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Journal of Liberal HISTORY

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Appreciation of Shirley Williams

Kathryn Rix
Bertha Bowness Fischer First woman political agent

Aaron Jacob
Lloyd George, the Liberal Summer Schools and electoral politics in the 1920s

David Williams
The Liberal rise in Richmond Introduction by Mark Egan

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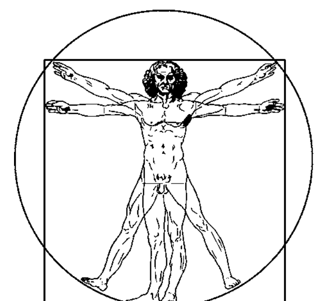

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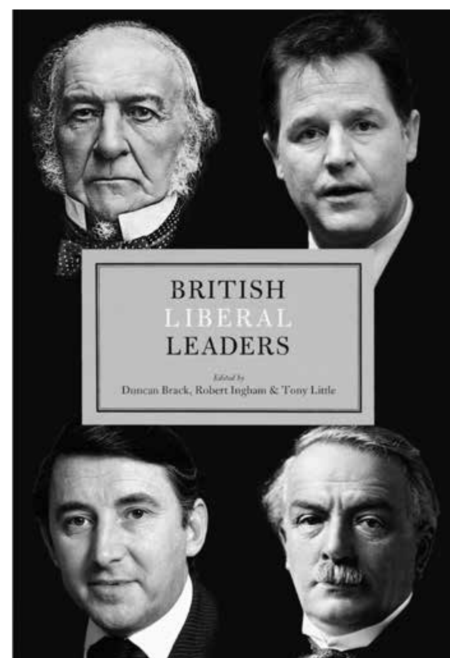

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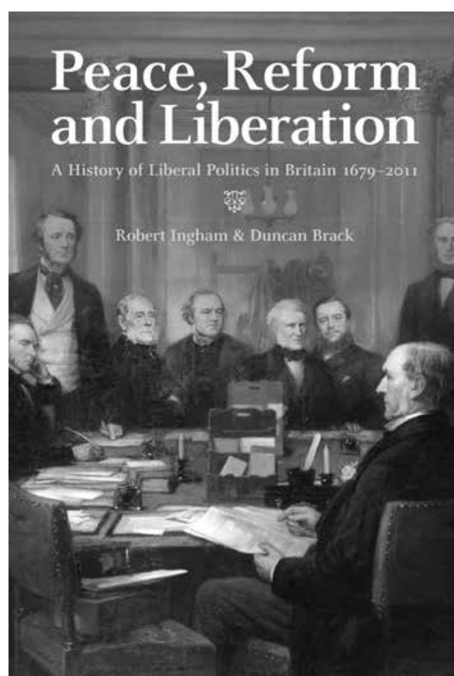

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Liberal Democrat History Group

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**.

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Liberal History News Autumn 2021

Editorial

Welcome to the autumn 2021 issue of the *Journal of Liberal History*.

This issue includes four main articles. First is an appreciation of the much-missed Shirley Williams, who died in April this year. We were lucky that she found time, during her busy latter years, to speak at a number of Liberal Democrat History Group meetings, and to be interviewed by us for her views in particular on formation of the SDP and the UK's relations with the EU (issue 98, spring 2018).

Second is a biography of Bertha Bowness Fischer, after whom the Liberal Democrats' latest party award is named. Although her political career was brief, she is notable as the first woman of any party to be formally accepted into the agents' profession.

Next we look back at the intellectual and political impact of the Liberal Summer Schools on the Liberal Party's fortunes in the 1920s, and in particular on the party's successful by-election record in the run-up to the 1929 election – a critical period in the adoption of proto-Keynsian ideas in Liberal policy.

Our final main article looks at the way in which Liberals in Richmond-upon-Thames built their campaigning and political strategy in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s – from nothing to winning the council in 1983.

Along with meeting reports and book reviews, I hope you enjoy this issue of the *Journal*. And (unless you have a standing order) don't forget to renew your subscription!

Duncan Brack (Editor)

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**.

September

4 September 1825: Birth of Dadabhai Naoroji in Khadka near Mumbai. He became the first Indian professor of mathematics and served as Prime Minister of Boroda in the 1870s and was three times President of the Indian National Congress. Naoroji first visited England in 1855 and returned in the early 1880s. He was chosen to fight Holborn for the Liberals in the general election of 1886. He lost but secured nomination for Central Finsbury and at the election of 1892 gained the seat from the Tories by five votes, becoming the first non-white person to be elected to parliament. Although he lost his seat in 1895 his influence both in the UK and India was and remains considerable.'.

October

29 October 1924: Election day in the 1924 general election. The Conservatives led by Stanley Baldwin are returned to power after nine months in opposition, gaining 158 seats. The election was a disaster for the Liberal Party. Outmanoeuvred in parliament, strapped for cash and unprepared to fight an election, the party was only able to field a little over 350 candidates. At the end of the parliament there had been 158 Liberal MPs; when the election was over, only 42 remained. Asquith lost at Paisley and leading figures such as Macnamara, Seely, Hogge, Masterman and Isaac Foot all lost. The few prominent Liberals to survive the carnage included Lloyd George, Simon and Runciman. In all, only seven Liberals were returned against both Labour and Conservative opponents. The election was a devastating blow for the party; it was now firmly relegated to third place.

November

26 November 1981: Shirley Williams overturns a Conservative majority of 19,272 to win the Crosby by-election for the Liberal/SDP Alliance, securing 49 per cent of the vote. Neither Williams nor Roy Jenkins – another founding member – were MPs when they formed the SDP; it was Williams who was selected for the campaign which was to deliver the first SDP Member of Parliament through an election. Following the creation of the Liberal/SDP Alliance, the Liberal Party supported WIlliams. The constituency had been regarded as a safe Conservative seat until this point and was held by Williams until 1983. She was created a life peer in 1993 as the Baroness Williams of Crosby of Stevenage in the County of Hertfordshire and served as Liberal Democrat leader in the House of Lords from 2001 until 2004. She died in April 2021.

Letters to the Editor

Tony Greaves (1)

Following Michael Meadowcroft's detailed appreciation in the summer issue (*Journal of Liberal History* 111, summer 2021) correctly indicating where Tony and I were at odds during my leadership I would like it to be known that I was shocked to learn that Tony Greaves had died.

We had a tumultuous relationship at the time of the merger, but he remained an inspiration and a friend. We enjoyed chatting over meals at the long table in the peers' dining room, sometimes recalling his participation in my by-election in 1965.

He was far too young to lose.

David Steel

Tony Greaves (2)

I first knew Tony when we were at school together at Bradford Grammar in the 1950s before he went off to Quegs at Wakefield.

Later, when I was Vice Chair of the NLYL and Tony was in ULS we sometimes played snooker together at the National Liberal Club in London and talked about home – especially when we once bumped into Freddie Trueman in the Snooker Hall at the National Liberal Club.

Although he ended up over't'ill in Lancashire, Tony was really a straightforward authentic Yorkie who still loved his dear old Bradford Park Avenue FC – and he loved the hills and mountains where the curlews and skylarks called.

Sometimes, despite being a Lordship, the outside world might sometimes see him as cantankerous, difficult, argumentative, and assertive, but I know he was much more than that. He was thoughtful, decent, good and kind, with a first-class mind. Any sharp edge was when his fundamental honesty detected flaws (or flannel) in an argument and a lack of liberalism. The best choice he ever made was to marry Heather.

Good lad, Tony. Well done. What you did was special. As with another old friend, David Shutt, I'm going to miss you … and, my goodness, your party could do with a few Tony Greaves just now.

David Raw

Tony Greaves (3)

I worked on and off with Tony Greaves for about fifty years, so would like to add to the appreciation by Michael Meadowcroft in the summer issue. More times than not, we got on very well but there were occasions when it was a good job that we lived approaching 300 miles apart!

Tony felt strongly about things and from time to time would let his feelings be known in no uncertain manner. As Michael records, if you took your time and let your reactions cool he would cool too … but there could be testing times.

His greatest attribute was his overriding commitment to radical Liberalism, and the party owes a very great deal to his unswerving belief that it could be a rival to both socialism and conservatism, a belief that never wavered even when he entered the graveyard of the Lords, which can simply swallow up the forthright.

In fact, in my experience, he took to the upper chamber like the proverbial duck. He invited my wife and I to visit and delighted in outlining some of the more exotic features of the place. No doubt he could also be withering … but that was Tony.

He was a fully rounded political beast. From time to time he would explode but at heart he stuck to his party.

He also had what Dennis Healy called 'a hinterland' – in his case a passion for the great outdoors, and rock climbing in particular. That, and serving on Pendle Council while also being an active working peer, would be enough for most folk, but I suspect his greatest contribution to the cause he subscribed to was the fifteen years he spent building up the Association of Liberal Councillors and, subsequently, Liberal Democrat Publications, from a converted nonconformist chapel high up a hill in the Pennines.

He was at home, a celebrated Liberal nonconformist if ever there was one – irreplaceable.

Trevor Jones (Dorchester)

Think history

Can you spare some time to help the History Group?

The Liberal Democrat History Group undertakes a wide range of activities – publishing this *Journal* and our Liberal history books and booklets, organising regular speaker meetings, maintaining the Liberal history website and providing assistance with research.

We'd like to do more, but our activities are limited by the number of people involved in running the Group. We would be enormously grateful for help with our publications, website, meetings, publicity and promotion.

If you'd like to be involved in any of these activities, or anything else, contact the Editor, **Duncan Brack** (journal@liberalhistory.org.uk) – we would love to hear from you.

Appreciation

Dick Newby looks back at the life and career of one of the Gang of Four who founded the SDP and who went on to become a much-loved Liberal Democrat peer.

Shirley Williams (27 Ju

Shirley Williams campaigning for the SDP at the Crosby by-election in 1981

In my first term at Oxford in 1971, I joined the Labour Club. Labour was relatively recently out of office, many of its leaders were Oxford alumni, and in that autumn term, every week, we had the opportunity to hear and meet a different former cabinet minister. I was star struck, but I can remember only two of the visitors. One was Tony Crosland, who dazzled us over drinks and cigars after the meeting. Shirley was the other.

My acquaintance with Shirley really began as a co-member of the committee of the Labour Committee for Europe, where I attended as secretary of Young European Left, a small but enthusiastic youth wing of the broader committee. I got to know her well when I joined the staff of the SDP in spring 1981, and particularly when, in her role as president of the party, which she held from 1982 to 1988, I briefed her on every National Committee meeting and conference session – every one of which she chaired.

On joining the Lords in 1997, I then served under her during her time as leader and, when I became leader myself, I was nominally her leader. By then Shirley was almost upon retirement from the Lords, but even when retired she was a regular visitor to my office, always bursting with ideas and plans.

I was therefore able to see, work with and appreciate Shirley for almost forty years. She was, throughout, a personal supporter and became a good friend. I don't think my assessment of her is seen though rose-tinted spectacles, but it is certainly suffused with a great deal of affection.

ly 1930 – 11 April 2021)

Hinterland

By the time Shirley entered the Commons in1964, aged 34, she had crammed into her life a range of experience which is impossible to contemplate for a contemporary politician. She was born in 1930 into the Labour Party elite. Her mother, Vera Brittain, was a renowned writer – *Testament of Youth* being one of the seminal accounts of life and loss during the First World War – an anti-war campaigner and a strong feminist. Her father was political scientist Professor Sir George Catlin, an unsuccessful Labour politician. If she inherited views on international relations and feminism from her mother, she inherited a strong degree of intellectual curiosity and concern for social justice form her father.

Because of their prominence in Labour circles, her parents were on a Nazi hit-list if an invasion took place. To protect Shirley, she was sent with her brother, unaccompanied, to Minnesota in 1940. She was already an accomplished actor, and whilst in the US narrowly lost out to Elizabeth Taylor to play the lead in the film National Velvet.

She returned to the UK in 1943 and attended St Paul's Girls School (which she hated) and Talbot Heath School in Bournemouth (which she loved). Before university, her interest in and support for the European ideal was sparked by participating in a Labour League of Youth visit to the youth wing of the Germany Social Democrats. She studied at Somerville College, Oxford, from 1948. She read PPE and starred in politics (first woman to be president of the Labour Club) and on stage (where she played Cordelia to the Lear of Peter Parker, later chairman of British Rail).

On leaving Oxford, she spent a year at Columbia University (New York), worked as a journalist at the *Daily Mirror* (improbably as a gossip columnist) and the *FT*, and spent a term lecturing in Ghana before becoming general secretary of the Fabian Society, succeeding Bill Rodgers, who had been a fellow officer of the Oxford University Labour Club. She first stood for parliament in the unwinnable Harwich by-election in 1954, stood again in the seat in 1955, in Southampton Test in 1959, before winning the Hitchin seat in 1964.

So, unlike some of the slightly older men who dominated the Labour Party in the Wilson years – Jenkins, Healey, Crosland – who had actively participated in the Second World War, Shirley had not been directly involved in the war effort. But with a pacifist mother, her experience of exile, and her visits to Germany and the US, she had an acute sense of the downsides of conflict and the benefits of international – Atlantic and European – cooperation.

This experience meant that by the time she became an MP she had a well-thought-through set of beliefs. Those beliefs – principally a passion for social justice and a conviction that peace nd prosperity required Britain to be at the heart of Europe – remained with her and animated her whole political career.

Labour MP

Once elected, and during the 1964–70 Labour governments, Shirley moved steadily up the slippery pole. After being PPS to the secretary of state for health, (1964–66) she became successively parliamentary secretary for labour (1966–67), minister of state for education (1967–69) and served at the Home Office (1969–70). Over this period, the issue which brought her to public notice and controversy was her support for and implementation of the policy of introducing comprehensive schools. This was not her initiative – Anthony Crosland as secretary of state was the prime mover – but it became a policy personally associated with her to such an extent that, even decades later, it was regularly raised by its critics on the doorsteps and in the studios. She was however a passionate supporter of the policy and gave no quarter in promoting it.

When Labour lost the 1970 election, she was elected to the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) and shadow cabinet, becoming

By the time Shirley entered the Commons in1964, aged 34, she had crammed into her life a range of experience which is impossible to contemplate for a contemporary politician.

health and social security spokesman and the shadow home secretary (1972).

The great internal Labour row in opposition was over Europe. Harold Wilson had begun negotiations for entry in the period before the 1970 election, but when the party's conference voted on the issue at a special conference in 1971, it opposed entry by a ratio of 5–1. When the legislation facilitating Britain's membership came to the Commons in October 1971, Shirley and sixty-seven colleagues supported it. Whilst Roy Jenkins and several other frontbenchers resigned to campaign and vote in favour of membership, Shirley, along with Roy Hattersley remained on the front bench. It was a measure of Shirley's popularity in the party that much opprobrium was heaped on Hattersley, but much less on her.

Her rebellion did however have consequences. She performed badly in the subsequent shadow cabinet election and was demoted to spokesperson on prices. She retained this brief after the 1974 general election, becoming secretary of state for prices and consumer protection in the new Wilson government. It was an impossible job. Prices rose by 27 per cent under her watch, but blame was – reasonably – not attached primarily to her.

The first part of the 1974 parliament was dominated by the first European referendum. Along with Roy Jenkins, Shirley headed up the Labour pro-European campaign, touring the country with her hallmark verve and panache.

When Wilson resigned as PM in 1976, Shirley stood, not for the leadership as some of her supporters wanted, but for the deputy leadership. She lost to Michael Foot by 166 votes to 128. She remained at Prices and Consumer Protection until Callaghan made her secretary of state for education later in 1976. At his behest she launched a 'Great Debate' on education standards and toured the country to discuss the issue. It was a largely barren exercise: too many vested interests argued their corner and no consensus for change emerged. She oversaw a number of lasting changes however, including the shift from O-levels to GCSEs.

By most standards she was an effective education secretary, but was criticised for not having achieved more. Given the entrenched sectional interests in the sector and the parlous state of the government, particularly as the parliament wore on, this was unfair.

Whilst Roy Jenkins and several other frontbenchers resigned to campaign and vote in favour of membership, Shirley, along with Roy Hattersley remained on the front bench. It was a measure of Shirley's popularity in the party that much opprobrium was heaped on Hattersley, but much less on her.

SDP

In the 1979 election, lost by Labour in the aftermath of the Winter of Discontent, there was a particularly large swing against the government in northern Home Counties commuter seats, where the Conservative manifesto's promise to allow the sale of council houses to their tenants proved popular with the better off amongst their number. Stevenage was one of these seats and Shirley was out of parliament. She remained a member of Labour's NEC as the party adopted policies on Europe, defence, and internal party democracy with which she – and other moderates – strongly disagreed.

The catalyst for a break with Labour came in the form of Roy Jenkins' Dimbleby Lecture of 22 November 1979, made as he prepared to leave Brussels as president of the EEC Commission and contemplated a return to domestic politics. In it, he criticised the rigidity of British society and politics, called for 'more change accompanied by more stability of direction' and argued that this could be achieved by the 'strengthening of the radical centre'. The lecture stimulated discussions about a new centre-left party. Shirley's initial reaction (which came back to haunt her) was that such a party, would have 'no roots, no principles, no philosophy and no values'. But Jenkins had let a genie out of the bottle. Many people – not least a young Charles Kennedy – were inspired by his critique and his prescription. And it precipitated a period of intense discussion amongst those Labour MPs most dissatisfied with the party's direction about whether to take the plunge.

The Labour conferences of autumn 1980 and January 1981 proved the final straws. In the autumn, following the left's conference victories and Michael Foot's election as Labour leader (beating Denis Healey), Williams cut her links with her constituency. After the special January conference, which gave the unions an unprecedented 50 per cent stake in electing the party leader and which booed David Owen, the break became inevitable.

The following day at Owen's house in Limehouse, the 'Gang of Four' – Shirley, Jenkins, Owen, and Rodgers published the Limehouse Declaration, which echoed the Dimbleby Lecture themes and called for the creation of a Council for Social Democracy. An advert bearing 100 signatures of politicians and other centre-left luminaries was placed in *The Guardian* and literally tens of thousands of people signed up within days. The original intention had been to launch the new party – the Social Democratic Party – in the autumn. But the momentum was so great that the party was launched in March, with media interest and a surge of support which not only included Labour moderates and a small number of Conservatives, but also

drew in a large number of people drawn from the professional middle classes who were new to politics – the so-called 'political virgins'.

These were heady days, but it was impossible without fighting any elections to know what the voters made of it all. A chance soon presented itself with a parliamentary by-election, held in Warrington on 16 July 1981. Shirley was the obvious candidate. She was the most popular of the Gang of Four and, as a Catholic, was in a strong position to appeal to the constituency's large Catholic electorate. The candidacy was hers for the taking but she refused. She later wrote that 'I did not dither. I quailed.' In the event, Jenkins only lost the seat by 1,759 votes. Shirley might well have won it. As I saw at first hand, she established an easy rapport with voters in Warrington in a way which Jenkin's never could. He was respected, but she evoked affection. Shunning Warrington was probably her biggest political mistake.

Shirley might well have won it. As I saw at first hand, she established an easy rapport with voters in Warrington in a way which Jenkin's never could. He was respected, but she evoked affection. Shunning Warrington was probably her biggest political mistake.

Why did she quail? There were, certainly, several factors, but I have no doubt that a lack of a supportive partner was a major one. Having married philosophy don Bernard Williams in 1955, she was by now divorced. The other three members of the Gang of Four had hugely supportive wives, who provided emotional and practical support which Shirley completely lacked. The whole SDP venture had been draining as well as exhilarating. Without a partner to support her, the huge risk of Warrington was one which she just couldn't face on her own.

Another opportunity soon presented itself, however, and Shirley fought and won the Crosby by-election in November 1981, with a majority of 5,288. It proved, however, a short-lived triumph. Following boundary changes, she lost the seat in the 1993 general election by 3,401 votes. She never returned to the Commons.

From day one, a key challenge for the SDP was how to calibrate and manage its relations with the Liberal Party. Roy Jenkins was very comfortable about having the closest possible relations. David Owen bristled at the prospect. Shirley took a pragmatic view. She realised from the start that the two parties would have to work together and described the SDP as the 'heterosexual wing of the Liberal Party'. She had good relations with David Steel and the pair posed on the grass in Dean's Yard, Westminster, in the spring of 1981 to launch a joint policy programme, looking for all the world like a pair of starry-eyed newly-weds. At the autumn conference of the Liberal Party in Llandudno she, along with Jenkins, spoke at a wildly enthusiastic rally to help persuade the Liberals formally to support the Alliance.

Owen later accused Williams of never wanting the SDP to have a long-term independent future and to have secretly conspired for an eventual merger of the two parties from the start. This wasn't true. She did support a merger after the 1987 election, but that was far from her mind in 1981.

As a new party, the SDP operated with a collective leadership comprising the Gang of Four – each member taking a monthly turn to chair the senior committees and be primus inter pares. It didn't work well and, as soon as the party adopted a constitution, it elected a single leader. Shirley declined to stand, supporting Owen against Jenkins (who won). Instead she was elected as party president, a position she then held for the remainder of the party's independent life. In that position she chaired its National Committee and sessions of its thrice-yearly conference. She had influence – but was always the second most important figure in the party. When Owen became leader after the 1983 election, his opposition to closer relations with the Liberals and support for a more free-market economic policy was opposed by Shirley, but she could do nothing to prevent it.

After the failure of the Alliance in the 1987 general election to present a coherent national campaign (largely because of differences between Owen and Steel both on strategy and style) or to win a significant number of seats (a loss of one to a mere twenty-two) demands in the SDP to merge with the Liberals became unstoppable. A membership ballot was held, and the pro-merger side won by 57 per cent to 43 per cent – a clear but not overwhelming majority, largely because of the advocacy of Owen for continued independence. Shirley supported the merger, as did Jenkins and Rodgers, not least because she had seen the benefits of the de facto merger of the two parties in Cambridge, where she had just stood unsuccessfully for the Alliance.

The period from August 1987 to April 1988, when the merger formally took effect, was extremely unpleasant for all involved in the SDP at national level. The Owenites, though defeated in the merger ballot, had a majority of one on the National Committee (chaired by Shirley) and made every attempt to salvage what they could of the assets and branding of the party for their planned continuity SDP. Meanwhile, merger negotiations between the parties – centring on the drafting of a new constitution – were tortuous. Shirley played a constructive part in these, although nearly derailed them by proposing that the name of the new party should simply be the 'Democrats'. This

prompted a threat of a walkout by several Liberals including Alan Beith, on the basis that they were not prepared to be members of a party which didn't have the word 'Liberal' in the title. So we ended up with 'Social and Liberal Democrats' – an inelegant mouthful which was soon shortened to o the current 'Liberal Democrats'.

