in

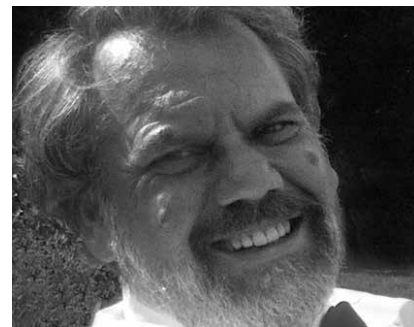
2000–11. He emerged as a vocal critic of the Liberal Democrats' participation in the coalition government, including being one of only four Lib Dem peers to vote against the trebling of tuition fees; in July 2014 he called for Nick Clegg's resignation as leader.

Angus Hawkins

Angus Hawkins died suddenly, aged 67, shortly before Christmas 2020.

His publications helped to refine and reshape over almost four decades historians' understanding of nineteenth-century politics. His arguments about 'Parliamentary government' and the formation of coalitions in the mid-Victorian era, his seminal two-volume rehabilitation of Lord Derby, 'the forgotten prime minister', and his magisterial *Victorian Political Culture* (2015), are just some of the many outstanding contributions to scholarship he leaves behind.

He wrote a number of articles for the *Journal of Liberal History* and was a supporter of our project to install a commemorative plaque on the building in King Street, St James, London, which stands on the site of Willis's Rooms. This was where, on 6 June 1859, Whigs, Peelites and Radicals agreed to combine to bring down Derby's minority Tory government; the meeting is generally held to mark the formation of the Liberal Party.



John Vincent

Professor John Vincent, who died in March aged 83, was a patron of the *Journal of Liberal History*, and spoke at one of the History Group's early meetings, on the repeal of the Corn Laws, on the 150th anniversary in 1996.



The study that made his name, *The Formation of the Liberal Party 1857–68*, was published in 1966; it was hugely important in developing historical understanding of its subject, and, more widely, of Victorian politics. Vincent rejected what he saw as the cruder orthodoxies in social and political history, of change being dominated by simple economic trends or shifts in social structure. Instead, he saw Liberalism as the binding together of disparate elements from varied social backgrounds, as well as pressure groups and religious Nonconformists. Popular radicalism was, he argued, 'the product of

the leisure of Saturday night and Sunday morning, the pothouse [pub] and the chapel, not of the working week'. That often fragile alliance or 'community of sentiment' had, crucially, also depended on the leadership of charismatic individuals such as Gladstone.

It was the calibre of this book, together with *Pollbooks: How the Victorians Voted*, that enabled Vincent, aged thirty-two, to move from a lectureship to a professorship. *The Governing Passion: Cabinet Government and Party Politics in Britain, 1885–86* (with Alastair Cooke) and scholarly editions of diaries by nineteenth and twentieth-century politicians, derived from extensive archival research and added to his reputation.

Politically he moved steadily to the right and in the 1980s developed a sideline as a columnist for *The Times* and the *Sun*. He was an instinctive controversialist, a lover of paradox who enjoyed, in university teaching and personal conversation as well as in journalism, questioning received opinion.

Gladstone and the World Cup of PMs

William Gladstone came close to being crowned winner in The Rest

Is History podcast's World Cup-style competition to find the greatest prime minister earlier this year.

The podcast is co-presented by the historians Dominic Sandbrook and Tom Holland. Followers of the podcast could vote via Twitter.

In a phenomenal run, the Grand Old Man triumphed over Tony Blair before scoring another easy victory over his great nineteenth-century rival, Benjamin Disraeli – 'a real Victorian grudge match,' in Sandbrook's words.

In a shock result, the four-times Liberal premier then overcame Winston Churchill in the semi-finals to reach the final, in which he was pitted against Labour's Clement Attlee.

Sadly 'he couldn't repeat the trick in the final, so it was Attlee who took the crown', observed Sandbrook.

A couple of other Liberal premiers also performed strongly. Asquith triumphed over Margaret Thatcher in the first round but was knocked out in the quarter-finals by Churchill.

Similarly, Lloyd George overcame Labour's Harold Wilson in the first round but met his Waterloo against Attlee in the quarter-finals.

You can see the full results at: <https://twitter.com/TheRestHistory/status/1371400870496149507>.

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On This Day ...

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

June

8 June 1904: Winston Churchill joins the Liberal Party, three days after saying (in front of ten thousand people at Alexandra Palace) that he would give the matter 'serious consideration'.

July

15 July 2004: The Liberal Democrats win the Leicester South by-election with 34.9% of the vote from Labour. Local councillor Parmjit Singh Gill is returned to Westminster. Gill fought the seat at the general election the following year but was defeated by the Labour candidate Peter Soulsby.

August

24 August 1931: In the wake of the financial crisis which led to the fall of the second Labour government, Ramsay MacDonald obtains the King's consent to form an all-party National Government and Liberal leader Sir Herbert Samuel and Rufus Isaacs (Lord Reading) agree to become members of the cabinet. They are formally appointed Home Secretary and Foreign Secretary respectively over the next two days.