

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