She chaired the final SDP conference in Sheffield in January 1988, showing her occasional ruthlessness by exercising to the full her right as chair to call speakers. She ensured that the least effective opponents of the merger spoke at the key points in the debate. The vote for the merger – though never in doubt – was duly carried by a large majority.

The Liberal Democrats

Out of Parliament and with no formal position in the newly formed Lib Dems, Shirley moved to the US as professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and apartheid, she championed the cause of democracy internationally and helped draft the constitutions of Russia, Ukraine and South Africa.

She received a peerage in 1993 and was leader of the Lib Dem group in the Lords from 2001 to 2004, becoming the third member of the Gang of Four to do so, succeeding Jenkins and Rodgers. She spoke with her usual passion and persuasion in the Lords, not least in seeking and achieving amendments to the Coalition's 2011 Health and Social Care Bill. But she regarded the Lords as an outdated, idiosyncratic institution (as indeed it is) and was much happier doing media performances, for which she remained in high demand.

She formally retired from the Lords in 2016 at the age of 85, having shown the first signs of physical and mental decline. She went out in style with a lavish party in the Commons' Speaker's House complete with concert pianist and laudatory speeches. But she immediately regretted it. Having had the party, however, the die was cast. This didn't deter her from being a regular visitor to the Lords, which usually involved an unannounced visit to my office where she invariably had a minimum of three ideas which, if implemented, would transform the party's fortunes, win the Brexit referendum or derail the government's Brexit plans.

Shirl the Pearl

A recitation of Shirley's tangible achievements in political office does not begin to tell the whole story of her contribution to British political life.

She had an infectious enthusiasm for political ideas and activity. She believed that politics was an honourable calling and passionately encouraged people – particularly young people and women – to take up a political vocation. She was a brilliant listener – head cocked, encouraging smile – and was willing to spend time discussing politics with anyone, anywhere, any time. Speaking from a public platform she brought conviction, sincerity, and enthusiasm. On radio and TV, she demonstrated the same qualities, making her a very frequent performer on flagship programmes such as *Question Time* and *Any Questions*.

She connected with people to a remarkable extent. People who met her by chance on the street or on a train felt that they could speak to her almost as if she was an old friend. Other

She chaired the final SDP conference in Sheffield in January 1988, showing her occasional ruthlessness by exercising to the full her right as chair to call speakers. She ensured that the least effective opponents of the merger spoke at the key points in the debate.

Peter Mandelson was concerned in the run-up to the 1987 election that Labour might come third behind the Alliance. With Williams as SDP leader, this fear might have been realised.

politicians with whom I've worked – particularly Charles Kennedy and Paddy Ashdown – had some of this instant recognition and rapport, but none of them could match Shirley. In the Alliance years, she became known as 'Shirl the Pearl' – a soubriquet which reflected this attraction and the affection which she invoked. Her charm and zest for life and for politics shine through her 2009 autobiography, *Climbing the Bookshelves*.

What was her secret? Part of it was that she liked to be liked and subconsciously tried hard to make people like her. Partly it was a genuine interest in people and their views. And partly it was a natural charisma, which like that of other charismatic leaders – Obama, Clinton, Mandela – is innate.

The downside of wanting to be popular, however, meant that she took on far too many engagements than the calendar allowed. She gained a reputation, deservedly, for often being late, as she tried to bend time to her calendar with predictable results. SDP staff developed the concept of 'Shirley time' and would often schedule meetings in her diary for fifteen or thirty minutes earlier than the real start time, simply to ensure that she arrived punctually.

But there was a further reason for this apparent disorganisation. Shirley, during the peak of her career, was a single mother, juggling running a household, bringing up daughter Becky and organising her own life with completely inadequate support. Until she remarried – her second husband was Dick Neustadt, a widowed Harvard academic and old friend – she had to carry the burden of personal and political decision-making entirely on her own shoulders. And unlike other members of the Gang of Four, and following the death of her trusted and shrewd aide John Lyttle early on in the life of the SDP, she lacked both a senior day-to-day political advisor and first-class administrative back-up.

This lack of support and the disorganisation which it engendered extended to aspects of her political performance. She rarely if ever had a prepared version of major speeches ready for distribution to the media in advance of their delivery. Indeed, her speaking notes were often an indecipherable mixture of typed text, crossings out and spidery handwritten additions, often inserted at oblique angles to the main text. The result was usually a passionate and inspirational speech for her live audience. But it had the media scrabbling with their shorthand.

If she had been a man, these issues wouldn't have mattered as much. We can all think of disorganised male politicians. But it was used as a stick to beat Shirley, which both rankled her and diminished her standing.

What ifs

With any politician, it's interesting to speculate what might have happened if only a different choice had been made at crucial points in their career. With Shirley, three stand out.

If she had been elected deputy leader of the Labour Party in 1976 instead of Michael Foot, would she have ever left the party? It is probable that she would not. The SDP, even if it had been established as an independent party (rather than Jenkins simply joining the Liberal Party), would clearly have been much weakened.

Second, if she had stood in Warrington and won, which she might well have done, would she have become leader of the SDP? I think that she would. The pressure for her to stand against Jenkins for the leadership would have been unstoppable. And in such a contest she would almost certainly have won. All the trauma about Ettrick Bridge and Jenkins' perceived weaknesses as leader during the 1983 general election would have been avoided, as would the futile and draining issues about seat selections during the 1883–87 parliament. And the Alliance would have presented a more united front at both the 1983 and 1987 general elections. Peter Mandelson was concerned in the run-up to the 1987 election that Labour might come third behind the Alliance. With Williams as SDP leader, this fear might have been realised.

And finally, if Shirley had had a strong marriage, such as the other members of the Gang of four did, during the main period of her political career, she would almost certainly not have developed to the same extent a reputation and indeed track record of disorganisation which dogged her. More importantly she would have enjoyed the benefits of a loving and fulfilling private life, which her later marriage to Dick Neustadt belatedly brought her.

Shirley Williams, like all of us, was a product of her time. The people and influences which shaped her political career were unique to that period. But her standout qualities of empathy, enthusiasm, and the belief that that political activity in support of a fair and tolerant society is a noble cause are timeless. And it is for these qualities for which she deserves to be remembered.

Dick Newby is Leader of the Liberal Democrat group in the House of Lords. He was formerly Chief Executive of the SDP, chief of staff to Charles Kennedy, Treasury spokesperson and Chief Whip in the Lords. Before the formation of the SDP he was an active Labour Party member.

Liberal pioneer

Kathryn Rix examines the life and political career of the first woman of any party to be formally accepted into the agents' profession.

'One of the most effective a Bertha Bowness Fischer, pio

IN 2020, THE Liberal Democrats added a new category to the awards presented annually at Liberal Democrat conference. This was the Bertha Bowness Fischer Award, conferred on a new member who had joined the party within the last year or two and who had shown outstanding energy and commitment to their new political home. But who was the woman in whose name the award has been established?

~

Bertha Bowness Fischer (1875–1920) was the first woman of any political party to be formally accepted into the agents' profession. On 18 February 1902, three days before her twenty-seventh birthday, she was admitted as a Fellow of the Society of Certificated and Associated Liberal Agents (SCALA), having passed its examination papers in both Registration and Elections – although passing either would have been sufficient to qualify her. Not until 1908 would another woman, Ellen Pocock, enter the ranks of professional Liberal agents by becoming a Fellow of the SCALA, and Fischer and Pocock were the only women to do so before 1918.[1] This achievement was made even more remarkable by the fact that women were excluded from the parliamentary franchise until 1918, and were not admitted to the comparable profession of solicitor until after 1919. There were no female members of the equivalent Conservative or Labour agents' organisations during this period.

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Fischer's pioneering status generated attention in the press, both close to her home in Southsea – the *Portsmouth Evening News* and the *Hampshire Telegraph* reported on her success as 'the first lady' qualified as a member of the SCALA – and further afield.[2] The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* featured Fischer under the headline, 'Novel professions for women. The lady Liberal agent'.[3] Using the press, census entries, India Office records and other sources, it has been possible to build up a picture of Fischer's life. As well as being a pioneering political organiser, she was an active and well-respected poor law guardian in Portsmouth, but ended her days in tragic circumstances on India's North-West frontier.

Fischer was born in India, where her family, who were of German origin, could trace their roots back to the 1750s. She was the fourth generation to be born there. Her great-great-grandfather, George Friedrich Fischer, came to India in 1753 to command troops at Pondicherry (now known as Puducherry). In 1759 he settled at Tranquebar (Tharangambadi), then under Danish control, but ceded to the British in 1845. Born at Tranquebar, Fischer's great-grandfather, George Fischer (1773–1812), had a brief military career before setting up in business at Cochin (Kochi) in 1797.[4] Cochin passed from Dutch to British control in 1814 and the Fischers developed ties to Britain. In 1823 George's younger son, Thomas James Fischer (1808–64) – Fischer's grandfather – joined the 4th regiment of the Madras Native Infantry, which was under the control of Britain's East India Company.[5] When he married his wife Louisa at the British ambassador's residence in Paris in 1837, he was listed as a resident of Topsham, Devon, but he continued his military career in India and had attained the rank of lieutenant colonel by the time of his death at Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappalli) in 1864.[6]

Fischer's father, Thomas James Henry Bowness Fischer (1838–1910), was baptised at Cannanore (Kannur) in 1839.[7] He followed in his father's footsteps, joining the 45th Madras Native Infantry as a second lieutenant in August 1857, shortly before this force passed from the East India Company's control to the British crown.[8] He transferred to the Madras Staff Corps in 1867.[9] In 1870, by which time

nd most welcome workers' oneering political organiser

he was a captain, he became the British consular agent at Karikal (Karaikal), then in French India.[10] The following year he married Fischer's mother, Henrietta Amelia Stevenson (1851–97), the daughter of a fellow officer in the Madras Native Infantry, at Tranquebar.[11] Fischer, born on 21 February 1875, was the younger of two daughters.[12] Although a press report gave her place of birth as Madras (Chennai), census records confirm that, like her older sister Henrietta Maria (1872–1957), she was born at Karikal.[13] Her father remained there as British consular agent until he retired from the army in August 1887 with the rank of colonel.[14] Fischer presumably spent at least part, if not all, of her childhood in India, although the details of her education are unknown.

In April 1888, when Fischer was 13, her parents left India for England.[15] At the time of the 1891 census, they, Fischer, her sister and two servants were living at the White House, Frant, East Sussex.[16] At some point before 1895 they moved to Southsea, near Portsmouth.[17] In November 1897, when Fischer's mother died, they were living at 'Elsinore', Waverley Grove, Southsea, but by the time of the 1901 census, they had moved to 25 Havelock Road, where Fischer was listed alongside her father, his young niece and two servants.[18] Fischer's sister had obtained her own professional qualification as a Queen's District Nurse and was living in Rochdale, Lancashire.[19]

A 'keen politician on the Liberal side', Fischer's father encouraged his daughters to take an interest in social and political affairs. After leaving school, Fischer 'began to study the social questions of the day, especially those concerning women'. She shared her father's Liberal views, although the first political meeting she attended, where she was introduced by a friend as a 'rabid Radical', was organised by the Conservative-supporting Primrose League. Fischer was inspired to take up public work after hearing a talk by Melie Stanbury, secretary of the Women's Local Government Society, at her first women's Liberal meeting.[20] Although excluded from the parliamentary franchise, by the late 1890s women made up 17 per cent of the local government electorate in England and Wales, and in 1900 there were 270 women sitting on school boards, 172 female district councillors and 1,147 female poor law guardians. Following the removal of the property qualification in 1894, 'women and working men flowed on to poor law boards'.[21] Fischer became one of them in April 1900, when, aged only 25, she was elected to the Portsmouth board of guardians, the ninth of ten successful candidates in the Southern ward.[22]

Re-elected as one of the 'progressive' candidates in 1903,[23] this time she took third place in the poll, indicating the recognition her diligent and energetic work had received.[24] Indeed, one former chairman of the board considered her 'one of the best of the Guardians of Portsmouth'.[25] Between April 1900 and March 1901 she had attended 151 out of the 224 board and committee meetings to which she was summoned.[26] Her election address in 1903, issued jointly with Mr W. J. Groves, noted that they had given 'much time and attention to the work', helping to achieve 'The Better Care and Training of the Children', 'Brighter and Better Conditions for the Aged and Infirm' and 'Labour for the *Genuine* Employed during the Winter Months'. This had been done without any need to increase the poor rate, despite increased demands for welfare provision during the Boer War.[27]

Fischer was particularly interested in the welfare of women and children, serving on the board's Children's Home Committee.[28] Like many fellow Liberals, she was anxious to promote temperance. She presided over Gospel Temperance meetings at Portsmouth's workhouse and pursued the same agenda at the

Fischer was inspired to take up public work after hearing a talk by Melie Stanbury, secretary of the Women's Local Government Society, at her first women's Liberal meeting.

Membership Roll of Districts

As reported to Secretary for Annual Meeting at Newcastle,
May, 1905.

Those marked * are Fellows, and hold Certificates.
Those marked † are Subscribers to Magazine.

EASTERN.

*†Belcher, W., Yarmouth
Brittain, W. H., Norwich
Burnip, J., Liberal League
†Clark, J., Spalding
Collings, O. C., Northants. N.
Cosford, A., Northants, S.
*†Cotchin, C., Beds. S.
Cozens-Hardy, S., Norfolk, N.
Davis, W. R., Horncastle, Lincs.
†Gilham, W. J., Gainsborough
*†Guyatt, J., Cambridge, W.
†Hames, H., Gainsborough
*†House, W., Cambridge, N.
*†Howe, A , Boston
Huckle, A., Sandy, Beds.
*Kirsop, J., Brigg
*Leeds, H., Lincoln
†Mouel, J.
*†Murton, W., Hunts., S.
†Oldman, A., Norfolk, S.
†Oldman, H. F., Norfolk, S.W.
*Parsons, J. A. Norfolk, N.W.
†Prentice, J.
†Price, T. H., Grimsby
*Raine, J. Hunts., N.
†Renshaw, T., Newmarket Div.
Riggall, F. S , Louth
Smithurst, R. A., Grantham
Sones, F. H., Stamford, Lincs.
*Standley, F W., Norfolk, Mid.
*Thorburn, W., Peterborough
*Winfrey, R., Peterborough

HOME COUNTIES.

*†Allard, W., Liberal League
*†Allcott, J., Guildford
*†Allgood, A., Fulham
Barley, A. G., Southampton
*†Baily, H., Hampstead
*†Barter, F., N.L.F.
*†Buss, A., City of London
*†Baum, F. C., E. Finsbury
Bear, B. W., Chatham
*†Bernthal, W., St. Albans
Brittain, F. C., Banbury
Brown, G., N. Herts.
*†Burley, W. C., E. Hants.
*†Burn, A. H., Battersea
Bynner, J. J., Sudbury
* Cathie, A., Camberwell
*†Cattermole, A., Eye
†Chester, E., Brighton
Childs, R. J., Watford
†Clarke, J., Home Counties L.F.
*†Clark, O., N. Islington
*†Clark, T. M., unattached
†Coward, W. S., Ipswich
Crook, W. M., Home Counties
*Crozier, W. E., Chichester
*†Daniels, Joseph, Horsham
*†Davison, Thomas, Kilburn
*†Downes, F. J., East Grinstead
Elkington, A., Lowestoft
*†Essery, A. G. Epsom
*Fellowes, Wm., Finsbury Park
Fidler, J. C., Newbury, Berks.
*Fischer, Bertha, Southsea
†Fitzpatrick, G. A., Holborn
†Ford, Will, Maidenhead
Galton, F. W., City of London
†Gathercole, G. Thetford, Suffolk
*Geake, C.

Membership list of Liberal agents – Fischer included lower right (*Liberal Agent* 41 (July 1905))

children's home through the Band of Hope.[29] She consistently voted against offering beer as a Christmas treat in the workhouse,[30] and also opposed a Christmas allowance for those receiving poor relief outside the workhouse, partly because 'in many cases … the money would go on beer'.[31] She 'strongly advocated women doctors',[32] and was involved with the Portsmouth branch of the National Union of Women Workers.[33] Hoping to make the board of guardians work more efficiently, she successfully raised the issue of a time limit on speeches at its meetings, complaining that 'lately the Board had suffered from an epidemic of long speeches … the longest speakers were those who did not speak closest to the subject'.[34]

Alongside this, Fischer was 'a most enthusiastic worker in the Liberal cause'.[35] The potential to harness women's voluntary labour for electioneering tasks such as canvassing in the wake of the restrictions on paid assistance imposed by the 1883 Corrupt Practices Act and the demands of an expanded electorate after the Third Reform Act of 1885 had encouraged the formation of women's Liberal organisations, which from 'a modest beginning' in the early 1880s had grown considerably by the end of the century. In 1904 the Women's Liberal Federation – founded in 1887 – had 496 affiliated Women's Liberal Associations, with a combined membership of 66,000 women.[36] Fischer was honorary secretary of the Southsea Women's Liberal Association. She did not, however, confine her activities to single-sex organisations, serving on the executive committee of the Portsmouth Liberal Association, as well as its ward and finance committees.[37] She attended selection meetings for the Liberal candidate for a by-election at Portsmouth in April 1900.[38] The Liberals won on this occasion, but lost both Portsmouth seats at the 'khaki' election later that year.

Reflecting on this defeat in a speech at Southsea on 'Women and politics', Fischer argued that 'there was much work to be done by women, and by Women's Liberal Associations, to awaken the right spirit'. She also commented 'in interesting and instructive fashion' on 'the temperance problem, the housing question and the conditions of labour'.[39] She regularly addressed the Southsea Women's Liberal Association, on topics ranging from 'Imperialism and Empire' to 'The work of the guardians'.[40] Unfortunately, press reports did not elaborate on Fischer's views on these issues, many of which were divisive and electorally challenging ones for the Liberal party. Given her firm anti-drink stance as a poor law guardian, it seems likely that she would have sided with the temperance lobby, rather than those party activists who raised concerns about the potential of this issue to alienate voters, while her own family's experiences would undoubtedly have informed her speeches on the theme of imperialism.[41]

One subject on which Fischer's opinions were reported in more detail was women's suffrage, of which she was, unsurprisingly, an advocate. She told a local debating society in December 1900 that 'women should bear a share in the government of the country, as they were becoming large wage earners and had a stake in the country'.[42] She was concerned, however, that 'if women do get votes there are very few who would know anything about registration', and thought they should go beyond the canvassing work usually assigned to them and 'learn more about the legal aspect of elections'. This prompted her to study registration

law and spend six months assisting with Liberal registration efforts at Hastings.[43] Local party organisations made a significant contribution to the work of electoral registration, checking the lists prepared by parish overseers, lodging claims to vote on behalf of their supporters, objecting to opponents' claims and sending representatives – usually the agent – to the annual registration courts at which revising barristers ruled on these claims and objections.[44]

Impressed by Fischer's abilities, the Hastings agent encouraged her to sit the examination held by the Society of Certificated and Associated Liberal Agents (SCALA).[45] Following the major electoral reforms of 1883–5 – the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Prevention Act, the Franchise Act and the Redistribution of Seats Act – which made the work of registration, electioneering and party organisation more demanding, local party associations increasingly turned from part-time solicitor agents to full-time professional agents.[46] On the Liberal side, these aspiring professionals had formed the Liberal Secretaries and Agents' Association in 1882, known from 1887 as the National Association of Liberal Secretaries and Agents (NALSA). It aimed to improve agents' status and provide professional education for this new breed of party organisers. Wanting to take this further and issue certificates of proficiency for agents, a break-away group from the NALSA formed the Society of Certificated Liberal Agents (SCLA) in June 1893. It held its first examination in February 1894. Papers on Registration and Elections tested would-be agents on questions ranging from the detailed technicalities of registration law to broader practical matters such as how to organise a by-election campaign.[47]

Fischer passed both papers not long after the NALSA and SCLA overcame their differences and merged as the SCALA in 1901. Agents could also qualify to join as Fellows on the basis of experience, or at the lower grade of Associate, but for Fischer, new to the profession, examination offered her the opportunity to demonstrate her abilities, irrespective of her gender. In 1895, the SCLA's examining board had discussed whether to accept women into the society, and resolved that 'women be not admitted members at present'. It reported to the annual meeting that 'applications had been made by women to become members but have been declined'.[48] The reasons for this were not elucidated, but when Fischer proved her merits by passing both of the SCALA's examination papers 'without difficulty' in 1902, no qualms seem to have been raised about making her a Fellow.[49]

Foulkes—Fischer.

Miss Bertha Fischer's marriage with Captain Howard Foulkes took place at the Portsea Parish Church on Thursday, July 20th. The choice of the date, it will be conceded, was a pretty compliment to the calling which Miss Fischer has adorned. It was well that she should select from the Registration Diary instead of choosing an ordinary and common-place day.

Miss Fischer has been the one Lady Member of the S.C.A.L.A. At the first attempt she won the Society's Certificate without difficulty. She has lately acted as Liberal Agent for Fareham Division of Hants, and would have been Surgeon-General Evatt's Election Agent if she had not abandoned politics for matrimony.

Miss Fischer has been one of the most effective and most welcome workers of her sex in the Liberal Party. When our only Sister leaves for India next month, she will be accompanied by the whole-hearted good wishes, as well as the esteem and regard of the Brotherhood.

A farewell Dinner was given Miss Fischer on July 10th, at the Hotel Florence, Rupert Street, W. Mr. Alfred Bass occupied the Chair and submitted the Toasts, three in number, in speeches that were lucid, high toned and commendably brief. Mr. Howard Mason proved to be in excellent voice; he rendered several acceptable songs. Mr. T. Davison sang "The Heart Bowed Down," and Mr. Tom Nuttall contributed a pathetic recitation, "Billy's Rose." Mr. A. O. Pipe brought the evening to a close by voicing an old favourite, "My Mother bids me bind my hair." The opinion was freely expressed that such an obedient son as Mr. Pipe would certainly rank as a pattern husband, given the opportunity.

