

# Liberal History News

## Autumn 2022

### Obituary: David Chidgey

David Chidgey came into parliament via the time-honoured Liberal route of local government and a fortuitous by-election; but, although he was a conscientious councillor on his local town council and, later on, the Winchester City Council, his sights were quite early set on a parliamentary career. His first big contest was a European Parliament by-election for the Hampshire Central seat in autumn 1988, but thereafter he concentrated on the Eastleigh constituency, winning it at the second attempt in February 1994 at a by-election caused by the death of the Conservative MP in highly unusual circumstances. He held the seat twice thereafter before retiring at the 2005 general election. He was made a life peer in May 2005.

David was unusual in being a highly regarded civil engineer, a rare breed in the House of Commons, and, prior to his election, he had managed many major overseas engineering projects mainly in Africa but also in Bangladesh, Brazil and the Middle East. As a natural parliamentary follow up to his practical work, he became a member of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. It was also appropriate that he became the party's spokesperson on transport, which also helped him in his

Eastleigh constituency with its history as a railway town.

He was a conscientious constituency MP and preferred to achieve results by applying expertise and by working constructively with other MPs rather than by banging the party drum too loudly. There were also opportunities for David to apply his engineering expertise to local issues as was evidenced by his speeches on the protection of the chalk streams which flowed through the local rivers in his constituency. He was also pleased to have played a significant role in the successful campaign to block plans by major high street banks to increase charges significantly at cash dispensing machines which would have disproportionately affected poorer people. His regular and unassuming habit of walking down from his constituency office to buy a lunchtime sandwich provided an informal opportunity to be approached by constituents, and he was amused by their regular mispronouncing of his name as 'Mr Chidley'.

When he moved to the House of Lords, he became the party's specialist front bench spokesman on African development and on human rights issues. With his internationalism and his attention to



environmental issues, David was a natural Liberal. His easy conviviality was evident in his active involvement in the National Liberal Club, in which he used his experience and his contacts to assist with meetings on overseas affairs.

*David William George Chidgey, engineer and politician, born 9 July 1942, died 15 February 2022.*

*Michael Meadowcroft*

### Obituary: Trevor Wilson

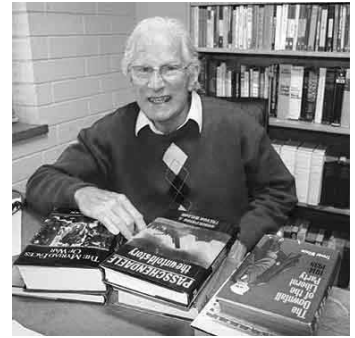
Professor Trevor Wilson died, at the age of 93, on 11 June 2022. Born in Auckland, New Zealand, in 1928, he completed a PhD at the University of Oxford in 1959. He took up the position of Lecturer in History at the University of Adelaide in 1960 and spent most of his career there. His main contribution to historical studies lay in the field

of World War I military history, but he is best known to students of Liberal history as the author of *The Downfall of the Liberal Party 1914–1935* (1966).

His conclusion on the reasons for the party's decline during that period is encapsulated in a memorable allegory:

'The Liberal Party can be compared to an individual who, after a period of robust health and great exertion, experienced symptoms of illness (Ireland, Labour unrest, the suffragettes). Before a thorough diagnosis could be made, he was involved in an encounter with a rampant omnibus (the First World War), which mounted the pavement and ran him over. After lingering painfully, he expired. A controversy has persisted ever since as to

what killed him. One medical school argues that even without the bus he would soon have died; the intimations of illness were symptoms of a grave disease which would shortly have ended his life. Another school goes further, and says that the encounter with the bus would not have proved fatal had not the victim's health been seriously impaired. Neither of these views are accepted here. The evidence for them is insufficient, because the ailments had not reached a stage where their ultimate effect could be known. How long, apart from the accident, the victim would have survived, what future (if any) he possessed, cannot be said. All that is known is that at one moment he was up and walking and at the next he



was flat on his back, never to rise again; and in the interval he had been run over by a bus. If it is guess-work to say that the bus was mainly responsible for his demise, it is the most warrantable guess that can be made.'

(Michael Steed reviewed the case for this argument in 'Did the Great War Really Kill the Liberal Party?', *Journal of Liberal History* 87 (Summer 2015).)

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