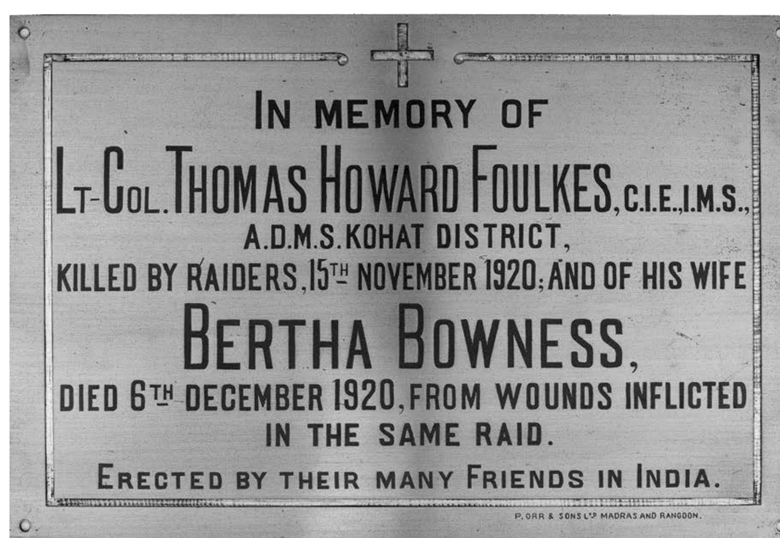
[And the Editor, a colleague of Sister Fischer in many a hard-fought battle, wasn't even invited ! ! !]

Tribute to Fischer on leaving the agents' profession (*Liberal Agent* 41 (July 1905))

Although it was not compulsory for agents to be SCALA members, Fischer's possession of a professional qualification undoubtedly proved an advantage in securing the post of Liberal agent for the Fareham (or South) division of Hampshire, an appointment which the *Liberal Agent* reported in January 1905.[50] She also had the benefit of some local knowledge, since the Fareham constituency adjoined Portsmouth. Fischer therefore became only the second woman known to have held a position as a constituency agent. The first, Ellen Pocock, had served as Liberal agent for the Strand division in London from around 1899, but did not become a SCALA Fellow until 1908. In the absence of any surviving records from the Fareham Liberals, the circumstances of Fischer's appointment are unknown, but it came just a few months after Surgeon-General George

Evatt (1843–1921) became the prospective candidate, suggesting that, as in other constituencies, the arrival of a candidate served as a stimulus to organisation ahead of an anticipated general election.[51] The Liberals, under the guidance of Herbert Gladstone as chief whip, were making particular efforts on this score in the run-up to the 1906 election.[52]

Evatt, who had stood unsuccessfully at Woolwich in 1886, made his first appearance in the Fareham constituency in April 1904. He was a long-serving and distinguished officer in the army medical service, and had been stationed for several years in British India, which gave Fischer the advantage of working with a candidate whose experiences and background were familiar to her.[53] The Liberals had never won the Fareham seat since its creation in 1885 and had left it uncontested in 1886, 1895 and at a by-election in 1903. Alongside their poor electoral prospects, the financial position of the local party does not seem to have been strong, since in May 1905 Rev. R. J. Wells wrote on behalf of the Fareham Liberal Association to W. M. Crook, secretary of the Home Counties Liberal Federation, to solicit funds from party headquarters in order to be able to employ a successor to Fischer, who was due to leave her post at the end of June.[54] At the 1906 election, Evatt was among the 169 Liberal candidates in England and Wales – many of them in unpromising southern English seats such as Fareham – who received a grant of money from Herbert Gladstone towards their election costs: in his case, £300.[55]



Fischer's career as a Liberal agent proved short-lived, as she left the profession to get married in July 1905.[56] This meant that she did not, as anticipated, act as Evatt's election agent, which would have been the first time a woman performed this role.[57] She had, however, undertaken many of the other key duties of an agent during her time at Fareham. Although she was no longer in post by the time of the autumn registration courts, she would have overseen much of the preparatory work of registration earlier in the year, drawing on the experience she had gained at Hastings. This would have included gathering information on potential Liberal voters who could be added to the register, as well as marking up the new electoral registers which were published in January, listing details of what was known about each voter, so that they could be invited to meetings, sent election literature and canvassed as appropriate. In the case of known Conservative voters, possibilities for objecting to their vote and striking them off the register would also have been considered. Given that the constituency had 17,398 electors in 1906 – 6,331 of whom voted for Evatt – the organisational and clerical tasks associated with registration and party organisation were significant.[58]

Fischer's work as agent also included promoting Evatt's candidature and general efforts at 'political education' on behalf of the Liberal cause. One means of doing this was by the distribution of Liberal leaflets and pamphlets and the display of posters. Some of these were used to promote the speaking tour of the constituency made by Evatt in January and February 1905, which was also advertised in the press.[59] Under the heading 'WAKE UP SOUTH HANTS', the *Portsmouth Evening News* in January 1905 listed eight dates and locations of meetings to be addressed by Evatt, and there was further promotion of the individual events.[60] Given the timing of this campaign, not long after Fischer's appointment, it is likely that the organisational initiative came from her, and as agent, she would have been responsible

Left:

Liberal Democrat party president Mark Pack confers the Bertha Bowness Fischer award for the first time, on Simran Meji at the autumn 2020 Liberal Democrat conference.

Commemorative plaque for Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Howard Foulkes and Bertha Bowness (Fischer), made by P Orr and Sons, from the Punjab Frontier Force Memorial Wall S10, 'Erected by their many friends in India', 1920. (© National Army Museum online collection)

for arrangements ranging from the placing of advertisements in the press to the booking of rooms for meetings. Fischer attended at least two of these meetings alongside Evatt.[61] At one of them, she was singled out for praise by Rev. Wells, who chaired the meeting, as 'a lady skilled in electioneering work … whose heart and soul were in the cause'.[62] If there was any opposition to a woman performing the duties of agent, it was not recorded in the press.

The reaction of Fischer's fellow agents also appears to have been largely positive. The *Liberal Agent*'s 'All About Agents' column reported the appointment of 'our only lady Fellow' as agent for Fareham alongside similar news from other agents.[63] In noting that this post came with an agreement that Fischer would serve as the election agent, the journal implicitly conveyed approval on her, since securing the right of the constituency agent to serve as the election agent – rather than this position being taken by a solicitor – was an important part of the agents' efforts to promote their professional status.[64] When Fischer left the profession, her colleagues gave her a farewell dinner at the Hotel Florence, Rupert Street, London, and the *Liberal Agent* paid tribute to her as 'one of the most effective and most welcome workers of her sex in the Liberal Party', declaring that 'our only Sister' had 'the whole-hearted good wishes, as well as the esteem and regard of the Brotherhood'.[65] Her services to the board of guardians and the Southsea Women's Liberal Association were recognised with wedding gifts of a bracelet and a silver salver.[66]

In turn, Fischer showed her 'kindness of heart' by inviting children from the children's home to her wedding to her cousin, Captain Thomas Howard Foulkes (1870–1920), at Portsea parish church, as well as sending a wedding cake to the home.[67] Her husband, known as Howard, was born in India, where his father, the Welsh-born Rev. Thomas Foulkes (1826–1901), had gone as a missionary in the late 1840s, subsequently becoming a chaplain in the Madras government service.[68] Having completed medical training at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, Howard Foulkes qualified in 1892, when he became a member of the Royal College of Surgeons. He joined the Indian Medical Service the following year and served in both civil and military posts. By the time he married Fischer, he had served not only in India, but also Burma and China, and become a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.[69]

The newly-weds departed for Madras, where Howard Foulkes had been serving as district medical and sanitary officer since 1899. In 1908 they moved to Vizagapatam (Visakhapatnam, also known as Waltair), where he took up a similar post and was also superintendent of the medical school and asylum.[70] Their only child, Constance Hilda Fischer, was born there in 1909.[71] Their peripatetic existence continued with Howard's appointment in 1912 as Durbar surgeon of Mysore state.[72] At some point they lived in Egypt, where Bertha Foulkes once 'had to stand and protect herself against seditious conduct'.[73] By then a lieutenant colonel, her husband returned to military service during the First World War, when it seems most likely that Bertha remained in India.[74] By 1920, still in the Indian Medical Service, Howard was assistant director of medical services at Kohat, then on India's North-West Frontier, but now in Pakistan. He was shot dead in a raid on the family's bungalow by Pathan tribesmen in the early hours of 15 November 1920. Shot in the arm and chest, Bertha was dragged away by their attackers, but released almost immediately when she became too weak to walk. Press reports praised her 'wonderful calm and pluck'. The dangers of life on the North-West Frontier were shown by the fact that the Foulkeses usually slept with revolvers under their pillows, but had not done so on this occasion.[75]

Sadly, Bertha Foulkes died of her injuries three weeks later on 6 December 1920.[76] Their daughter, who was uninjured, went to live with relatives in England.[77] Bertha and Howard Foulkes were buried at Kohat Church, where 'their many friends in India' erected a memorial plaque. This became part of the Punjab Frontier Force Memorial, which was relocated to England following partition in 1947. From 1951 the plaque to Bertha and Howard Foulkes was housed in the crypt of the newly dedicated Punjab Frontier Force Memorial Chapel at St Luke's Church, Chelsea, but it was given to the National Army Museum in 1998.[78]

Learning of their former colleague's plight, the members of the Portsmouth board of guardians paid tribute to her as 'an efficient lady on the board' and 'a most able woman'.[79] Bertha Fischer had been a trailblazer in 1902 as the first female professional agent. Her departure for India in 1905 left Ellen Pocock as 'the only woman political registration agent in the United Kingdom'.[80] Looking beyond the constituency associations, there were a small number of other female organisers on the Liberal side, such as Ivy Pretious of the Free Trade Union.[81] There were also cases of daughters who aided their fathers with political work: the *Liberal Agent* suggested that James Corrie's daughter, who assisted her father at the

By the time of the 1921 census – the first occasion on which 'political association officials' were listed as a separate category among the 'professional occupations' – there were 1,159 male and 243 female political association officials in England and Wales. Bertha Bowness Fischer's hopes that women would become more involved in registration and elections had been realised.

Northern Liberal Federation's offices, could easily qualify as a Fellow of the SCALA.[82] Taking a broader perspective, while Fischer's position within the formal structures of the Liberal Party organisation as a professional agent was highly unusual, her wider experiences – as a poor law guardian, a temperance supporter, an advocate of women's employment and an active Liberal association member – were symptomatic of the growing opportunities which women had for participation in public and political life, even before the extension of the parliamentary franchise to them in 1918 and 1928.[83]

However, despite the acceptance Fischer had received, allowing women into the profession remained a thorny question for the Liberal agents. In 1905 Maisie Rivers – demonstrating her own capabilities by deputising for her ill father as editor of the *Liberal Agent* – deemed it 'a well-known fact that *some* Liberal agents are not at all partial to admitting the "fair sex" into their ranks'.[84] This may have reflected the divisions within the profession over women's suffrage. When the SCALA overhauled its rules in 1910, it confined its membership specifically to 'persons of the male sex'. An attempt at the annual meeting to omit this alteration received only sixteen votes in favour from the ninety members present.[85]

This rule change overlooked the existence of the society's only current female member, Ellen Pocock, who had followed in Fischer's footsteps and qualified as a Fellow by examination in December 1908. Pocock does not seem to have known of Fischer's pioneering achievements, commenting in an interview about her registration activities in 1904 that 'I am the only lady who does this sort of work. It is extraordinary that others have not taken it up'.[86] By 1910, Pocock was able to report that 'there are a good many women engaged in this branch of political work in various parts of the country', although she believed she was 'the only one' who had defended her party's claims and objections in the registration courts.[87] The Liberal candidate for the Strand constituency, Leonard Costello, entrusted her with the responsibility of acting as his election agent in January 1910, the first known occasion on which a woman undertook this duty.[88] Pocock seems to have encouraged other women to take up political work, with a 'lady assistant' accompanying her to the 1913 registration courts.[89]

In 1914 Pocock successfully appealed to the SCALA's examining board to be reinstated as a Fellow. Citing the 1910 rule change, the Home Counties district, to which she had previously belonged – as had Fischer – had refused to allow Pocock to resume her membership after she missed subscription payments due to a change of address, despite her offer to pay the arrears. The examining board resolved, however, that the rule change should not be considered retrospective, and the SCALA therefore had a female member once more.[90] In the wake of partial women's suffrage in 1918, the society put its opposition to female political agents firmly behind it, not only admitting women as members, but honouring two of them – Mrs E. Smith, of East Dulwich, and Florence Morton, assistant secretary to the Yorkshire Liberal Federation – with biographical profiles in the *Liberal Agent* to mark the event.[91] By the time of the 1921 census – the first occasion on which 'political association officials' were listed as a separate category among the 'professional occupations' – there were 1,159 male and 243 female political association officials in England and Wales.[92] Bertha Bowness Fischer's hopes that women would become more involved in registration and elections had been realised.

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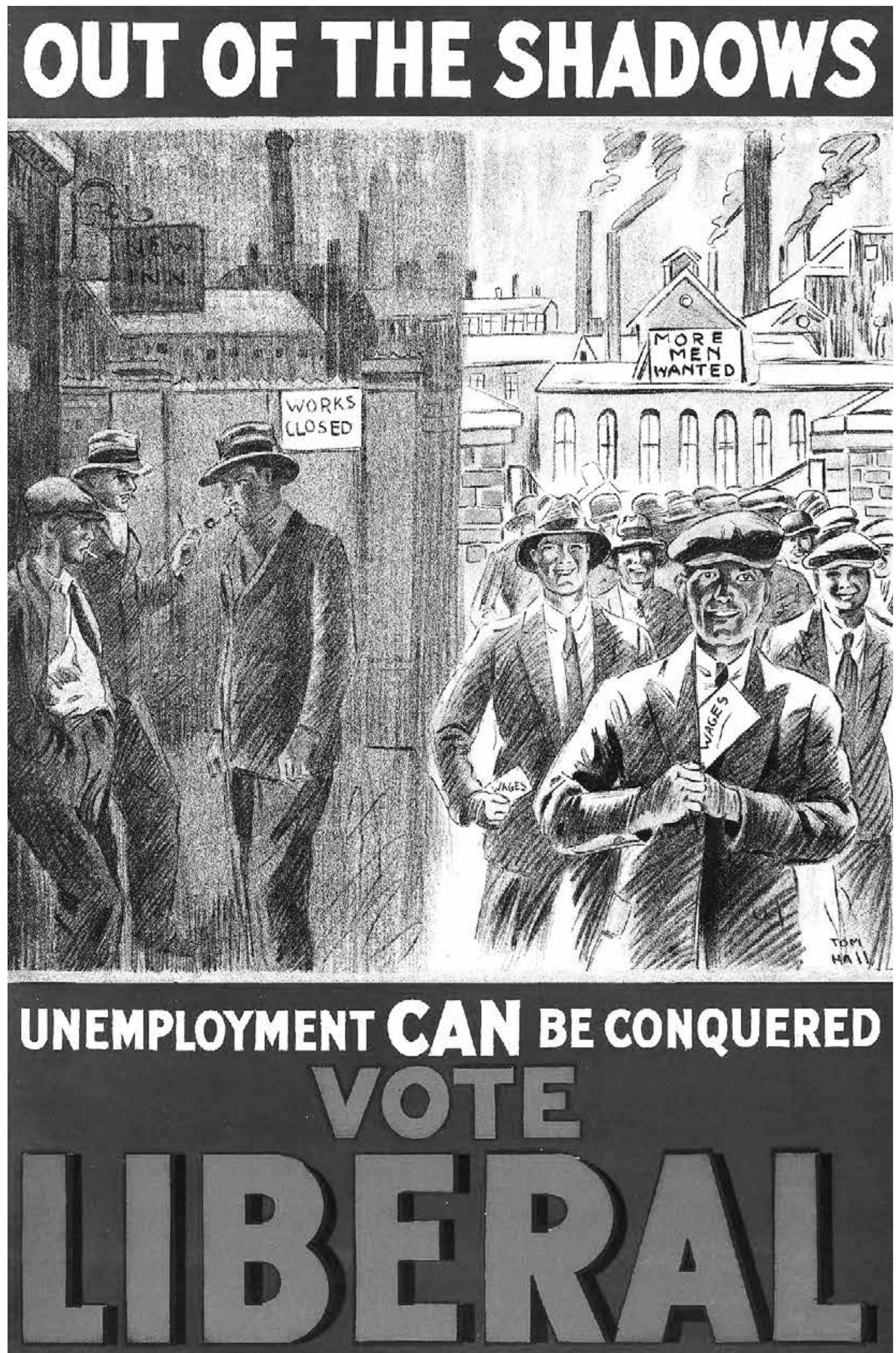
Liberal thought

Aaron Jacob examines the role the Liberal Summer Schools played in the electoral record of the Liberal Party in the 1920s.

Lloyd George, the Liberal Summer Scho



Liberal Party election poster, 1920s

ools and electoral politics in the 1920s

The history of the Liberal Party in the twentieth century is often characterised as being marked by decline and renewal.[1] The New Liberal victory in 1906 marked the high noon of twentieth-century Liberalism. Decline then followed in the inter-war period, reaching its nadir in the 1950s, before the tide turned towards the end of the century. Broadly speaking, this is the trajectory that historical scholarship tends to take as its backdrop. In particular, explanations for the decline – and precisely how, why and when it happened – often predominate, so much so that debate about the decline has 'tended to overshadow other issues relating to the history of British Liberalism in the Twentieth Century'.[2] This article does not seek to add to that corpus of literature: far too much analytical ink has been spilled on Liberal Party decline or downfall.

The Liberal Summer Schools (LSS) remain an underexamined area of Liberal Party scholarship. If the Liberals failed electorally between the wars, the same cannot be said of their intellectual impact. This erudite movement, brought under Lloyd George's aegis in 1925, sought to navigate a middle way between an unrestrained free market and a doctrinaire socialism. This movement has, however, been interpreted as an interlude in the inevitable Liberal decline: the party written off, notwithstanding its precocious understanding of 1920s industrial conflict. One of our key protagonists, Ernest Simon, set the tone for much of the debate that followed. He was clearly exasperated with the state of Liberal Party politics in the 1920s: 'What a party!' he declared, after only ten months of sitting in parliament. 'No leaders, no organisation, no policy! Only a summer school!'[3] Yet this interpretation imposes an unnecessary analytical straitjacket on the LSS which overlooks the part it played in shaping political and electoral outcomes in the late 1920s. As such, the author makes three key arguments in this article. Firstly, that this period in British political history provides an excellent vantage point from which to view the changing currents in Liberal thinking on economic affairs, as the First World War devastated both the cohesion of the Edwardian Liberal Party and the Gladstonian economic order which underpinned it. Secondly, that by examining the Liberal by-election revival between 1927 and 1929, the reader can see which strands of Liberal economic thinking were dominant when the Liberal Party was electorally successful. An examination that weaves between the national and local pictures will afford the reader an insight into how, why and when differing economic ideas held explanatory purchase in Liberal ranks during a period characterised by political flux. Thirdly, given the protagonists' belief that electoral alignment was fluid in an apparent three-party system, the author provides an analysis of the relationship between Liberal policy ideas, party politics and electoral politics.

Manchester and Cambridge: the Liberal Summer Schools

The First World War and its immediate aftermath fractured the Liberal Party so that it entered the 1920s disorganised and divided. The Lloyd George–Asquith split did not recede in peacetime, as Lloyd George continued to lead a Tory-backed coalition. After Lloyd George's fall from power as a result of the Carlton Club revolt in October 1922, the Liberal Party remained divided along these lines for the remainder of the 1920s. The brief let up in the schism within the party leadership, to defend free trade at the 1923 general election, simply masked the dearth of Liberal Party policy in the early 1920s.

Outside the contours of the Liberal Party, however, a new agitation sought a radical rethink of economic affairs. If the 'New Liberalism' was characterised above all as a form of 'welfare politics', in that it was microeconomic in nature, the First World War had illustrated that the state could successfully involve itself in economic life.[4] Keen to heed the collectivist lessons of wartime, Ernest Simon – businessman, Manchester councillor and director of the New Statesman – was the catalyst around

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which provincial industrialists and academics coalesced as they sought a sweeping change in intellectual direction. The Manchester Liberal Federation was used as the conduit through which they could lobby the Liberal Party hierarchy. It was met with immediate intransigence, however, by the National Liberal Federation (NLF), which had fallen prey to the caprice of the Liberal leadership since Gladstone's day.[5] The General Committee of the Manchester Liberal Federation initially sought a number of amendments to the central body, as they heeded the collectivist lessons of wartime: commitments were made to nationalisation of the coal mines, canals and the railways.[6] Yet the NLF, populated by those who clung onto Gladstonian platitudes, was unsure about this change of intellectual direction and instead settled for a nebulous resolution calling for increased public control over those three sectors 'if experience proves desirable'.[7] This pull-and-push of party politics did not deter the Mancunians, however, and Ramsey Muir, professor of Modern History at the University of Manchester, published his seminal *Liberalism and Industry*. This proposed a series of institutional reforms within industry: the encouragement of profit-sharing, the legal limitation on profits, industrial councils to fix minimum wages in all industries, and the experimental transfer of the coal mines and railways into state ownership. Muir conceived of the role of government as mediator between capital and labour. A special conference of the NLF in 1921 ultimately accepted the majority of Muir's proposals and it increasingly seemed that the parameters of Liberal economic ideas were being redrawn for the needs of the interwar world.

This redefinition of Liberal industrial policy led to the formation of the Liberal Summer School movement. Under the auspices of the Manchester radicals, this movement met at Grasmere in October 1921, but then settled for the more cerebral enclaves of Oxford and Cambridge thereafter. Michael Freeden has contended that the individuals who coalesced around the LSS 'had regressed in terms of intellectual ability and sophistication' in juxtaposition to New Liberal thinkers.[8] However, early in its formation, the decision was explicitly taken not to devise a formulaic, theoretical approach to the economy but instead to act as a vehicle for promulgating policy that addressed contemporary socio-economic issues. Freeden's supposition is based on a false premise.

Alongside the Mancunian businessmen, three Cambridge economists were central to the LSS: J. M. Keynes, Hubert Henderson and Dennis Robertson. The interchange of ideas between these three, in particular, afforded this change of direction a theoretical underpinning. It is the shifting patterns in Keynes' thought that provide a useful vantage point for examining particular facets of the Cambridge contribution to liberal economic thought in this period. The Cambridge contribution pursued macroeconomic stabilisation with two particular discretionary tools: monetary policy and fiscal policy. An active monetary policy assumed greater importance initially. Whilst writing his *Tract on Monetary Reform* in 1923, Keynes came to believe that modern capitalism simply could not withstand a volatile standard of value and thought that only an actively managed currency could stabilise prices. The Treasury, the Bank of England and the banking sector could even out the trade cycle between them, he believed. On the fiscal side, an active, large-scale, counter-cyclical public works programme also grew in salience in these years. Keynes spoke of the 'rut' that the economy was in, as unemployment remained around 10 per cent of the insured workforce. This, he said, required 'an impulse, a jolt, an acceleration' that would 'provide the stimulus which shall initiate a cumulative prosperity'.[9] In this way, the Victorian and Edwardian economic settlement of the Gold Standard and balanced budgets was not so much incrementally undermined as torn asunder, with a more domestically oriented approach to economic management creeping onto the political agenda. In certain quarters of the Liberal movement, the intellectual currents were shifting towards direct state involvement in the economy as the problem of the 'refractory million' of unemployed appeared insoluble within the intellectual parameters of classical economic theory.

This macroeconomic stabilisation was symptomatic of Keynes' view of the requirements of a mature, industrial economy such as Britain. In a 1924 lecture, 'The end of laissez-faire', and in the paper 'Am I a Liberal?', delivered at the 1925 LSS, Keynes asserted that the political and economic context had fundamentally changed since the nineteenth century. Considering the work of American economist John Commons, Keynes posited that Britain was moving into an era of stabilisation. Due to the growth of large firms and trade unions, the classical model of the economy was becoming an anachronism.[10] Keynes shared the traditional Liberal concern that these corporations might collude against the public interest but argued that such collusion could be avoided so long as they were brought into line by government.[11] He then outlined how any potential collusion

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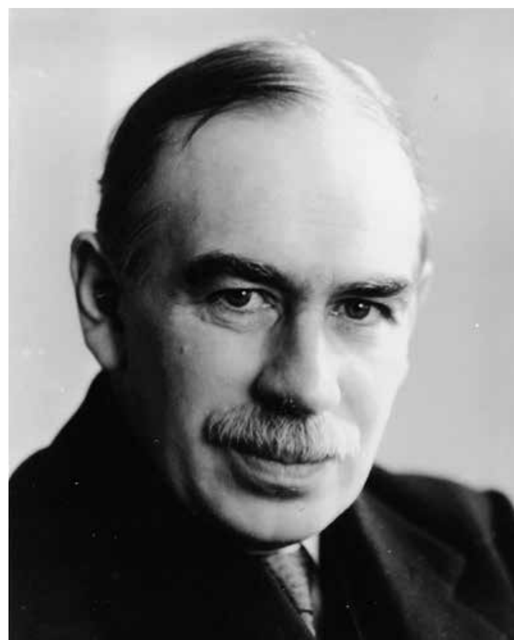
could be avoided. Firstly, government should incorporate corporate entities into the fabric of the state, with the state becoming just one, *primus inter pares*, in the hierarchy of corporations. Echoing the zeitgeist of the period, Keynes argued that the conventional public–private divide was no longer applicable because of the growth of intermediate institutions. These 'semi-autonomous bodies within the state', such as the 'universities, the Bank of England, the Port of London Authority' and joint-stock companies, were evidence of a new corporatism as these institutions were 'socialising themselves'.[12] Secondly, government should exercise a 'coordinated act of intelligence' over the economy, which concerned the coordination of savings and investment, to be achieved via currency and credit control.[13] As Peter Sloman has shown, these dual harmonising roles of government 'correspond loosely to the two strands of constructive Liberalism which existed during the 1920s, associated respectively with Manchester and Cambridge'.[14] Keynes provided the appropriate economic and historical context which underpinned these two circles of thought. He thereby illustrated why economic theory had to change, paving the way for detailed policy ideas to emerge.

Questions of price instability and the trade cycle, and those issues of industrial strife and unemployment which flowed from them, were at the heart of the LSS in the mid-late 1920s. Social justice issues were not entirely neglected, however. One of our key protagonists, Ernest Simon, had a long pedigree of seeking social justice and took a particular interest in inheritance rights, proposing a 'bold extension of taxes on inherited wealth'.[15] His interest in inheritance reform dovetailed with his vision of a wider diffusion of ownership, as he affirmed his support for that Liberal maxim which kept cropping up in the 1920s: the Liberal ideal, he said, was to have 'every worker a capitalist and every capitalist a worker'.[16] To realise these ambitions, he maintained his support for free markets but envisaged a more pervasive role for government in order to achieve increased wealth redistribution: 'it may', he said, 'be necessary for the State to provide the conditions under which private enterprise can function freely'.[17] Simon's view of a more proactive role for government meant that he was prepared to countenance its involvement in other areas too. In light of the failure of Lloyd George in coalition to build 'homes fit for heroes', as the combination of a slump, City interests and a vociferous Tory press put paid to Lloyd George's ambitions for a welfare capitalism, a



Liberal economists:

John Maynard Keynes, Baron Keynes (1183–1946)

Sir Hubert Douglas Henderson (1890–1952), by Lafayette, 1932 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

Sir Dennis Holme Robertson (1890–1963), by Walter Stoneman, 1939 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

housing policy was also urged.[18] The idea of a more active, muscular state was indicative of his view of an alternative, preferred socio-economic framework for Britain: 'we are perfectly willing that houses should be built municipally rather than they should not be built at all but our preference is always in favour of private enterprise and initiative, properly regulated by the State'.[19] A mediated position, a synthesis of public and private, a 'middle way': this view neatly captures the LSS balancing act. A comprehensive look at inheritance, wages and housing saw these issues as inextricably linked and Simon in particular proposed both practical policies and a different socio-economic framework to achieve more wealth redistribution.

It is axiomatic that the Liberal Summer Schools in the 1920s tackled a plurality of issues, as the conversation moved from high macroeconomic theory to the minutiae of social policy. The leitmotif which manifested itself time and again was the emphasis on the need for a framework for socio-economic stability under which individual dynamism could flourish. The absolutist vision of the state associated with Labour was rejected as was the inequality and instability associated with interwar capitalism and the Conservative Party. As they sought to address the underlying symptoms of a wider socio-economic malaise, the LSS used adjacent concepts of certainty, individual dynamism and social reform to surround its liberal core. This required an enquiring, experimental and elastic liberalism. Importantly, against a backdrop of Bolshevism abroad and socialism at home, these debates signified a serious attempt to provide alternative answers to the problems of the 1920s British economy and society. The Liberals were finding their way towards a managed capitalism as the vicissitudes of the 1920s disrupted those economic norms in Britain that Liberals had known and understood since the days of the 'Grand Old Man' at the Treasury. The Victorian conception of society was receding quickly as a more 'communitarian' conception sought to use the state almost as powerfully as it had been deployed during wartime.

The return of Lloyd George

The Liberal Party under the auspices of Lloyd George began to rebuild. With his cash, charisma and chutzpah, the Liberal Party set to work on a series of policies that sought to radically alter British political economy. His own perception of the difficulties of 1920s Britain was that socialism, or its more radical sibling, Bolshevism, was a grave threat to the 'whole order of society'.[20] This was the macro-theme of the 1920s, as the Russian revolution abroad and industrial strife at home seemed a harbinger of revolution on British soil. Ross McKibbin has, moreover, shown that class became the 'dominant variable' in political affiliation in the interwar period, to which Edwardian political cleavages were subordinate: 'What primarily determined political allegiance was ideological-sociological identification: a sense among voters that their party stood for the world as they understood it and wished it to be'.[21] The Liberals knew that they had to radically reshape their electoral offering in light of the enfranchisement of the working classes, lest they be tempted by socialism or communism. Despite the attempts of the Asquithian elite, it was to this end that Lloyd George sought to re-orient the Liberal appeal away from the traditional middle-class base that had been their core constituency in the Edwardian period.[22]

The Liberal economic tradition was one of adaptation to the environment and circumstances that the party found itself in. Andrew Gamble has correctly highlighted the leitmotif in Liberal policymaking as 'the constant relating of economic issues to the party's political and electoral strategy'.[23] The electoral power of positive policy proposals had, of course, been central to Liberal Party ethos since Newcastle in 1891, and the 1920s were no different. Lloyd George confirmed at the 1927 Summer School that acquisition of office was futile unless it was 'to carry out a definite programme of work which the party has devoted its years of leisure to thinking out and planning'.[24] It was to this very task that Lloyd George set himself; as Charles Masterman, who worked closely with Lloyd George on pre-war social reform, confessed, 'I've fought him as hard as anyone … but when Lloyd George came back to the party, ideas came back to the party'.[25] It was in this milieu, as Lloyd George made one final push for power, that the LSS became his think tank as he chased the chimera of a managed capitalism that had eluded him in office.

There were early synergies between Lloyd George and the LSS. Lloyd George's *Coal and Power*, also known as the *Brown Book*, drew upon ideas captured at the 1923 LSS which suggested that the state ought to nationalise coal royalties and grant leases on the premise of effective rationalisation and involvement of the miners. However, it was the subsequent publication which really cemented the partnership between Lloyd George and the LSS. Rural radicalism remained part of Lloyd George's armoury: 'Whatever happens we must

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strengthen our grasp on the rural districts'.[26] From his time as chancellor with the People's Budget to his lamenting to C. P. Scott, upon falling from power, that 'the real ground of attack is the Land', Lloyd George consistently emphasised the relationship between a positive land policy and electoral success, placing him firmly in the radical Liberal tradition of Henry George.[27] Running to almost 600 pages, the *Green Book*, published two years later, was comprehensive and its proposals complex.[28] It envisaged the nationalisation of land that would give the tenant farmer security of tenure subject to 'good cultivation', to be adjudicated upon by the county agricultural authorities. Similar to the proposals for the coal industry, it was believed that the state could provide much needed certainty and stability in turbulent market conditions yet would be detached from the production process. A bifurcation began to emerge in Liberal ranks, though, as the likes of Hilton Young and industrialist Alfred Mond defected to the Tories over what they saw as socialist policies. The ideas associated with the LSS were manifest in this document, as Lloyd George continued to manoeuvre his way back onto the centre of the political stage.

Soon after the general strike of May 1926, the LSS was brought firmly into Lloyd George's orbit. It was the industrial problem to which his attention now turned. Lord Lothian had been urging him to address the issue for some time: 'There is not the slightest hope that the perpetual battle between capital and labour ever coming to an end under the present system'. He was clearly frustrated with his old boss: 'Why on earth do you never come near the problem? The whole country is waiting for a lead'.[29] It was to this end that Lloyd George set up the Liberal Industrial Inquiry and furnished it with £10,000. The consequent *Yellow Book* was a synthesis of the ideas of both Cambridge and Manchester, enhanced by the expansionist instincts of Lloyd George.[30] Freeden is right to contend that 'the result of the Yellow Book was to incorporate state interventionism decisively within liberal ideology as no document has ever done before'.[31] The micro proposals considered industrial democracy a panacea for industrial conflict: works councils, trade boards, Whitley councils and encouragement of profit-sharing. The macro proposals also envisaged some institutional solutions: a Board of National Investment to issue bonds and coordinate investment at home, greater public control over the Bank of England and the use of an active credit policy by manipulating interest rates. A programme of national development offered this programme the immediacy and relevance it craved: unemployment could be tackled by an unprecedented programme of public works comprising slum clearance, house building, electrification and road construction. This document encapsulated the main strands in liberal economic thinking over the previous decade, combining institutional reform with a nascent resolution to the unemployment problem and the economic cycle.

These dense and complex policy programmes were hardly ideal electioneering weaponry. An election campaign required panache, vim and a dose of Lloyd Georgian demagoguery. After rejecting two versions of a manifesto forwarded to him by Lord Lothian, Lloyd George was adamant that 'it must somehow or other create the impression that Liberalism alone has got the message that will lead the land out of its present difficulties.'[32] Something a bit snappier was required and the 'pledge' was the answer. Two months before the 1929 general election, Lloyd George asserted that, if returned to power, the Liberals had schemes of work to put in place 'immediately', which would reduce unemployment to 'normal proportions' in one year without adding a single penny to local or national taxation.[33] The *Orange Book* explained that this would be done with a £250,000,000 programme of loan-financed public works, which received the imprimatur of Keynes and Henderson in their pamphlet, *Can Lloyd George Do It?*[34] That the 1929 general election failed to produce the anticipated Liberal electoral dividends is well known. What remains to be explored, however, is the relationship between Liberal policymaking, party politics and electoral politics in the Liberal by-election revival from 1927 to 1929.

Party reactions

It has been doubted how original these ideas were. The debate centres around precisely who was the progenitor of the 'Middle Way' movement in the interwar period. Booth and Pack, for example, argue that the Liberals in the 1920s were 'still firmly rooted in the orthodox view of the economy to which was added an array of practical and utopian reformist ideas' and they are juxtaposed with Harold Macmillan and the Conservative Planners.[35] Stewart Faulkes, however, disagrees and views the LSS as the true instigators of the 'Middle Way', as they built a viable pathway between an untrammelled free market and a doctrinaire socialism.[36] Ultimately, though, such post hoc judgments about which political grouping was the most innovative in the interwar years do little to aid

Lloyd George increasingly set the political agenda. After he launched his land proposals at Killerton in September 1925, both of the other parties responded rapidly.

our historical understanding of these policy proposals. This debate pays scant attention to, and does not take account of, the political consequences of these policy departures. Yet contemporary impressions and responses, as demonstrated by the policy reactions of other parties, the press reaction and electoral results, were central to the path-dependent nature of policymaking in interwar Britain. Indeed, others such as Philip Williamson even argue, rather cynically, that the primary reason for Liberal policy construction in these years 'was perfectly straightforward – to regain the balance of power in the House of Commons'.[37] Whilst this latter point may be a mischaracterisation, the above debate, in this way, disregards the contingent nature of economic policymaking and artificially elevates the economic debate above the political process. Particularly for the Liberal Party, the political outcome of policymaking was invariably more important than the policies themselves and it is that outcome which concerns us here.

Lloyd George increasingly set the political agenda. After he launched his land proposals at Killerton in September 1925, both of the other parties responded rapidly.[38] Both Labour and the Tories held their annual party conference between Lloyd George's Killerton speech and the publication of the Liberal *Green Book*. A meeting at the Labour conference concluded a particular resolution on agriculture but, prior to debate, MacDonald personally intervened and persuaded conference to avoid announcing any new policy until Labour's experts had settled on a rural programme. When these proposals appeared in 1926, they bore a strikingly similarity to the *Green Book*. They proposed land nationalisation by vesting the freehold in the state with county agricultural committees providing for long-term land improvements and special boards fixing farm workers' wages. The Tory conference, equally, accepted a resolution 'calling on the government to make … a definite statement on agricultural policy, to carry such policy into effect forthwith, and with a view to the fullest use of the land for production of food and employment of labour'. The significance of this was that, as Roy Douglas points out, not only were Conservative conferences loath to criticise their own governments but this resolution was moved by a delegate from the prime minister's constituency.[39] Government action quickly followed as it brought forward the Small Holdings and Allotments Bill. It appeared that the legislative landscape was being shaped by Lloyd George's rural radicalism.

The Tories in particular were concerned about a rejuvenated Lloyd George more generally in the 1920s. After dispensing with his services in October 1922, the Conservatives viewed this debauched opportunist as a constant thorn in their side, who, with his cash and chicanery, threatened to derail their chances of absorbing the anti-socialist vote. This was, of course, the all-important Conservative strategy in the 1920s.[40] Stanley Baldwin's House of Commons room became a venue for designing a potential response to Lloyd George: 'Sir Samuel Hoare suggested that it was desirable to get up-to-date on the subject of land taxation, in view of the probability that the matter would be taken up in the autumn by Lloyd George'.[41] They were simply unsure as to how to combat the man:

> Conference discussed what steps should be taken with reference to the campaign which would probably be undertaken by the Liberals on the subject of taxation of land values and kindred matters; the question being whether the Unionist party should have an active policy … or should restrict themselves to opposition of Liberal proposals.[42]

The Conservatives often conflated personality and policy, in what was a recurring theme throughout the 1920s: they were as uneasy about the policies of the 'Welsh Wizard' as much as the unpredictability of the man. As Lord Morgan has correctly highlighted, whether by action or reaction, the 1920s were the 'age of Lloyd George'.[43]

Whilst sending shockwaves throughout the political system, Lloyd George's series of policies received considerable support from Liberals across Britain. Ross McKibbin has argued that the *Yellow Book* and the unemployment pledge were merely personal initiatives of Lloyd George to which the Liberal Party as a whole was only weakly committed. McKibbin argues that disgruntlement with Lloyd George's leadership reflected the fact that the Liberals contested the 1929 general election 'on a programme neither the majority of its voters nor its MPs believed in', and the 'fundamentally anti-socialist' view of most MPs and activists meant that 'the representative Liberal leader' was actually Sir John Simon.[44] However, this view is at odds with the evidence. The Welsh National Liberal Federation 'rejoiced at the fine Liberal spirit which animates the [industrial] report and in its enthusiasm for social betterment, holding out hope for a recognition of the rights of all … in industry'.[45] The Home Counties Liberal Federation was equally enthused

by the changed emphasis in Liberal economic policy. Throughout the 1920s, the federation passed resolutions calling for profit-sharing and co-ownership, the abolition of the slums via the 'active co-operation' of local authorities and private enterprise in the 'speedy' production of homes and approval of both the rural and urban land reports.[46] In Norwich, too, middle-class Liberals welcomed Lloyd George's return to the party and his platform at the 1929 general election in particular.[47] Mr Rewcastle, Liberal candidate in Kettering, speculated on the electoral consequences of a rejuvenated Liberalism, 'the Liberal unemployment policy will sweep this country'.[48] Manchester, perhaps unsurprisingly, was also a stronghold where the 'pledge' was advocated vociferously. Each election address in 1929 contained the proposals to tackle unemployment: Philip Oliver, contesting Blackley, gave a succinct summary of the multiplier, a principal tenet of the policy: 'the works will bring employment not only to those directly engaged upon them, but to countless others in subsidiary industries. The purchasing power of the people will be increased.'[49] Further north, Fred Martin, Liberal candidate in Central Aberdeenshire, spoke of the 'immense advantage' of a national development policy and the virtue of works councils in inducing confidence in industry.[50] Additionally, the Women's National Liberal Federation showed consistent support for the full gamut of Lloyd George's ideas. Its Executive Committee in 1928 celebrated the *Yellow Book* as 'an achievement of which all Liberals are justly proud' and they 'acknowledge that a real contribution has been made to economic thought'.[51] This is significant because, as Pat Thane has shown, the Women's National Liberal Federation claimed 100,000 members in 1928 and its membership was spread across Britain.[52] Furthermore, an analysis by E. A. Rowe has shown that all Liberal candidates mentioned unemployment at the 1929 general election, 79 per cent of them gave it special emphasis and 52 per cent of Liberals mentioned Lloyd George's pledge directly, whilst 37 per cent emphasised that the Liberal plans were 'detailed' and 'expert'.[53] Indeed, as Sloman correctly argues, 'a clear majority of Liberal activists and MPs rallied behind Lloyd George in the period 1926–1929'.[54] The evidence presented here lays out a kaleidoscopic picture of a Liberalism converging on Lloyd George's radicalism across much of Britain in the late 1920s.

The following analysis will focus on the campaign issues and subsequent interpretation of results in the Liberal by-election victories between 1927 and 1929, when the Liberals succeeded against the other parties. This is for two reasons. Firstly, success at the expense of the other parties gives the reader the opportunity to see which strands of Liberal economic thinking were dominant when the Liberal Party was electorally successful. An analysis which weaves between the national and local pictures will afford the reader the benefit of observing how, why and when differing economic ideas held explanatory purchase in Liberal ranks in a period characterised by political flux. Secondly, when it seemed to the protagonists that electoral alignment was fluid in an apparent three-party system, what follows is a microcosm into the relationship between Liberal policy ideas, party politics and electoral politics. Michael Hart has argued that, by 1924, the Liberals were 'eliminated as a potential Government' and that the by-elections in this period masked the actual strength of the Liberal Party.[55] Hart suggests that the constituencies in which these by-elections occurred overstated the strength of the Liberals vis-à-vis the Labour Party. In the thirty-seven by-elections between 1927 and the general election, only three seats displayed an increase in the Liberal vote of more than 10 per cent whilst three saw a decline on 1924. Importantly, Hart argues that Labour 'continued to show that, although its support in rural England was slight, it was sufficient to preclude a Liberal revival' because in three by-elections (St Ives, Cheltenham and Tavistock), Labour intervened to contest seats that they had not contested in 1924 and the Liberals won only one, at St Ives. Yet this post hoc judgment does not appreciate or acknowledge the shifting dynamics involved in electoral politics nor does it vitiate the expectations that arose from the Liberal electoral success in these by-elections. By May 1928, Lloyd George hoped for 100 or 120 MPs and by April 1929, he hoped for 80 to 100.[56] Even Sir John Simon, an Asquithian traditionalist, expected the party to win around 5 million votes at the next general election.[57] The Liberal press tended to agree, as Garvin argued that the Liberals could capture the parliamentary balance of power by winning 'well over a hundred seats'.[58] The key point for our purposes here is that our protagonists *believed* that they were operating in a contestable market and they did not appreciate the harsh realities of the first-past-the-post electoral system as Labour steadily cemented itself as the opposition to the Conservative Party in the duopoly of British politics.

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The by-election revival

Southwark North was wrested from Labour in March 1927. Local circumstances predominated

here, as the Labour MP resigned because of Labour's stance towards China. Haden-Guest believed that Labour's policy 'would have exposed our nationals in Shanghai to very grave peril', which would have been akin to 'intervention in the Chinese Civil War'. This would have contravened Labour Party policy, agreed at conference the year before.[59] Elements of the Tory press, notably *The Scotsman*, believed this to be Labour's loss and not a Liberal gain.[60] Even the Liberal press were inclined to interpret the campaign in this way.[61] Lloyd George tried to introduce his new economic thinking: 'We are fighting for the right of the community to make the best use of the resources of the land'.[62] This tried to build on the unsuccessful campaign at Leith just weeks beforehand where the Liberal candidate there extolled the virtues of the land policy. This was difficult in Southwark, though, as the Liberal candidate, Edward Strauss, was a keen free trader and stood on a Gladstonian platform.[63] The Liberals were picking up political momentum though, as *The Economist* suggested: 'Leith and Southwark are noteworthy. If they do not justify paeans of rejoicing in the Liberal camp, they do at least provide a tonic to the new party organisation'.[64] Electoral victory shifted the political focus onto the Liberal Party.

Bosworth came next. This constituency seemed fertile terrain for a thorough exposition of the new interventionism. Its electorate was mixed: partly agricultural, partly industrial. The Tories tried to make the Trade Dispute Bill the focal point of the campaign and the Liberals found themselves dancing to the Tory tune. On Lloyd George's visit to the constituency, he made it clear that he and the Liberal candidate, Sir William Edge, would strive to restore the seven-hour day for miners and defeat the Trade Disputes Bill.[65] Importantly, the Liberal candidate did support both the *Green* and *Brown Books* and Liberal luminaries such as Sir William Acland and Sir Archibald Sinclair held a score of meetings on the *Green Book's* proposals.[66] The division in Liberal economic thought was clear, though, in how Liberals interpreted their own victory: it was at once a call for retrenchment and for further state intervention. Sir James Pratt, former Liberal MP, for example, was unsurprised by the Liberal victory given that there had previously been 'no attempt at national economy'.[67] The *Biggleswade Chronicle* saw Liberalism in the same terms:

> These triumphs … demonstrate beyond doubt that Liberalism is still deep-rooted in the hearts of people who populate the English countryside … Liberal leaders would do well to concentrate on the old-time slogan: 'Peace, Retrenchment and Reform'. Nothing is more needed in England today than peace and retrenchment.[68]

Gladstonian policy had an enduring appeal in Liberal ranks across parts of the country at this time, as Lloyd Georgian prescriptions for state intervention had not percolated through to all places and to all Liberals.

A second Liberal victory in quick succession seemed a harbinger of things to come. Herbert Samuel's revamp of party machinery coincided with these by-election victories. He detected general election victory, as he told Edwin Samuel: 'There is now a feeling of buoyant optimism … there is a growing feeling in the country that we shall dominate the next Parliament'.[69] The *Northampton Mercury* unknowingly proclaimed that 'ministers are profoundly disturbed by the Bosworth result'.[70] As the political momentum now appeared to be with the Liberals, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin responded with alacrity as he sought to equip the Conservatives with constructive proposals for the remainder of the parliament and the next election. It fell to Sir Laming Worthington-Evans to design a programme.[71] Arthur Steel-Maitland clearly viewed the agricultural issue as fertile ground on which to conduct a policy battle with Lloyd George: to capture the rural vote, he said, 'what is particularly needed is something to make the farmers in this disastrous year feel that they are not forgotten. A good year may make a huge difference.'[72] Increasingly anxious, they were determined not to be outflanked amongst rural voters, whom they considered to be their natural constituency, an 'important part of the party's ethos and identity'.[73] It is clear that in the aftermath of electoral victory at Bosworth, a narrative developed that Liberal policymaking lead to Liberal electoral success, irrespective of the centrality of the policy in the campaign itself.

After failing in the Northampton and Faversham by-elections in early 1928, Lancaster provided an opportunity for redress. The Liberals that coalesced around Lloyd George believed that the failure at Northampton and Faversham was due to the failure to present Lloyd George-style interventionism. The Liberal candidate, however, had other ideas: he actively recoiled from the new policies and called for retrenchment and peace abroad.[74] This by-election ultimately triumphed on personality, as Lloyd George successfully defended the allegations

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against him by Lord Ashton, a former Liberal grandee. Again, both factions of the party claimed victory as their own: Vivian Phillipps, on the Asquithian wing, asserted that victory was affirmation of a Liberalism which stood for 'peace abroad, industrial peace at home, reduced taxation and freedom of trade'[75] whilst the *Burnley News* attributed the result to the *Yellow Book*.[76] More significantly, however, Labour clearly believed that Lloyd George was making the political weather and, shortly after the result, launched concrete agricultural proposals such as national purchasing boards to keep imported wheat prices stable. Policy generation dovetailed with personality to create a narrative and impression which by-elections seemingly confirmed.

Notwithstanding the kaleidoscopic picture painted above of a Liberalism converging around Lloyd George's radicalism in these years, the South West remained a bastion of the old Gladstonian Liberalism. The Liberalism of Devon and Cornwall was particularly prone to the rallying cry of 'Peace, Retrenchment, Reform'.[77] The St Ives by-election in March 1928 thus seemed particularly inauspicious for the coterie of Lloyd Georgians and so it proved to be. In Hilda Runciman, the Asquith-supporting Liberal Council had an ideal candidate to promote a Liberalism that was the antithesis to LSS-inspired state interventionism. Mrs Runciman did not mention the *Yellow Book* despite its recent publication and her husband actively disavowed the *Green Book*. Retrenchment was the issue put forward most forcefully by the Liberals; as the *Manchester Guardian* explained, 'Vivian Phillips, like everybody else here, is making economy the cornerstone of the Liberal case'.[78] St Ives was, furthermore, steeped in Nonconformity in the 1920s and it was in the South West in particular that religion remained a dominant socio-political cleavage. The *Church Times* was correct when it said that 'she won the seat for the old Liberalism which Lloyd George dislikes but which clearly appeals to a Cornish constituency where Wesleyan Methodism is still a political factor'.[79] Despite this division, they were still winning, the 'pulses and arteries of Liberalism coursing with a new vigour'.[80] It appeared to outsiders as if Liberalism still mattered.

The Liberals were offered many opportunities to cement this appeal in a number of by-elections in March 1929 with a general election right around the corner. In a mostly rural constituency, the Eddisbury by-election provided an unrivalled opportunity to espouse the virtues of the *Green Book*. The Tories successfully castigated the Liberal programme as 'nationalisation in disguise', drawing on the themes of bureaucratisation and surveillance that had consistently been levelled against it.[81] Even Lloyd George opted for a non-partisan approach to agriculture.[82] As the campaign went on, any proposal of state-engineered recovery for agriculture receded and reliance upon market forces crept back into the Liberal policy platform. The recently launched unemployment policy fared no better. The Liberal candidate was uneasy over a policy designed for urban Britain and local Liberal magnate, Lord Stanley, openly doubted the wisdom of an unemployment policy. Instead, he thought, 'there must be more individual effort on the part of the people themselves. To tell people that you can remedy all difficulties by legislative action is to make promises that you cannot fulfil'.[83] It seemed that Cheshire Liberalism, similar to that which obtained in the South West, was shaped by its bucolic character and was at once hostile to and sceptical about a panacea seemingly designed for urban Britain. The Liberal press, however, trumpeted this success as an endorsement of Liberal interventionist ideas, as criticism of the government and praise of constructive programmes were deployed in equal measure. The *Western Morning News* thought that the Liberal unemployment policy 'captured the imagination of the country' whilst the *Burnley News* asserted that this result 'proves' that the 'electorate in town and country are heartily tired of this Government'.[84] The Liberals were manifestly intoxicated with their own success as the failure in East Toxteth before Eddisbury was held by the *Manchester Guardian* to be a 'reflection of the rise which has taken place in Liberal stock since Lloyd George launched his unemployment plan'.[85] By-election success was viewed as clear affirmation that Liberal policy was popular, pragmatic and pertinent amidst persistent unemployment.

Holland-with-Boston arrived the next day and Lloyd George's unemployment 'pledge' was all-consuming. The Liberal candidate fully endorsed the 'pledge', but Lloyd George remained the subject of ignominy. The *ad hominem* attacks came thick and fast from both sides. On the Labour side, J. H. Thomas said that it was 'useless for Lloyd George to talk in his slipshod way when he knew perfectly well that he would not be called on to redeem his pledges'.[86] On the Conservative side, Arthur Steel-Maitland said the 'pledge' was 'not possible, but even if it were, it would be no cure'.[87] The Asquithian elite continued to press for free trade and retrenchment, most notably by Walter

The Liberal by-election revival of 1927 to 1929 was an opportunity to appeal to the electorate with this new, radical economic thinking. Notwithstanding the campaign difficulties and differences due to Liberal Party infighting, the Liberals continually built political momentum in this period and it was in the reaction of the press and the other political parties that the new interventionism had its most profound effect.

Runciman and Vivian Phillipps, the latter explaining that 'as sure as night follows day so will a lowered national credit from borrowing on the scale suggested'.[88] Even at this stage, with an election looming, the Asquithian elite continued to long for the vestiges of a lost world.

Internal opposition and external condemnation could not prevent the Liberals from winning. The Liberals secured a majority of almost 4,000 as the 'pledge was the topic of conversation … all over the country'.[89] In the aftermath, the Tory press argued that a constructive policy response was required from Baldwin with the general election fast approaching as Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* lamented the lack of 'boldness, of constructive imaginativeness'.[90] Both MacDonald and Baldwin responded in kind. Rehashing *Labour and the Nation* in more vigorous form, MacDonald's competing 'pledge' was light on detail but similar in its immediacy, 'the first meeting of the Labour Cabinet will tackle the unemployment problem in all its details'.[91] Far from trying to match him, the Conservative response sought to rise above Lloyd George's legerdemain and reiterated concrete Conservative measures on housing and electricity. Baldwin's objections to the Liberal proposals were at once administrative and rooted in classical dogma as he dismissed these 'palliatives … which would require a miracle'.[92] Lloyd George set the tone and shape of the debate as the 1929 general election approached. As Britain headed into the 'devil's decade', he continued to press for a managed capitalism that had so eluded him in office but which had been a consistent feature of his political career.

Conclusion

In conclusion, following the failure of the British economy to return to its Victorian and Edwardian normalcy in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, a group of radicals in Manchester were keen to heed the collectivist lessons of wartime and harness the government's leverage in industrial and economic affairs. Outside the parameters of the party organisation, this combination of industrialists and academics persistently attempted to suffuse Liberal Party thinking with solutions to industrial conflict, as strike action and unemployment seemed to characterise the British economy at this time. The Liberal Summer Schools which emanated from this Mancunian agitation in the early 1920s became a platform from which Keynes, Henderson and Robertson questioned the contemporary application of classical theory as private enterprise appeared to yield to a new corporatism. The strands of thought which were the basis of LSS thinking, namely institutional reform and macroeconomic stabilisation, subsequently became associated with Lloyd George as he pursued that chimera of a welfare capitalism which had proved so elusive in government. The phalanx of books produced under his auspices all outlined how the state could and should be used to make private enterprise more productive, efficient and fair with an alternative socio-economic framework. The Liberal by-election revival of 1927 to 1929 was an opportunity to appeal to the electorate with this new, radical economic thinking. Notwithstanding the campaign difficulties and differences due to Liberal Party infighting, the Liberals continually built political momentum in this period and it was in the reaction of the press and the other political parties that the new interventionism had its most profound effect. Labour and the Conservative Party continued to follow Lloyd George's lead; despite dismissing his 'pledge' as a stunt, it illustrated that, when Lloyd George acted, the other parties reacted.

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1 This article follows the established practice of using a capital L to denote the political tradition associated with the Liberal Party and a small l for liberalism as a political philosophy.
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12 Robert Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes: The Economist as Saviour, 1920–1937,* ii (London, 1992), p. 228.
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14 Peter Sloman, *The Liberal Party and the Economy, 1929–1964* (Oxford, 2015), p. 40.
15 Ernest Simon, *The Inheritance of Riches* (London, 1925), p. 3.
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17 Ernest Simon, *Houses for All* (London, 1923), p. 7.
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21 Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People: England, 1914–1951* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 185–93.
22 Asquith declared that 'the Liberal Party is not today, it has never been, and so long as I have any connection with it, it will never be, the party of any class, rich or poor, great or small … We are a party of no class', *National Liberal Federation Report*, 1921.
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Economy', in Vernon Bogdanor (ed.), *Liberal Party Politics* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 193–4.

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28 The name of the Green Book was *The Land and the Nation*.

29 Lloyd George Papers, Parliamentary Archives, LG/G/12/5/2 and LG/G/12/5/3, Philip Kerr to Lloyd George, 4 Feb. 1924 and 1 Mar. 1924

30 The name of the Yellow Book was *Britain's Industrial Future* (1928).

31 Freeden, *Liberalism Divided*, p. 118.

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61 *Manchester Guardian*, 30 Mar. 1927, p. 11.

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69 Herbert Samuel to Edwin Samuel, 29 May 1927, quoted in Bernard Wasserstein, *Herbert Samuel: A Political Life* (Oxford, 1992), p. 299.

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Local government

Growing success in local government was a key aspect of the Liberal revival of the 1960s and 1970s. David WIlliams examines how this took the Liberals to power in Richmond-upon-Thames in 1983. Mark Egan provides an introduction and overview.

The Liberal ris

The Liberal revival in local government: Mark Egan

'Something different had started in Kew' writes David Williams in his account of the rise of the Liberal Party in Richmond in the 1960s and 1970s. What he describes will be familiar to observers of the Liberal Party during this period. A handful of Liberal activists – perhaps even just one man (it was almost invariably a man) – threw themselves into more intensive community campaigning than was ever contemplated by the two major parties in order to win a council ward. The seat would be fought 'all year round', with leaflets going out months in advance of the local elections. The leaflets might barely mention the Liberal Party and would be devoted exclusively to a small number of local issues, particularly road schemes and planning issues. There would be strong criticism of decisions being made behind closed doors: Liberals consistently argued for more transparency in local government. David Williams gives a striking account of how Richmond's one-party state operated, with public council meetings used to rubber stamp decisions taken in private committee meetings, something which was not unusual in local authorities at the time. In response to this, Liberals asked people to suggest issues they should take up and this community campaigning generated more activity, more leaflets and more momentum towards the election victories which often followed.

Richmond was far from the first place that this new approach to winning local elections was attempted. The earliest example I have found was in Rugby in 1955. The town's Young Liberals had started to work to win council seats in 1952, although using entirely traditional tactics. Derek Gee became Rugby's first Liberal councillor for twenty years when he was elected in 1954, primarily because he was the surprised beneficiary of a straight fight with the Conservatives. He believed on principle that councillors should seek the views of ward residents and, having sought them, in a post-election canvass, he produced a regular 'report-back' letter, explaining what he (and, in later years, his colleagues) had been up to. Strikingly, these letters were almost impossible to identify as Liberal Party leaflets and made no mention of national issues. Opening up council meetings to the press and public was one of the Liberals' main campaign themes.

Something similar happened slightly later in Southend. Report-back leaflets – known as *Council Comments* – were produced by David Evans, who was elected in Prittlewell in 1956. Like with Gee, Evans owed his victory to the fact that he had a straight fight, on this occasion because Labour accidentally failed to stand a candidate. Evans was aware that he needed to do something different to secure re-election, so used report-back leaflets to show how he had voted in council. The Conservatives attempted to copy the style of the leaflets, but only did so in the run-up to the elections, missing the point of the innovation. There were other places where new campaigning techniques were introduced before 1964 – in Greenock, Finchley, and West Ham, for example and, of course, in Liverpool. Cyril Carr had plugged away at Church Ward, Wavertree, for several years before deciding, in 1960, to introduce a new leaflet, *Contact*, which would ask residents for their ideas for Carr to adopt. According to one activist, the response was 'like taking a cork out of a bottle' and Carr was inundated with casework. This helped him achieve victory in 1962.

David Williams mentions that new campaigning techniques were introduced in

e in Richmond

David Williams at the moment Richmond changed hands, at the count for the two by-elections in 1983. His digital watch helpfully times this at 10.24pm on Thursday 10 November.

Richmond in the early 1970s through the influence of a party member who had been a councillor in Liverpool, alongside Trevor 'The Vote' Jones. Jones had been recruited by Cyril Carr, having entered politics in order to campaign against a motorway scheme. Jones was a tireless proponent of community campaigning and popularised the techniques of community politics, as it became known, to Liberals around the country. However, he was not the only advocate of the new style of campaigning. Community politics tactics appear to have developed spontaneously in a number of constituencies at a time when the national party was uninterested in local politics. This changed in the late 1950s, almost entirely due to Richard Wainwright, who headed the party's organisation department in the middle of the decade and went on to become MP for Colne Valley.

Wainwright was convinced that local politics mattered and in 1960 he personally funded the creation of the party's local government department. Writing in the first Liberal *Local Government Handbook*, he stated, 'A successful [Liberal] Association must be rooted in local service, without compromising liberalism for the sake of mere office or mere prestige'. The handbook made no mention of the new campaigning techniques then being devised, but this changed with the appointments of Pratap Chitnis and then Michael Meadowcroft as the party's local government officers. They (particularly Meadowcroft) toured the country to meet Liberal councillors and discovered for themselves what was happening on the ground. The *Liberal News* was also used to share best practice but crucial was the establishment of the Association of Liberal Councillors in the mid-1960s.

Writing in *The Independent* over Christmas 2020, Vince Cable called for a return to community politics following the disappointment of the 2019 election result. The circumstances now are not dissimilar to the situation faced by Liberals in the mid-1950s: the election results of 1950, 1951 and 1955 showed that the Liberal Party was on life support and needed an urgent injection of something different in order to survive. However, any return to community politics will need to address the deficiencies of community politics, rather than dwell on the successes, which were limited, both geographically and temporally.

Firstly, the techniques of community politics are now well established. Glancing at my Twitter feed today, I noticed a Conservative MP out campaigning 'all year round' asking constituents for feedback. Liberal Democrats must think of different approaches to campaigning to make an impact today.

Secondly, the Liberal Party never truly embraced the theory of community politics, in which it was envisaged that the party should become a means of assisting communities assert themselves and take power. The theoretical basis for community politics developed well after the campaigning techniques were devised and, although formally adopted by the party in 1970, the theory was not, in my view, well understood or accepted. The Liberals always remained a party with a programme of policies to implement when in power, not a mechanism to transfer power to the people. It is noticeable that after Stanley Rundle, who instigated community campaigning in Richmond, stood down in 1978 Kew Liberals were unable to hold his seat, as a result of a community campaign of which the Conservatives were able to take advantage. In Southend, the Liberal surge foundered because different councillors took different positions on local issues, which rendered the party unable to campaign effectively. I have seen no signs of a new approach to this dilemma.

Community politics emerged as a response to the strategic challenges faced by local Liberals in the 1950s and 1960s. It was particularly effective in areas where one party had held sway for many years and the opposition was ineffective. Liberals were also adept at arguing for more openness in politics, a reasonable appeal which proved impossible for the two main parties to argue against. The political landscape looks very different today. Voting behaviour is far more volatile; there are more direct channels of communication between politicians and the public than before (think e-petitions and social media); and the Liberal Democrats have a recent record in government, seemingly still fresh in the minds of many voters. A return to community politics looks no more likely to succeed than a new campaign for Peace, Retrenchment and Reform, the great Liberal slogan of the nineteenth century. But the lesson from the development of Liberal community campaigning is that the reinvention of Liberal politics, if it happens at all, will start at the grass roots and take forms which cannot easily be predicted.

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Community politics emerged as a response to the strategic challenges faced by local Liberals in the 1950s and 1960s. It was particularly effective in areas where one party had held sway for many years and the opposition was ineffective.

The Liberal rise in Richmond: David WIlliams

An important part of late-twentieth-century Richmond political history is the rise of the Liberal Party and its success in winning control of Richmond upon Thames Council in 1983. This article covers the rise to power from the 1960s to 1983, followed by control of the council up to the 1986 elections. Although the story is about Richmond upon Thames, the new politics started in Kew, extended to the rest of Richmond, then to the whole of the borough.

Local government in what is now Richmond upon Thames had, by 1933, become three borough councils: Richmond, Barnes and Twickenham. After 1945, most councillors were elected with a party label, though there were still some genuine independents in Kew and Richmond up to the formation of the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames in 1965, with the first elections in 1964. All three borough councils had Conservative majorities, except for 1963 in Richmond, when three independents defeated Conservatives, reducing them to 19 out of 40. As with most 'safe' councils with political groups, there was little specifically local campaigning. The split between Conservative and Labour largely reflected national swings in opinion. Occasionally contentious local issues influenced elections, but rarely. This still was the case with the Liberal revival in the 1960s.

The first Liberal gains

Table 1 shows wards won from 1959 to 1963 in Richmond, Barnes and Twickenham councils. Each year a third of the councillors were elected, one per ward, plus the occasional extra vacancy. 1959 was a typical year in three solidly Conservative councils. Liberal gains started in 1960, and 1962 saw a remarkable upsurge of Liberals in Twickenham, but even this largely reflected national opinion following the Orpington by-election two months before the local elections. A Middlesex County Council seat was also won in a by-election. Twickenham Liberal Association was certainly very active in 1962, but the campaigns were traditional. Lots of door-to-door canvassing was supplemented by public meetings and press releases, but the traditional election address was the main leaflet. This was still good enough to win seven of the eleven wards, and South Twickenham was only lost by four votes. I was told in the seventies that this was because all six helpers in the Liberal committee room forgot to vote! Liberals also had won several seats in Richmond and in Barnes.

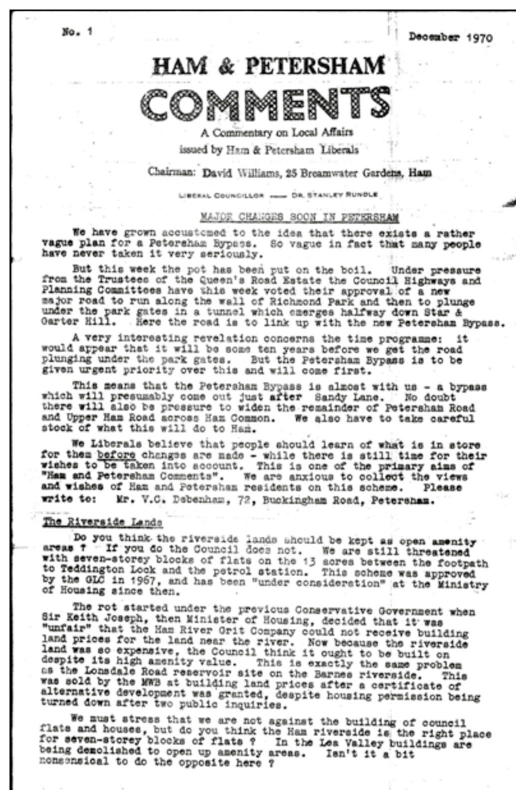
The 1962 Twickenham gains should have been a springboard for further success, but only three wards were won in 1963. The elections in 1964 for the new Richmond upon Thames Council saw no Liberals returned. This drop in Liberal councillors elected followed national opinion in the absence of much local campaigning. The traditional pattern seemed to be still in place when the Conservatives won every seat on the council in 1968, a very bad year nationally for Labour. However, something different had started in Kew.

Stanley Rundle and *Kew Comments*

If there was one piece of paper that triggered the Liberal rise in Richmond it was *Kew Comments*. This was a community newsletter started in 1965 by Stanley Rundle. It was duplicated on foolscap size paper (8 inches by 13) and was his individual take on local issues in Kew. He publicised his campaigns, never mentioned national politics, and it resembled contemporary parish magazines. The newsletters in this format gradually spread across the other wards in Richmond and Barnes, and then to Twickenham. The Gestetner duplicators were only pensioned off in 1975 with the purchase of a cheap offset litho printer. Overleaf is the first edition of *Ham and Petersham Comments*, which Rundle helped me to put together in 1970. The amateurish cross hatching for the word Comments avoided

Table 1. Wards won by party in the May council elections in the three boroughs

	Richmond				*Barnes*				*Twickenham*			
	Con	*Lab*	*Lib*	*Other*	*Con*	*Lab*	*Lib*	*other*	*Con*	*Lab*	*Lib*	*Other*
1959	7	2	0	1	6	2	0	0	9	2	0	0
1960	7	2	1	0	6	2	0	0	11	0	0	0
1961	5	2	2	1	5	2	1	0	10	1	0	0
1962	3	3	3	1	4	3	1	0	3	1	7	0
1963	3	2	2	3	5	2	1	0	6	2	3	0



No. 1 December 1970

HAM & PETERSHAM

COMMENTS

A Commentary on Local Affairs

issued by Ham & Petersham Liberals

Chairman: David Williams, 25 Breamwater Gardens, Ham

LIBERAL COUNCILLOR — DR. STANLEY RUNDLE

MAJOR CHANGES SOON IN PETERSHAM

We have grown accustomed to the idea that there exists a rather vague plan for a Petersham Bypass. So vague in fact that many people have never taken it very seriously.

But this week the pot has been put on the boil. Under pressure from the Trustees of the Queen's Road Estate the Council Highways and Planning Committees have this week voted their approval of a new major road to run along the wall of Richmond Park and then to plunge under the park gates in a tunnel which emerges halfway down Star & Garter Hill. Here the road is to link up with the new Petersham Bypass.

A very interesting revelation concerns the time programme: it would appear that it will be some ten years before we get the road plunging under the park gates. But the Petersham Bypass is to be given urgent priority over this and will come first.

This means that the Petersham Bypass is almost with us – a bypass which will presumably come out just **after** Sandy Lane. No doubt there will also be pressure to widen the remainder of Petersham Road and Upper Ham Road across Ham Common. We also have to take careful stock of what this will do to Ham.

We Liberals believe that people should learn of what is in store for them before changes are made – while there is still time for their wishes to be taken into account. This is one of the primary aims of "Ham and Petersham Comments". We are anxious to collect the views and wishes of Ham and Petersham residents on this scheme. Please write to: Mr. V.C. Debenham, 72, Buckingham Road, Petersham.

The Riverside Lands

Do you think the riverside lands should be kept as open amenity areas ? If you do the Council does not. We are still threatened with seven-storey blocks of flats on the 13 acres between the footpath to Teddington Lock and the petrol station. This scheme was approved by the GLC in 1967, and has been "under consideration" at the Ministry of Housing since then.

The rot started under the previous Conservative Government when Sir Keith Joseph, then Minister of Housing, decided that it was "unfair" that the Ham River Grit Company could not receive building land prices for the land near the river. Now because the riverside land was so expensive, the Council think it ought to be built on despite its high amenity value. This is exactly the same problem as the Lonsdale Road reservoir site on the Barnes riverside. This was sold by the MWB at building land prices after a certificate of alternative development was granted, despite housing permission being turned down after two public inquiries.

We must stress that we are not against the building of council flats and houses, but do you think the Ham riverside is the right place for seven-storey blocks of flats ? In the Lea Valley buildings are being demolished to open up amenity areas. Isn't it a bit nonsensical to do the opposite here ?

Front page, *Ham and Petersham Comments* no. 1

Stanley Rundle (1913–78)

too much ink building up on the master stencil and stopped it falling apart!

Stanley Rundle had been a councillor for North Sheen ward, elected for the last two years of the old Richmond Council. He won a by-election to Richmond upon Thames council in 1966, but lost in 1968. Only a few months later one of the Kew Conservative councillors resigned, and Rundle won the by-election in February 1969, again the only Liberal councillor, joining no less than sixty-two Conservatives (fifty-three councillors and nine aldermen).

Kew Comments was delivered monthly to every household in Kew by volunteers, enthused by his campaigns to help on a regular basis. Only a few were party members. He ran a successful campaign to stop the Broad Street line from closing – still open today as the North London line. He campaigned to stop the subway at Kew Gardens station from closing. He got no support from Richmond Council, but the government minister accepted his proposal as the only way to save the subway. After that the council supported him. Again, the subway is still open. In contrast to almost every other politician he never indulged in personal criticism. I asked him once why he didn't reply to personal attacks. He said he only mentioned the Tories in his newsletter to thank them for supporting his campaigns. Stanley Rundle was an extraordinary man. He was nearly 50 when he started in politics and died in 1978 after serious illness since 1974. But from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s he transformed Richmond politics.

Rundle was also a first-class public speaker and liked nothing better than impressing a large meeting. As the only opposition councillor, he held a pre-council meeting in Kew the night before every council meeting. He contrasted this with the private meeting the Conservatives had at the council offices. He would go through the council meeting agenda, asking for views, and discuss Kew issues. I will never forget the first 'pre-council' meeting I attended in 1970. A very irate resident was complaining about lorries using the industrial site next to his house at all hours: 'I've complained to the site owners, the council, the police, the MP and the press. If nothing happens soon, the only option I have is to go and lie in the road in front of a lorry.' Rundle immediately replied, 'If you feel you have to lie in front of a lorry, will you please promise me one thing? Ring me first and I will come and lie in the road with you.' This brilliant off-the-cuff reply did four things: it showed the complainant Rundle was on his side; it showed the audience he was a man of action; the tense atmosphere at the meeting disappeared; and if this man was reckless enough to lie in the road, Rundle might stop him getting run over! In 1971 Kew elected three Liberal councillors on the back of the community campaigns and frequent leafleting.

Spreading out of Kew

By now several other wards had active Liberal campaigners, but success outside Kew didn't happen until 1973 in a by-election in Richmond. Meanwhile the Labour Party were

winning by-elections. In 1972 they won three Twickenham seats from the Conservatives, and were confidently expecting a fourth gain in Richmond Town, only narrowly held by the Conservatives in 1971. With no ward organisation, John Waller and I, as candidate and agent, mobilised the Liberal activists across the borough. Eight leaflets were delivered in six weeks across the ward, including an early morning leaflet through every letterbox on polling day. With the helpers and the enthusiasm, a dominant campaign was organised as had never been seen before in Richmond. Waller won comfortably by over 300 votes. The Tories were surprised, expecting Labour to be the challengers. Labour were stunned. Neither could understand how this had happened.

This was the first of a long chain of success in council by-elections in Richmond upon Thames, all with intensive campaigning and large numbers of enthusiastic activists. Liberals and Liberal Democrats won twenty-six out of thirty council by-elections from 1973 to 2005. Successful by-election campaigns were big catalysts for more confidence and more campaigning.

Constituency elections

In April 1973 Stanley Rundle won the Richmond and Barnes constituency in the Greater London Council election. Again, this was done with intensive leafleting and activity, helped by a token campaign by the Conservatives who thought they couldn't lose, and the Labour Party who knew they couldn't win. Most of the Labour activists helped in the Twickenham constituency which they nearly won.

1974 saw two general elections where the Liberals strengthened their position in both Richmond and Twickenham. The Liberal Party was doing much better nationally, and the local campaigning was impressive. But parliamentary elections are dominated by national issues, not local campaigns, and the local success only translated partially to national elections.

The May local elections saw another significant improvement for the Liberal Party. All the seats in Kew and Richmond Town were won, together with three seats in Mortlake and one in Ham and Petersham. Mortlake was the strongest Labour ward in the borough, but an intense community politics campaign turned this round with a huge swing. The organiser of this success was Barnes resident Chris Graham. He had been a Liberal councillor while still at Liverpool University in the same ward as Trevor Jones, the best-known exponent of Liberal community politics. This style of local council campaigning was spreading across the country.

More Liberal success

As Table 2 shows, the initial Liberal success on Richmond upon Thames Council was from Richmond and Barnes, but in 1978 this started to change. Interestingly, the two wards won by the Liberals in 1978 were both organised by Richmond activists who had moved to Twickenham. John Waller had moved to Twickenham as the Liberal Prospective Parliamentary Candidate. He not only had an incentive to be a Twickenham councillor, but the need to organise the whole constituency, and raise the game of the many activists already there.

East Twickenham was the most dramatic Liberal gain on election night in 1978. One of the defeated Conservatives was the leader of the council, Harry Hall. He had been the leader for fourteen years, since the new borough was formed, and was very much in charge. Two weeks before the election, East Twickenham Liberals felt confident enough to tell the press they thought they would win and defeat the council leader. The Twickenham Tory agent responded by saying, 'Pigs may fly!' His embarrassment after the election was increased with letters to the local press such as, 'Sir, Today I have seen a large pink flying object over East Twickenham. Can this be ex-councillor Harry Hall disappearing into oblivion?'

Table 2. Councillors by party in Richmond-upon-Thames elections 1964–1982

	Richmond and Barnes				***Twickenham***				***Richmond-upon-Thames***			
	Con	*Lab*	*Lib*	*other*	*Con*	*Lab*	*Lib*	*other*	*Con*	*Lab*	*Lib*	*other*
1964	15	8	0	1	26	4	0	0	41	12	0	1
1968	24	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	54	0	0	0
1971	15	6	3	0	22	8	0	0	37	14	3	0
1974	12	2	10	0	24	6	0	0	36	8	10	0
1978	9	0	13	0	25	0	5	0	34	0	18	0
1982	6	0	16	0	20	0	10	0	26	0	26*	0

** Liberal/SDP Alliance group: 24 Liberals and 2 SDP*

There was one setback, though. A proposed bail hostel became a major issue in Kew during the election, and by opposing this vigorously the Conservatives gained three Liberal seats, one of which had been Rundle's. David Blomfield, the Liberal group leader first elected in 1971, and new candidate Jenny Tonge, the future MP, were defeated.

Local council politics before the 1970s

In considering the sea change that Liberal community campaigning brought, it is important to understand how different local council politics was up to the 1970s. Decisions were made in private, rubber stamped at council meetings. These had been open to the public since 1908, but only the education committee also had to meet in public. Richmond Council set up two education subcommittees, meeting in private, which had all the discussion and made the decisions. These were referred to the education committee for formal approval in public, lasting only a few minutes. The only accountability of councillors was at the local elections, but this was illusory as most councillors were elected on a party ticket in safe wards. The opposition Labour councillors also considered themselves as privileged decision makers, accountable more to the party than the public. They had some influence as they were part of the club. Only in 1974 were all committees open to the public, not through choice but by a change in the law.

Publicity about the council was very limited. Richmond Council meetings and articles about local issues were well covered in the local press, but no more than a quarter of the local residents read a local paper. Liberal newsletters went through every letterbox every month in the stronger wards. There were no council press releases or press officers, no public meetings unless called by residents. There was one major issue well debated in public in the early 1970s – grammar schools and comprehensive education. But this was the local dimension of a national debate.

Inevitably, the Conservative and Labour councillors disliked the Liberals' approach to local politics, accusing them of stirring up controversies in a populist way. This antipathy increased the stronger the Liberal council group became, fuelled by unwanted criticism and lost seats. For the Labour Party this was about survival. By 1980, the strongest areas of Liberal support were in the council estates, traditionally solid Labour territory. Liberals won the tenants' votes through campaigning for them and taking up their problems far more than Labour councillors had. Around this time the council's housing manager told me that 80 per cent of his department's casework came from Liberal councillors.

Liberal councillors were active in traditional policy areas like education and housing, but, starting with Stanley Rundle in Kew, they took a radically different approach to representing the community. Open government was always a strong campaign. Public consultation was considered fundamental to all major council decisions, then made privately by a few councillors. Scrutiny of council spending was also demanded. The Conservatives inevitably objected to being told that they were not running the council's finances efficiently. The Liberals wanted the community engaged as fully as possible and believed this would produce better decisions and more accountability. Community engagement would lead to community empowerment. All this was done by communication with the voters in a way that had never been done before.

Liberal councillors were active in traditional policy areas like education and housing, but, starting with Stanley Rundle in Kew, they took a radically different approach to representing the community. Open government was always a strong campaign. Public consultation was considered fundamental to all major council decisions, then made privately by a few councillors. Scrutiny of council spending was also demanded.

Why did the Liberals succeed?

One way to understand this Liberal success is to look at the differences among the four groups involved in elections – the party activists, the other party members, party helpers and the supportive voters.

By the late 1970s there were far more Liberal Party activists than in the other two parties, and they were more energetic and motivated. It was slow progress with local elections only every four years, but political success meant an expanding local party, and winning control of the council was a realistic target.

Inactive party members were the majority of Labour and particularly Conservative local parties, but most Liberal Party members did something more than pay their subscription and attend the annual general meeting. Similarly, only the Liberals had significant numbers of helpers who were not party members, including hundreds of regular deliverers.

Conservative and Labour election campaigns were aimed at the committed voters and, in what was generally considered as a safe Tory borough, this made sense. The Liberals ran their elections trying to convert people. All the successful campaigning saw a bandwagon effect where support got stronger and stronger, peaking on polling day. Running dominant campaigns with much more activity, visibility and presence made this possible.

The run up to 1982

After 1978 the Liberals were confident that they could win Richmond upon Thames Council. Labour had no council seats. All five by-elections were won very comfortably. Two of these were Liberal 'holds', the other three were gains from the Conservatives, including David Blomfield and Jenny Tonge in Kew. In 1981 Adrian Slade was elected in the Richmond half of the borough to the Greater London Council. Only six gains were needed in 1982. One complication was the need to agree an electoral pact with the SDP, founded in 1981. The eventual agreement saw forty Liberals and twelve SDP candidates contest the fifty-two council seats. The six gains were made, but with one loss. At all council meetings, voting on party lines was 26–26. In these circumstances, the mayor had a casting vote, which was the Conservatives 'majority'. So the vote to elect a mayor in 1982 and 1983 was literally a vote for control of the council.

Why had only twenty-four Liberals and two SDP been elected when the target was a clear majority? Two reasons seemed likely. The campaign had not been coordinated across all the target wards properly. Wards had been left to write some of their own leaflets with patchy results. Also, the Falklands war had boosted the Conservative vote, even if this was a local election.

May 1982 to November 1983

The next eighteen months on the council were tense. All twenty-six Conservatives had to turn up to every council meeting and vote together otherwise they would lose. In the summer of 1983, one Conservative fell seriously ill, and died in October, resulting in a by-election in Hampton Wick. However, a Liberal councillor had to resign when his firm moved him to Holland. He had a majority in Hampton Nursery ward of just one vote. So, to win the council the Liberal/SDP Alliance, as it was by now, had to hold its most difficult seat, and win the ward with the largest Conservative majority.

The double by-election campaign was more intense than any before or since with so much at stake. It was the typical Liberal community politics campaign, but the threatened service cuts that the Conservatives were considering featured heavily too. Hundreds of helpers got involved. By the last weekend opinion was clearly moving away from the Tories, and change of control looked increasingly likely. Election day on 10 November 1983 saw both wards won more comfortably than expected, and a new regime took over Richmond upon Thames Council.

Campaigning, communication and commitment had seen the Liberals succeed in a 'safe' Conservative borough, but, even with all their energy and ability, it had taken them the best part of two decades.

For this to happen in Richmond upon Thames was surprising in one way. Every MP elected in the area for more than a century had been a Conservative, except for one Liberal representing Middlesex, Brentford (including Twickenham) in 1906. All the elected local councils from inception in the late nineteenth century had been Conservative controlled, or run by independents of Conservative persuasion. This was a generally affluent and Conservative place. After the change of control, I was asked several times how long the Tories had run Richmond. My reply became, 'No one really knows, but the two most likely dates are since 1660 or 1066.'

The party balance was now 27–25, with the mayor able to stand aside from the politics of the council in a traditionally non-political role. The handover to the new administration was uncharted territory for everyone involved; but the chief executive, Michael Honey, was determined to make this a smooth transition, not just for the councillors but for the staff of the council who were wondering what would happen next. As the new leader of the council for only a few hours, I met the chief executive and the director of finance with my deputy, Tim Razzall, the morning after the by-elections to discuss next steps. A council meeting already fixed for the following Tuesday would see the formal change of control. This all went remarkably smoothly and was a credit to the flexible way local government has always operated. The losing Conservative leader also helped to make the changes work without the obligation to do so.

The financial crisis

The new administration was buzzing with ideas for changing and improving services. But the first priority was the council's financial problems, heavily featured in the two by-election campaigns. In 1982 the rates had gone up 28 per cent, then 30 per cent more in 1983. Despite all this extra income, severe service cuts were threatened, including making some teachers compulsorily redundant. The new committee chairmen spent many hours going through the detail of all the options and found a way through to avoid the worst cuts. From mid-November to the Christmas break, the senior councillors in the new administration had little time for anything else.

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The approach adopted was to involve the public – the people who had to pay the rates demands. This was very much in line with the emphasis on consultation and public involvement which the local Liberal Party had been advocating for many years. The decisions seemed too important to be simply imposed on the borough's residents. A leaflet offering three options was printed and delivered to every household, paid for by the Alliance local parties. Thousands of tear-off slips were returned with hundreds of letters. Four big public consultation meetings were held.

Both tear off slips and meetings showed a strong majority in favour of the middle option of 10 per cent to 20 per cent rates increase with some cutbacks. By March when the 1984 rate was set, this option only needed an 8 per cent rates increase. The 1984 budget was a tough challenge, though, for the new untested and inexperienced administration. Many difficult decisions had to be accepted. There were still service cuts. The education committee, whose composition could not be changed, voted against every education cut. Every Conservative on the education committee voted against cuts they had been proposing a few months earlier. But politics is always like this.

Meaningful public consultation was very important to the new administration, and the tough choices balancing service levels with rates increases were ideal to share with the public paying the bills. But consultation wasn't just a policy difference. It was a fundamental attitude about how a local council should make major decisions. The new administration said that no major council development project would go ahead unless it had majority public support. The council officers thought this was mad, and the attitude of the other political parties was dramatically demonstrated when a major consultation started in 1985 on plans for improvements and changes in Twickenham town centre.

Proposals were put to the public, in a special newspaper, on a dozen town-centre sites, including new civic offices, eventually completed in 1990, and the Twickenham Baths site, still being argued about in 2021. The 1985 proposal here, supported by a majority of the responses, included a Cinderella/Rockerfella disco. At a public consultation meeting on the proposals, I was amazed at some of the reactions. A former Conservative candidate said, 'Weren't you elected to make decisions? Can't you make up your mind?' A former Labour candidate said, 'Don't you know what to do? Why are you passing the buck to the people?' I replied that councillors were elected to represent the community and should listen to their views. The council was putting real options to the public, which is consultation, not asking for approval of a pre-determined choice.

YOUR 1984 RATES

What increase in April?

25% to 35%	10% to 20%	under 10%
No cuts, and some improvement in the services, but large rate increase as Government Rate Support Grant is cut drastically by penalties. The Council services ought to be better but in 1984 this can only be done by an unacceptable rate increase. Without penalties the rate increase would be similar to the middle option of 10%-20%. The huge penalties rule out this "no cuts" option in our view.	Some cuts, but most of the services are unaffected. Medium rate increase with small Government penalty similar to 1983. Standstill in Social Services, less road repairs, stopping Adult College expansion at Clifden Road, slight decrease in pupil/teacher ratio without redundancy, maximum rating of empty offices. Provisionally, our preferred choice, but some details and the precise rate increase not yet known.	Savage cuts and 330 compulsory redundancies. This is the full £3 million "hit list" produced by the previous administration on 31 October, but not acted on. Over half of the redundancies are teachers. Other cuts were 5 branch libraries, 3 day centres, and ending nursery education. This option we have rejected as unacceptably hard. We believe that the public do not want the services of the Council savaged in this way.

TELL US YOUR VIEW

Published by Richmond & Twickenham Liberals and Social Democrats and printed and delivered at no cost to the ratepayers.

The unprecedented 1984 rates consultation leaflet (extract)

Planning

The planning subcommittee, deciding the more important planning applications, was immediately opened to the public, and a year later the public were allowed to speak. The Conservatives opposed both decisions, but within a few years every council operated this way. Having to listen carefully to the objections and supporting arguments for planning applications is healthy for the councillors and the planning system. If the public feel they have some say in the decisions, they will be happier. Whether it's consent or refusal for a disputed application, councillors upset someone. So they need to get it right. On one occasion a neighbour of mine spoke against an application, and said to me afterwards, 'I don't agree with the decision your committee took, but I must compliment you on the procedure.' The most heated arguments are usually about house extensions, and still are. In one Petersham case, a neighbour told the committee that if this extension was built, people would be able to see into his daughter's bedroom. It turned out that the daughter's bedroom was in an extension like the one he was objecting to.

A major planning challenge that had started under the Conservatives, and wasn't resolved for many years, was Sainsbury's wanting to develop a supermarket at St. Clare's Nursery in Hampton. The land was owned by Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity. ASDA then Sainsbury's were refused planning permission. Sainsbury's went to appeal and the planning inspector recommended the government minister to refuse the appeal. Strangely, Patrick Jenkin allowed the appeal. Richmond Council took the minister to court and won. The Department of the Environment was told to rewrite the decision letter to correct its deficiencies. Eventually, Sainsbury's did get permission, and the supermarket was built. But Sainsbury's had to pay £21.75 million to the charity, rather than £3 million plus interest. Hampton Fuel Allotment Charity as a result is much the biggest charity in the borough, which wouldn't have happened without the stand that Richmond Council took.

Opinion surveys

At the end of 1984, MORI was commissioned to do an opinion survey of borough residents. This produced some remarkable information about residents' attitudes to the council. The *Surrey Comet* (10 January 1985) said, 'Residents of Richmond borough have given their council a reasonably clean bill of health – and most of them prefer paying out a bit extra in rates to see borough services preserved.' The chief executive was delighted that refuse collection got over 90 per cent satisfaction. He had only heard the complaints. In the context of fixing the 1985 budget, the questions on service cuts versus rates increase were very useful, and confirmed what the administration had done. Half the residents supported a 10 per cent rates increase to avoid service cuts with only 17 per cent preferring an inflation rise only with some cuts.

The Conservative councillors repeatedly complained about the £20,000 the MORI survey had cost, but changes to the services based on the responses must have saved much more. One resident asked in the *Richmond and Twickenham Times* why the opposition were not scrutinising the £2 million of savings Richmond Council was claiming instead of complaining about the £20,000 survey.

Why professional opinion surveys were value for money was clearly demonstrated in a £15,000 survey of council tenants, a group less satisfied in 1984 than borough residents as a whole. Every councillor had anecdotes about repairs problems, but the survey pinned down the main problem. It wasn't that the repairs were done badly. It wasn't that the repairs took too long. It wasn't that too many workmen turned up for simple jobs. The biggest complaint was the appointments system and the frustration of not knowing exactly when workmen would call. Tens of thousands of pounds could have been wasted solving the wrong problem – several times the cost of the carefully planned survey.

Getting the council out into the community, and reducing the remoteness highlighted in the MORI survey, resulted in two mobile offices at ten different sites every week. They weren't cheap, but generally were very welcome for residents, particularly council tenants, who didn't have to phone, write or go to Twickenham.

Services and efficiencies

Housing repairs were one of the big successes and were almost doubled from 1983 to 1986. The ringfenced housing revenue account had always run a large surplus. Many council tenants felt they were being treated as second-class citizens and said so. The housing department reception desk in Regal House at Twickenham was difficult to find. This was moved to a much more accessible place. Getting the council out into the community, and reducing the remoteness highlighted in the MORI survey, resulted in two mobile offices at ten different sites every week. They weren't cheap, but generally were very welcome for residents, particularly council tenants, who didn't have to phone, write or go to Twickenham.

A major effort was made to find efficiencies in the council's spending. All charges were looked at, and a thorough review was done of all the council's property holdings. As mentioned earlier, £2 million was found in this and similar ways, without cutting services. The controversial worsening of the pupil–teacher ratios at schools was reversed, and in the 1985 budget there were no service cuts for the first time since 1979. The new administration had wanted to improve services as far as the financial constraints would allow, and did make improvements particularly in education, social services and housing. The housing manager was asked for some ideas for new initiatives. He presented six to the next housing committee and was amazed when five were accepted immediately. Glass and paper recycling, started in 1980, was much expanded. Not only this this save money, it was helping to reduce landfill.

Another way the new administration was prepared to be innovative happened over Hampton Pool. The open-air pool had been closed in 1981, at the same time as Twickenham Baths, to save money. The Conservative council wanted to hand the site back to the Royal Parks, but they insisted that the whole concrete basin had to be removed and the land reinstated. This was very expensive and still hadn't

Going out in style

WHAT a way to go! Retiring Mayor and Mayoress, Derek and Pat Wainwright rode out in strange style last week just prior to handing over to new Mayor, Tony Simmonds and his wife Audrey.

But they were back in the Mayoral Daimler come the evening. The duo were paying a call to the council's Craneford Way depot to meet staff before they retired. And they opted to get into the mood by hitching a ride on a dustcart.

Derek and Pat Wainwright 'helping' with the refuse collection (*Richmond & Twickenham Informer*, 23 May 1985)

been done by the end of 1983. A Hampton Pool Group was now campaigning to reopen the pool and set about fundraising. They asked the new council for help. After careful evaluation of their plans, and wishing to help a worthy community initiative which would bring the swimming pool back into use, we agreed to match the funding they raised, if they met their target. They succeeded, the council paid over the matched funding, and Hampton got its pool back, now much improved.

Continuity and change

For all the changes on Richmond Council, some things stayed the same. The Conservative mayor was in office for the first six months of the new administration. Harry Hall had been leader of the council from 1964 to 1978, but then lost his seat before getting back on the council in 1982. He was relieved to avoid the casting-vote embarrassment at council meetings, and made his mark as a successful non-political mayor. He also chaired the council meetings impeccably. He was succeeded in May 1984 by Derek Wainwright, the first Liberal mayor. Not only did he look the part but was hugely popular by the end of his mayoral year. He got a rave editorial from the *Richmond and Twickenham Times* – very few councillors achieve that – and joined a refuse collection round in his last week. It was a shameless publicity stunt but produced some great photos.

One traditional activity that was stopped was smoking at committee meetings. Smoking had always been banned at council meetings, but several councillors puffed away during committees and subcommittees. In February 1985 smoking was banned at all meetings to the distress of the smokers. They were in a minority and were never going to win once the proposal was made. The local press covered the debate with several articles, noting that this was not a political argument. It was smokers versus non-smokers. As a former smoker who had quit at age 26 (and increased my life expectancy by ten years), I knew which side I was on. The journalists who smoked at meetings also had to stop, not least the chain-smoking *Surrey Comet* reporter who had to keep his roll-ups in the tin.

One council service that was expanded was press and public relations. Perhaps a sign of the times, with public relations even in complacent local government growing, this department had a greater role than previously. An experienced media professional ran this small unit and was responsible for a new council logo in 1985. This is still in use today thirty-three years later. The stylised R has the blue of the Thames and the green of our open spaces. Despite criticism at the time, it has had remarkable longevity.

The opposition and the local press

An inevitable question is how the Conservative councillors reacted to all this. They were distressed at losing control of Richmond Council, and found it difficult to put together a successful opposition role. They didn't do opposition, having always run the local councils. They were aggressive at council meetings and put out press releases, but attacks and abuse were never balanced by alternative proposals or policies.

There was no counter to the regular leaflets at ward and borough level put out by the Liberal/SDP Alliance.

Possibly the biggest change since the 1980s has been the local media. Then it was just newspapers, but there were six of them – three broadsheets and three free tabloids. Half of these covered the whole borough. What they reported and said mattered. There were dozens of articles about Richmond Council every month. Now the only survivor is the *Richmond and Twickenham Times* as a patchily distributed free tabloid.

The run up to the 1986 elections

As well as having the advantage of running the council, with all the well-publicised new initiatives, the new administration was also helped in one way by the Conservative government. 1986 would see the abolition of the Greater London Council, and the government were determined to show that this saved a lot of money. The Government Rate Support Grant to London boroughs for 1986 was very generous compared with previous years. The rates could be frozen, and with a late extra grant were cut by 1.6 per cent. This was a dramatic contrast to the 28 per cent rates increase in 1982 and 30 per cent in 1983. It also helped that the rents had only gone up in line with inflation for three years.

In the months before the May 1986, local elections leaflets were distributed across the borough publicising the achievements of the Alliance council. Ward newsletters also went out regularly. The election campaign was carefully planned in a centralised way for the first time with tailored borough leaflets for every ward. The Liberal/SDP organisation was active in every ward, and all nineteen wards campaigned to win. In the event forty-nine of the fifty-two seats were won with only three Conservatives returned. This was a success beyond anyone's expectations and must have been a huge blow to the Conservatives. However, despite losing every ward in the Twickenham constituency the Conservative MP held his seat a year later. The runaway success at a local level didn't translate to parliamentary success until 1997. The Liberal Democrats, though, continued to run Richmond Council until 2002, then from 2006 to 2010. In May 2018, Richmond upon Thames saw thirty-nine Liberal Democrats returned with only eleven Conservatives. Four Greens were also elected in an electoral pact with the Liberal Democrats.

Reflections

How successful was the 1983–86 Richmond Council administration? I think it was very successful, starting with a financial crisis and ending with a cut in the rates. The initiatives started then still benefit Richmond residents today. But the calibre of the leading councillors was perhaps the best Richmond Council ever had. Three of them are in the House of Lords, and the others, not ennobled, would have made successful peers (or MPs as one of them became). All are still alive except for Alison Cornish, who chaired the education committee. She sadly died from a brain tumour in 2003.

More than thirty years later, the most important aspect of these two and a half years has to be the approach to community engagement and consultation. All public bodies like to claim that they 'consult', but they all struggle to give examples of a change of direction following consultation with genuine options. The best biography of Richard Nixon, by Anthony Summers, is called *The Arrogance of Power.* It is more time consuming, more challenging and more expensive to have genuine open-ended consultation on important projects or decisions. But it is better government and produces better results. Would Richmond Council and the residents still be arguing about the future of Twickenham Baths, which closed in 1981, if the council under both Liberal Democrat and Conservative control had not tried to impose their preferred solution on the site?

More than thirty years later, the most important aspect of these two and a half years has to be the approach to community engagement and consultation.

After 1986

The intensive community campaigning in Richmond which led to winning control of the council in 1983 seems history now, as does the successes of the first two and a half years of control. Perhaps it is selective memory, but I find it hard to think of any failures during that first period of office other than the continued dereliction on the Twickenham Baths site. Of the nine elections for Richmond upon Thames Council from 1986 to 2018, Liberal Democrats have won six of them – a better record than most.

David Williams was a councillor for Ham & Petersham ward from 1974 to 2014, Leader of Richmond-upon-Thames Council from 1983 to 2001, and Leader of the Liberal Democrats on the Local Government Association from 1996 to 2001. He received a knighthood in 1999 for 'Services to local government and the Local Government Association'.

Reports

Asquith vs. Lloyd George

Evening meeting (online), 1 February 2021, with David Laws and Damian Collins MP; chair, Wendy Chamberlain MP
Report by Katheryn Gallant

Chamberlain opened the meeting by saying that Asquith's serving between 1886 and 1918 as the Liberal MP for East Fife had no bearing on her views. Laws joked that, despite Chamberlain's being 'a scrupulously independent chairman', he took her role as the Liberal Democrat MP for North East Fife as a half vote for Asquith.

Laws stated that there is a fair claim for Asquith and Lloyd George to be considered (after Gladstone) the greatest Liberal prime ministers. Asquith and Lloyd George worked together closely until the midpoint of the First World War, after which their conduct and attitudes diverged remarkably.

Asquith was born and raised in England and was from a relatively privileged background; Lloyd George was born in England, raised in Wales, and from a less privileged background. Asquith was restrained, measured, conciliatory; Lloyd George was emotional, provocative, divisive. Asquith was a lukewarm supporter of the Boer War; Lloyd George opposed the Boer War. Asquith was a natural centrist who opposed votes for women; Lloyd George was far more radical. Asquith appointed Lloyd George to the key role of chancellor of the exchequer and protected him during the Marconi share scandal of 1912.

Both progressives, together they advanced the first British state pension. Both Asquith and Lloyd George had moved beyond nineteenth-century Liberalism, with its focus on legal rights and protecting citizens from an overmighty state.

There could have been a split at the start of the First World War. Many of the Liberal cabinet were unenthusiastic about the prospects for war in July 1914, but the German invasion of Belgium helped to keep Lloyd George in the cabinet.

A final element in the similarities between Asquith and Lloyd George is their personal lives. Kitchener as war minister refused to share military secrets with the entire cabinet, saying to a friend of his that the cabinet ministers would all tell their wives, except for Lloyd George, who would tell other people's wives. However, Asquith, while prime minister, fell in love with Venetia Stanley, who was thirty-five years Asquith's junior. Asquith wrote Venetia 600 letters over a period of five years, a number of those while chairing meetings of the cabinet and War Council. Those letters, which Asquith sent in the Royal Mail to Venetia, contained secret details of military operations that were yet to take place.

Asquith's management of the First World War had begun well. He appointed Kitchener, one of the most popular field marshals in the country, as war minister. In August 1914, recognising that the war would be long, Kitchener added troops. In 1915, there was an ill-judged intervention in the Dardanelles engineered by Winston Churchill (First Lord of the Admiralty) but supported by many senior people in the government, including Kitchener and Asquith. There was a stalemate on the Western Front and the risk that Russia would collapse against Germany in the East, and there was a shortage of shells, bullets, and equipment. These tension points converged in the spring of 1915, when General French, commander of the British forces in France, leaked some of the information to British newspapers, blaming Kitchener and Asquith for the shortage of shells that French claimed was impeding his operations on the Western Front. French was angry that some of his forces were being sent to the Dardanelles, rather than being retained on the Western Front. The issues of the shell shortages and the Dardanelles created a crisis which led Asquith to bring Conservatives into the government, thus creating a coalition. Churchill left and Lloyd George became munitions minister. The government had already put in place many of the steps needed to fight war on a bigger scale, but many of the problems the British had in 1915–16 were common to all armies fighting in the First World War and not something that the British government was to blame for.

But style in politics counts for a lot, and Asquith's leisurely style of being prime minister counted heavily against him. Asquith failed to note the warning by the coalition joint leader, Conservative leader Bonar Law, in February 1916: 'In war, it is necessary not only to *be* active, but to *seem* active.' That criticism felt by Asquith's cabinet colleagues gradually permeated to parliamentary backbenchers and into the media.

In June 1916, Lloyd George was to have joined Kitchener on a secret mission to keep Russia in the war, but, at the last moment, Asquith asked Lloyd George to go to Ireland to tackle the aftermath of the Easter Uprising. Asquith saved Lloyd George's life. However, it also put paid to Asquith's career because six months later Lloyd George was joining with the Conservative Party in a coup that forced Asquith out of government.

Asquith was unsuited to be a war leader, but it is unclear how much difference the introduction of Lloyd George as prime minister meant. Had Asquith succeeded in clinging on to power in 1916, we probably would have seen a similar result when the war ended in 1918.

Collins sees Lloyd George as an unorthodox prime minister, someone who did not conform to the way business was done, who identified problems that needed resolution and brought energy and dynamism to that task. Collins sees Lloyd George as part of the Progressive Era, which flourished in the United States from the 1890s to

the First World War. Lloyd George was one of a generation of leaders who developed executive functions for themselves and brought progressive ideas to solving social problems.

Unlike any other prime minister before him, Lloyd George was the first 'ranker', as he described himself – the first prime minister not to go through the 'staff college of the old universities'. Lloyd George feels like the first prime minister of the twentieth century: Asquith feels like the last Victorian prime minister.

As a social reformer, Lloyd George's enemy was not so much the wealthy (Lloyd George had many wealthy friends who were self-made men) but the propertied class, the landlords whom Lloyd George opposed while growing up in a Welsh-speaking community in North Wales. Whilst Asquith regarded the People's Budget as Lloyd George's budget, no prime minister who was not completely committed to the People's Budget would have given the support Lloyd George needed.

The challenge came for them in the First World War, which demanded a more dynamic form of leadership. Lloyd George realised that, after the invasion of Belgium and the denial of the rights of a small nation for which he had great sympathy (as Lloyd George had for the Welsh nation and for the Boer nation in South Africa), he had to support the war. Whilst Asquith was still prime minister, Lloyd George became the leading member of the government and pushed for conscription, opposing many leading Liberals such as Reginald McKenna, Lloyd George's successor as chancellor of the exchequer.

As a wartime prime minister, Lloyd George lobbied to wait for the technological advances in tanks and mortar aircraft that would bring victory. Lloyd George executed influence over war policy to prevent the unnecessary sacrifice of soldiers for little gain until the UK had marshalled enough technological superiority to make the final decisive effort.

The fact that Asquith was not part of the government greatly damaged the Liberal Party. The split between Asquith and Lloyd George into the 1920s was a major factor preventing the Liberals from emerging as a single-party government after the First World War. The postwar coalition government that Lloyd George led until 1922 faced economic difficulties due to the postwar crash, which saw his popularity with unions and working people diminish and added to the growing suspicion amongst Conservatives about Lloyd George's policy decisions.

In the 1930s, Lloyd George was arguably the first Keynesian politician (despite Keynes' own mixed views about Lloyd George). Lloyd George advocated for the New Deal reforms of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt to be brought to the UK. This led to the great error of judgment in Lloyd George's later life: accepting the flattery of Hitler. This was because Lloyd George approved of the progressive domestic policy of Nazi Germany, which allowed Lloyd George to turn a blind eye to how the Nazis treated Jews. Concerning Lloyd George's refusal to enter Churchill's coalition government in June 1940, Collins believes that A. J. Sylvester, Lloyd George's secretary, was right in saying that it was because Lloyd George would not accept (as Asquith had not accepted) serving under anybody else in a subordinate role.

Collins thinks that, despite Lloyd George's many personal flaws and his massive risk-taking in his personal and political life, Lloyd George became prime minister because the nation required a dynamic leader. Although Collins is a Conservative MP, he considers that Lloyd George's efforts during the First World War and as a progressive social reformer make him perhaps not the greatest Liberal prime minister, but definitely one of the greatest prime ministers of the twentieth century.

The question-and-answer session began with Laws being asked if he agreed with A. J. P. Taylor's observation that Asquith had lost the confidence of many in the House of Commons and the media by 1916. Asquith's selfish decision to cling to the Liberal leadership made the Liberal split inevitable and condemned it to political irrelevance. Laws replied that Asquith thought the coalition Lloyd George had put together would crumble. Asquith made a profound misjudgment since Lloyd George was able to keep the coalition together for the rest of the war and marginalise Asquith. Laws thinks the first active split was Lloyd George's, but the way Asquith dealt with it is fundamental to the Liberal Party split and Asquith bears at least partial responsibility.

The next question for Laws was whether historians with an awareness of mental health issues would link Asquith's distraction with the loss of his son on the Western Front. Laws replied that Asquith's relationship with Venetia Stanley was important to Asquith, who described it as a motivating force in his life. The blow of losing his son Raymond in September 1916 devastated Asquith. However, it was Asquith's difficulty in dealing with the first two years of the First World War, combined with the fact that the skills and style he brought to the job of prime minister were unsuited to the expectations of a leader during wartime, that were more likely to be the factors that led to Asquith's downfall — not the death of his son, or even the breakup with Venetia Stanley.

The third question for Laws was whether Asquith would have dealt with Ireland any differently than Lloyd George. Laws replied that, had Asquith still been prime minister after the end of the war, he would possibly have ended up with something like the Lloyd George solution.

Collins was then asked what Lloyd George could have done to prevent the decline of the Liberal Party. In Collins' opinion, if Lloyd George had brought Labour into his government, it might have bought him time and made his government stronger. However, even if Asquith had stepped down from national politics and the Liberal Party had been united behind Lloyd George in 1922–23, Collins doubted that Lloyd George would have been successful in boosting the Liberal ranks with moderate Conservative and moderate Labour MPs in order to lead the Liberals to government in the late 1920s.

How would Asquith and Lloyd George have fared in modern politics and who would be the modern equivalents of Asquith and Lloyd George in British politics? Collins replied that Lloyd George's personal life and financial affairs would be more scrutinised today and he would not have got away with today what he did over a century ago.

When Laws thinks of more recent Liberal Democrat leaders, it is Charles Kennedy and Paddy Ashdown who have a lot in common with Asquith and Lloyd George. There is much in the energy, assets, and liabilities of Lloyd George that Laws recognises in Paddy. There are also many of the extraordinary skills and abilities, but also some of the weaknesses, of Asquith that Laws recognises in Charles's time as leader.

Replying to a question about how factionalism might have affected the Asquith–Lloyd George split, Laws stated that it was the operation of wartime government, the nuts and bolts of getting shells to the frontline that Asquith and Lloyd George fell out over, rather than a difference in political philosophy.

A final question for Chamberlain was about any remaining memories of Asquith in Fife. Chamberlain stated that she has seen a plaque commemorating Asquith outside the Masonic Hall in Ladybank because Asquith frequently made speeches there. Asquith would undoubtedly be happy to have a Liberal again representing North East Fife, but Asquith and Chamberlain would disagree about universal suffrage. In 2018, while standing for election as the first female MP for North East Fife, Chamberlain discovered that suffragettes had chased Asquith off golf courses many times in the constituency, which is the home of golf.

Katheryn Gallant, a graduate of California State University, Los Angeles, is writing an alternative history novel that explores what might have happened had Asquith's letters to Venetia Stanley been published in 1915.

Back from the dead: the Liberal Party in the 1950s

Conference fringe meeting (online), 19 March 2021, with Dr Mark Egan and Lord William Wallace; chair: Baroness Liz Barker. Report by Daniel Duggan

Although acknowledging that the same number of Liberal Members of Parliament were elected in 1964 as in 1945, Dr Mark Egan, Greffier of the States of Jersey and author of Coming into Focus: The Transformation of the Liberal Party, 1945–64, began the meeting by challenging the idea that there was one Liberal Party revival between 1945 and 1964, arguing that there were, in fact, three revivals during this period. The first, he suggested, was in the late 1940s and centred on the efforts of the Liberal Party's headquarters to establish Liberal Associations in the country. These efforts were particularly successful in universities and there was a large increase in the number of Liberal Party candidates standing in the 1950 general election as compared with the 1945 general election. A second revival occurred in the mid-1950s and was marked by an impressive performance at the Inverness by-election in 1954 and a win at the Torrington by-election in 1958. Such success was reflected in the opinion polls and, Egan suggested, gave hope to the Liberal Party. A third revival occurred from 1959 onwards when Jo Grimond became leader and produced victory at the Orpington by-election in 1962.

After outlining the above revivals, Egan highlighted a number of their features. Firstly, they were very much grassroots-led. The idea, for example, of campaigning in by-elections came from the grassroots, with university Liberal clubs in particular often playing an active part in by-election campaigns. Similarly, and although it was patchy and tended to encourage mavericks who could damage the party's reputation, local council activity increased in the 1950s, especially in places such as Liverpool and Rugby.

Secondly, these revivals encountered great challenges with, for example, the party winning a by-election, but finding itself unable to repeat this in a subsequent election. Nevertheless, during each revival new members joined the party, often remaining actively involved for many years.

A third feature of these revivals was the importance of the party's leadership. In particular, Egan argued that the leadership provided by Jo Grimond, with his ability to inspire members, was crucial.

A fourth, and final, feature was the importance of ideas. In the 1940s, the Liberal Party was largely marked by a commitment to free trade and by not being the Labour Party. Subsequently, however, a commitment to other causes, such as support for membership of the Common Market and opposition to Britain's possessing an independent nuclear deterrent, became more important.

However, despite the positive aspects of some of these features, Egan went on to note a number of missed opportunities for the Liberal Party during these revivals. Firstly, the task of turning success at the local and municipal level into success at Westminster proved elusive. Secondly, the party found itself dependant on 'big moments', such as by-elections. Thirdly, general elections were often seen as a binary choice between Labour and Conservatives and, as evidenced by the 1959 and 1964 general elections, the Liberal Party suffered as a consequence. A strategy to prevent this 'squeezing' eluded the party. Fourthly, there were huge fluctuations in the memberships of Liberal Associations and the number of votes the party received during this period.

Overall, although there was much positive sentiment towards the Liberal Party, transforming this into

electoral success proved difficult. Egan concluded by asking why we still discuss the revival of the early 1960s and stressed the important role Grimond played by combining charismas with ideas. Indeed, for Egan, when charismatic leadership and ideas are merged the party is able to make progress, yet in their absence the party cannot succeed.

The second speaker, Lord William Wallace of Saltaire, has not only served the Liberal Party, and subsequently the Liberal Democrats, in various roles, but completed his doctoral thesis on the Liberal Party's revival of 1955 to 1966.

Wallace began by observing that each revival attracted new recruits, serving to re-energise the party, but questioned Egan's suggested second revival, arguing that the mid-1950s were a time when the Liberal Party was close to dying, possessing a mere 250 councillors. Nevertheless, after 1955 a revival did occur and, like Egan, Wallace stressed the importance of Grimond's leadership. Not only was Grimond inspiring, but he also successfully sought out capable people, such as Frank Byers and Mark Bonham Carter, victor of the Torrington by-election. By the time of the Orpington by-election, the Liberal Party's organisation, especially in the suburbs, had become highly effective, so much so that this established the conditions for the next revival in the early 1970s – a revival which occurred despite, and not because, of Jeremy Thorpe's leadership.

Similar to Egan's point regarding general elections often reduced to a binary choice during this period, and with the Liberal Party suffering as a consequence, Wallace argued that all of the party's revivals show how dependant the third party's fortunes have been on the standing of the Conservative and Labour parties. In particular, in the wake of the Suez crisis in 1956, a sense that the Conservatives were more reactionary than the 'one-nation' Conservatives that Churchill had sought to present since 1951, combined with, after 1958–9, a feeling that the Labour Party could not form a government, provided the Liberal Party with credibility and, indeed, council seats were won in the early 1960s. However, the Labour Party's renewed cohesion and electoral support, culminating in victory at the 1964 general election, demonstrated that the Liberal Party could not present itself as the radical alternative to the Conservatives.

In summing up, and while acknowledging that the Grimond-inspired revival led to a new generation of activists joining the party, Wallace noted that the barriers for the third party in a first-past-the-post electoral system are enormous and, with greater reliance on professional organisation and money for effective campaigning today, are now more so.

After hearing from the speakers, various questions were raised, beginning with why Grimond was such an effective and special leader. Egan noted that prior to Grimond, Clement Davies was not a powerful leader, suffering from ill health, and coming from a previous era. In contrast, Grimond was in his forties when he became leader and was a good speaker and television performer. In particular, Grimond's interest in new ideas was stressed by both speakers. When Grimond became leader, the party lacked news ideas, with co-ownership of industry being the last major and distinctive idea that the party had articulated in the late 1940s. Grimond, however, acted as his own think tank, publishing three books between 1957 and 1961 addressing both international and domestic issues, and engaged with a wide range of policy experts and academics who examined contemporary problems, such as local and regional government, and found an intellectual home in the Unserville State Group and the New Orbits Group. Developing new ideas was an important part of the party's revival during this period and, in this respect, was notably different from the revivals of the 1940s and early 1970s.

A second question focused on the extent to which the Liberal Party's fortunes were impacted by Labour being in power, and in particular Labour's ability to attract the support of the youthful and idealistic. Egan noted that during the 1950s and 1960s it was felt that the party tended to struggle electorally when Labour was in power and benefit when a Conservative government existed; indeed, this was understood to be the best guarantor of revival. Nevertheless, Egan added that Labour being in power did not prevent the Liberal Party attracting new activists during the 1960s and the Liberal Democrats' performance during the Blair years has undermined the theory that the party struggles to benefit electorally under a Labour government.

Regarding the place of young supporters, Wallace noted that after 1966 the party possessed a very lively and imaginative Young Liberal movement. However, under Thrope's leadership the Young Liberals were poorly handled and, Wallace suggested, had Thrope and his circle engaged better with the Young Liberals the revival of early 1970s could have been much stronger.

A third question asked whether the party's enduring problem is that many people have defined the Liberal Party, and Liberal Democrats, by what we are not, i.e. Labour or Conservatives. Egan returned to the claim that during the 1950s and 1960s the binary nature of politics was very problematic for the Liberal Party. Although Grimond did position the party on the left – as a non-socialist alternative to the Conservatives – and this chimed with many Liberal activists who saw themselves of the left, but not part of the Labour movement, this clever positioning only took the party so far and opened the Liberal Party to attack from the Conservatives. The party, Egan argued, has always faced the problem of how to relate to other parties, and although party leaders have attempted to define the party in other terms, for example, on the basis of policy, the media's focus on which party the Liberal, and subsequently Liberal Democrats, would support in the event of a hung parliament has hindered this strategy.

Wallace argued that, in the 1950s and 1960s, politics was very much class-based, with voters tending to vote for the same party in election after election. Today, however, the electorate is largely alienated, often voting for the party that they dislike least. In such circumstances, the task of offering a positive alternative to voters is, Wallace contended, all the more challenging.

The fourth, and final, question was asked by the chair, Baroness Barker, and focused on the Liberal Party's approach in the 1950s and 1960s towards international and local issues and what Liberal Democrats today can learn from this. Addressing the party's engagement with international issues, Egan suggested that such matters provided party leaders with principled and distinctive stands, such as Grimond's support for the Common Market and Thorpe's views on Rhodesia. Although such issues tend to appeal to only a relatively small part of the electorate, they can generate media attention for the party and, as Wallace commented, attract members to the party.

As to the party's concern with the local dimension of politics, Egan argued that in the 1950s the Liberal Party knew very little about its local organisations and their development was very much grassroots-led, with local activists learning from one another via such publications as *Liberal News*. Similarly, Wallace stressed the accidental pattern of Liberal Party activity during the 1950s and 1960s, sometimes dependant on the presence of a local notable Liberal family. Today the party's significant reliance on volunteers, in contrast to, say the Conservatives, who are able to rely on much greater financial resources, helps explain why the Liberal Democrats are much stronger in some parts of the country than others.

Daniel Duggan is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group Executive and a Liberal Democrat Councillor in Gateshead.

Reviews

Religion and politics

Tim Farron, *A Better Ambition: Confessions of a Faithful Liberal* (SPCK Publishing, 2019)
Review by Chris Rennard

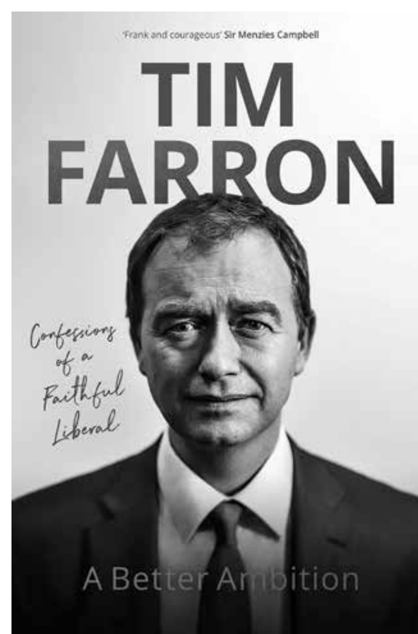
Some eyebrows were raised amongst Lib Dems when it became known that Tim Farron's memoirs were to be published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The author admits in the book to his own fears prior to leading the party in the 2017 general election that more details of his 'whacky religious views' (his phrase) would appear.

The book does not explain satisfactorily why the view he expressed about gay sex was not properly 'stress tested', either within the party or amongst potential voters, in the twenty months that he was leader. Almost everyone who canvassed for the Lib Dems in the 2017 general election campaign met people expressing concern, and often astonishment, over his belief that gay sex was sinful. I did over twenty canvassing sessions across seven different constituencies during the campaign and in only one of them was this issue not raised with me.

The initial strategy described in the book was to refuse to say whether gay sex was sinful. But this could not last long because it simply confirmed that this must be his view. When Tim briefly went on to deny that this was the case, he came across as unconvincing. His post-election admission that he had not been telling the truth when he had said that it was not sinful did him no good and none of this sat well with the party's attempt to present itself at the time as being 'open, tolerant and united'.

It is quite possible to believe that all sex outside religious marriage is sinful, that you 'love the sinner if not the sin', and that you don't consider that people who indulge in it should be considered evil. But simply saying that 'we are all sinners' does not provide any reassurance that the view held is not discriminatory and did not fit with any form of election message. Whilst referencing gay sex twelve times in the book, Tim does not suggest any way in which what he said could help a party seeking to build on its long-standing commitment to the principle of equality on issues of sexual orientation.

As party leader, he was of course targeted ruthlessly by the Tories in his Westmorland and Lonsdale constituency. He had previously been a very popular constituency MP. As chief executive of the Lib Dems at the time of the 2005 general election, I admired how his great campaigning energy had helped him to win the marginal seat by 267 and to become one of a parliamentary party of sixty-two. He then built his constituency into an apparently safe seat with a majority of 8,949 in 2010. But as leader of the party in 2017, he came within 777 votes of losing it. His book says that internal polls showed him losing. He blames this near defeat on being leader. But he does not explain why the constituencies of previous leaders since 1974 had benefitted hugely from having the leader as their candidate.



The problem was his campaign, not him being leader.

Much is made in the book about the relative success, in 2017, of twelve Lib Dem MPs being elected, as opposed to eight in 2015. But, at the same time, the party's share of the vote fell between those elections from the previous record low of 7.9 per cent to a new low of 7.4 per cent. This was the lowest level achieved 'in the Liberal tradition' since the 1950s. Five of the nine Lib Dem MPs at the start of the 2017 general election lost their seats. The party's few gains were either based on areas of Scotland opposed to both Brexit and a second independence referendum, or to the tenacity of local campaigns, mostly by returning MPs. The facts hardly justify his claim about the 2017 campaign that 'This had been a good result.'

In the meantime, the party had been positioned immediately after the Brexit referendum of 2016 to oppose its outcome and seek to reverse it. This attracted a large influx of new members. But it hardly saved the party, as it did not result in increased levels of support. Most of the new members lived in areas that were not good prospects for the party and quite a few of them were effectively making a one-off donation to try and block Brexit.

Interesting parts of the book are very critical of the Lib Dems communications strategy in coalition, starting with the Rose Garden press conference at which Clegg and Cameron looked as though they had just won the national lottery. Farron is critical of the tuition fees reverse, the bedroom tax and the Health and Social Care Act. But he is careful to deny that his positioning on these issues was all part of his campaign to become leader. He says that he did not decide to run for leader until Nick stepped down in 2015. But he had an active campaign team that did not appear to dissolve when he won the election to be party president in 2012. His book does not list the group of 'about ten' people (apart from Ben Rich) who first met at a hotel in Kendal in July 2013 to plan his leadership campaign.

He complains vociferously of media briefing against him by some of those close to Nick Clegg. People will be left wondering who the 'anonymous colleague' was that said of the then party president to a newspaper journalist, 'What is there about the treacherous, sanctimonious, God-bothering little shit, not to like?'. His own comments to a journalist giving the party's performance in government '8 out of 10 for policy and 2 out of 10 for communications' showed support for some coalition achievements, but he doesn't say much about them. He says that his anger about the distinctive voice of the party being drowned out in the coalition had driven him to want to be president. He rightly saw that the consequences of this were catastrophic in electoral terms. He sought to avoid a repetition of the problem by saying that he would not enter another coalition if the chance came his way after 2017. The conclusion from the book is that he did not enjoy the role as leader when it came to a general election, and that he is more comfortable evangelising his faith, representing his constituency, and campaigning well on issues that he cares about.

Lord Rennard was the Liberal Democrats' director of campaigns and elections 1989–2003 and chief executive 2003–09. He is now a Liberal Democrat peer. His memoir Winning Here *was published by Biteback in January 2018 and was reviewed in* Journal of Liberal History *105 (winter 2019–20).*

The question of Europe

Vernon Bogdanor, *Britain & Europe in a Troubled World* (Yale University Press, 2020)
Review by Julie Smith

For decades, academics and practitioners have spilled ink and voiced their opinions on the question of the UK's relations with its European neighbours. Since the outset of European integration in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the UK has typically been out of sync with the project. Politicians have talked about 'Europe' and academics have offered their thoughts, opining on the UK's position as a 'latecomer' to the European Communities and as an 'awkward partner' once it finally joined in 1973. More recently, 'Brexit' as shorthand for the UK's departure from the EU – a hitherto unprecedented act for any member state – has seen a proliferation of academic and journalistic commentary by experts and newcomers to the field of studying the EU and/or British politics; in many ways it has proved to be the 'gift that keeps on giving' for those seeking to pen new publications. Is there, then, anything new to say about the UK's relations with 'Europe'? And does Vernon Bogdanor, certainly no newcomer to British or European politics, provide it?

This slim, four-chapter volume arose from the Henry L. Stimson Lectures delivered by Bogdanor at the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale in 2019. To an extent it reads as such and there is thus some repetition that one might not expect in a single-authored monograph, but which inevitably occurs in a lecture series as the lecturer seeks to remind the listener of key points. This is, however, but a minor criticism. For the most part, the elegant narrative reads beautifully and provides a perfect introduction to UK–EU relations. It has the advantage of being hugely readable, a far cry from the heavily footnoted articles and books that now dominate scholarly literature and which can scarcely be read for pleasure; this book is undoubtedly a pleasure to read. I shall certainly be recommending it to my students as an excellent way into this complex and controversial topic. The addition of a chronology and appendices on British prime ministers, recent general elections and referendums on Europe provide a useful additional resource for anyone wishing to put the relationship into context and to have a sense of the detailed history.

Because the original lectures were given to an American audience, Bogdanor adds some insights about American attitudes to integration, including the role of Henry Stimson – FDR's war secretary – referred to in both the opening and closing chapters. This is a nice touch, which adds a welcome additional perspective for British and European audiences, and an element of originality. The four chapters each broadly cover a different period and have a title drawn from a quotation. Chapter 1, largely addressing the period before the UK joined the Common Market, draws on Disraeli in referring to 'Reserve, but Proud Reserve'. Here Bogdanor touches on both the creation of the founding Communities and British reluctance to cede sovereignty, as well as the relationship between liberalism and nationalism, correctly noting that, 'while the aim of nineteenth-century liberals was to give effect to nationalism, their successors in the latter half of the twentieth century have sought to transcend it' (p. 7).

Chapter 2 on the UK's accession to the EEC in 1973 and the very early years of membership, including the 1975 referendum, harks back to Ernest Bevin's mixed metaphor about Pandora's box and Trojan horses. Chapter 3, looking at the travails of British membership, including Margaret Thatcher's evolving attitudes to European integration, before exploring the 2016 referendum that mandated leaving the EU, uses Theresa May's mantra of 'Brexit Means Brexit' as its title. The final chapter on 'Never Closer Union,' a term coined by Andrew Duff, takes a very different approach. Where the first three chapters look at the history of the relationship, in Chapter 4 Bogdanor provides his thoughts on the future of European integration and offers his views on how the EU should reform.

The first three chapters offer an elegant reminder of the complex and often fractious relationship, drawing on a variety of (for some of us, half-remembered) quotations from leading figures in British political life over the last three-quarters of a century, including Churchill and Thatcher. For newcomers, this is a perfect way into the topic, for veterans like the current reviewer, there are some less obvious quotations that supplement the well-known comments and thus ensure that the book remain fresh even if it covers quite well-known territory.

Thoughtful, measured and almost certainly correct in much of his analysis of the history, Bogdanor then turns to the harder topic of the future. Much of his prediction seems valid and may indeed be vindicated in the longer term. One might hope he is right in predicting that 'Britain will remain a stable democracy, one of the most stable indeed in the world; and its constitutional and political structures retain their solidity' (p. 113), yet wonder whether the tensions between the executive and legislature and judiciary post-referendum really give grounds for such optimism. It may well be the case that 'Brexit, therefore, will lead to a Britain more, not less, exposed to the forces of globalisation. It will prove to be the revenge of Margaret Thatcher from beyond the grave' (p. 112). However, the expectation of opening up markets and low taxation envisaged by Bogdanor in 2019 (and indeed by advocates of leaving the EU ahead of the 2016 referendum) will inevitably be rather muddied by the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and the consequences of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's incomparable largesse over the course of the last eighteen months. Just as the immediate consequences of Brexit were hidden by a lockdown that rendered the effects of the ending of the transition period on 31 December 2020 almost invisible (almost no one could travel, so changes to border controls could scarcely be tested), so the impact of Covid on the economy dwarfs the effects of Brexit. Low tax might well be the ambition of the Johnson government, but it is not within reach in the foreseeable future.

In his concluding remarks, Bogdanor highlights the illiberal turn in European politics, arguing that the situation might be even worse 'without the existence of the European Union' (p. 142). His closing remarks are sombre: looking back to the post-war international order that Stimson helped create, he highlights contemporary concerns over the disconnect between global economics and national politics. Nationalism and Liberalism no longer go together, and Europeans need to 'prevent our world from becoming a world disaggregated and fragmented into conflicting national or ethnic groups, a world of competing

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national states' (p. 144). What he, perhaps, neglects to say at the very end is that Brexit takes the world in the opposite direction. His conclusions are, though, thought-provoking and salutary. Bogdanor does, indeed, have something new to say.

Julie Smith is Reader in European Politics in the Department of Politics and International Studies, Cambridge University and a Fellow of Robinson College, Cambridge. As Baroness Smith of Newnham, she is the Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesman in the House of Lords.

Labour biographies

Keith Gildart and David Howell (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. XV (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

Review by Michael Meadowcroft

It may seem perverse to recommend a series of reference books based firmly in Labour history, but I consult one or other of the fifteen volumes more often than most Liberal publications. Early Labour history is also Liberal history and most Labour pioneers, even Keir Hardie, began as members of the Liberal Party and only moved on when frustrated by the inability, as they saw it, of the Liberal Party adequately to accommodate the justified aspirations of working men and, more particularly, its failure to enfranchise women. The whole period of Lib-Labbery is portrayed within the biographies. Later, with the post-First-World-War decline of the Liberal Party and its failure to deal with internal divisions, more Liberal luminaries moved to Labour and figure in the relevant biographies. Finally, the term 'Labour' is interpreted very broadly and a number of men and women who have a Liberal background are included, including Arthur Acland, Richard Bell, Charles Bradlaugh, Henry Broadhurst, John Burns, Thomas Burt, Charles Roden Buxton, Noel Edward Buxton, William Randal Cremer, Richard Denman, Barbara Bodichon Gould, Vernon Hartshorn, John Atkinson Hobson, William Jowitt, David Low, Arthur Ponsonby and Tom Ellis.

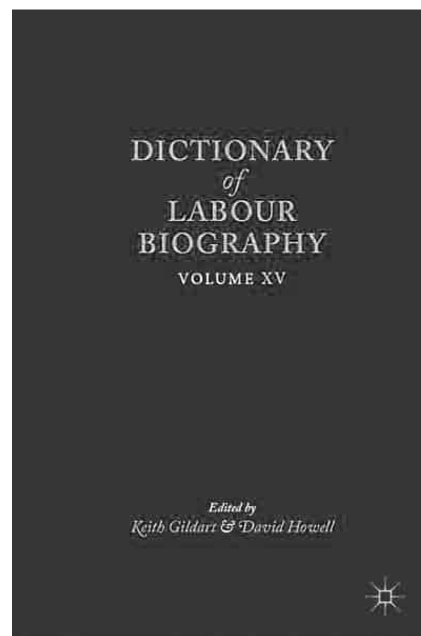
The occasion for reviewing the whole series is the publication of volume XV. The previous volume only appeared after an interval of eight years, so a single year's gap is positively spritely! The first volume of the series appeared in 1972 and a swift calculation shows that it has taken forty-eight years to produce fifteen volumes – certainly no race to the finish. There are now over one thousand biographies covered, plus a number of generic articles on aspects of Labour history, such as the entry in volume XIV on 'The Working Class Movement Library', alongside an essay on its two founders, Ruth and Eddie Frow. Volume XV has an essay on 'Patriotic Labour 1918'.

Biographies in the new Volume XV that have Liberal connections include William Dobbie of York, Edward Cadbury of the Quaker chocolate family, Frank Chapple and combatting electoral malpractice, Henry Charleton and Arthur Fox – both of whom had electoral battles with Leeds Liberals – Victor Grayson who, of course, took over the Colne Valley seat vacated by Liberal Sir James Kitson (who was crucial to the saving of the official party for the Gladstonians in the 1886 struggle over home rule for Ireland), Ben Spoor, the disastrous Chief Whip in the first Labour government in 1924, Richard Llewelyn Jones and his involvement with the Cardigan Liberals, and Tom Ellis, Labour and then SDP MP for Wrexham and one of the most Liberal members of the SDP.

The original editors were Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, based at Hull University, and they remained in charge until volume X – a span of twenty-eight years. The constants over the past five volumes have been Keith Gildart, Professor of Labour and Social History at the University of Wolverhampton, and David Howell, Professor of Politics at the University of York. Gildart and Howell have followed the wise and eclectic example of Bellamy and Saville in including worthy subjects as they were available from reputable writers. Each succeeding volume contains a cumulative index of the subject biographies enabling them to be easily referred to, plus, of course, a detailed index to each individual volume. Each essay contains full references, a list of the subject's writings plus a note of related essays. In researching articles on Liberals and Liberal history, I find myself not only checking whether there is an essay on my subject, but also going through the individual indices for relevant references.

The main problem for individual historians is the high price – typical, alas, of most academic books these days. It is always worth asking the publishers, Palgrave Macmillan, whether they would give a discount for an individual purchaser. If not, then at least recommend your local library to obtain them.

Michael Meadowcroft was a Leeds city councillor for fifteen years and a West Yorkshire metropolitan county councillor for six years. He was the Liberal MP for West Leeds from 1983 to 1987. He is a regular lecturer on political and local history.



A Liberal Democrat History Group fringe meeting

The two Davids: Steel versus Owen

In 1981 the alliance between the Liberal Party and the newly founded SDP was agreed; the two parties would fight elections together on a joint platform with join candidates. Between 1983 and 1987, however, the working relationship between the Liberal leader, David Steel, and his SDP counterpart, Dr David Owen, became increasingly marked by tension and distrust. Steel became steadily more frustrated at Owen's resistance to joint selection of candidates, and any convergence on policy proposals. The Liberal Party and the SDP clashed over some issues, most notably nuclear weapons. In particular, Owen strongly opposed any long-term moves to merge the two parties.

The clash became painfully obvious during the 1987 general election campaign, when Steel ruled out supporting a minority Thatcher government while Owen was adamant that Labour was unfit to govern. The results of the election were disappointing for both parties. The leadership tensions ultimately wrecked the Alliance.

Speakers: **Sir Graham Watson** (David Steel's former Head of Office) and **Roger Carroll** (former SDP Communications Director). Chair: **Christine Jardine MP**.

17:35 – 18:40, Friday 17 September
This is a fringe meeting at the Liberal Democrats' autumn conference; you must be registered for the conference to be able to participate. You do not need to register separately for the meeting.

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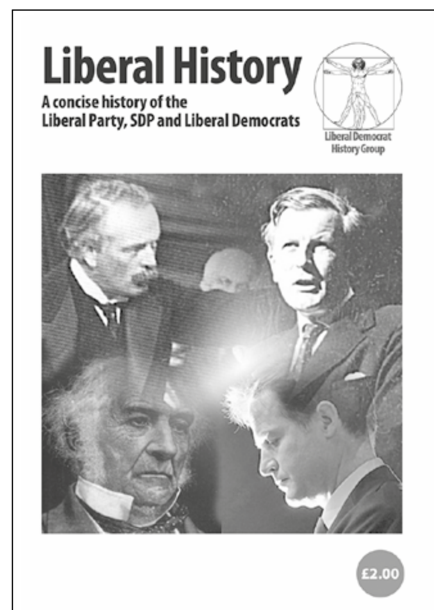

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