

# Liberal History News

## Spring 2023

### Editorial

Welcome to the spring 2023 edition of the *Journal of Liberal History*, which now completes a year of publication in the new smaller format. We hope readers like the new size; we'll be giving you an opportunity to provide feedback through a reader survey soon.

This issue contains two main articles: Peter Hain's memories of his involvement,

as a Young Liberal, in anti-apartheid campaigns, and an examination of the influence of North American politics on British Liberals in the second half of the nineteenth century. We also continue our new 'Introduction to Liberal History' series: primer articles on key periods, personalities, policies and approaches. Here we cover the topic of free

trade. Suggestions for other topics are very welcome.

Finally, please note our appeal for help on page 6. The Liberal Democrat History Group needs a new organiser for our series of discussion meetings; if you think you can offer some time, please do get in touch.

*Duncan Brack (Editor)*

### Frederick Horniman

Frederick Horniman, the nineteenth-century Liberal MP, hit the headlines last year – more than a century after his death – when the museum which bears his name became the first UK government-funded institution to agree to repatriate historically significant artefacts to their place of origin.

The Horniman Museum, which he founded, handed over a number of objects, including two sixteenth-century Benin bronze plaques ransacked from what is now Nigeria, to a representative of

the country's museum service. Coincidentally, the Horniman was also named Museum of the Year by the Art Fund.

Despite never reaching the upper echelons of the Liberal Party, Horniman (1835–1906) was typical of a number of Liberal MPs of the era in being a

businessman with a social conscience who believed in giving something back to society – an act reflected in his case in the bequeathing of his eclectic collection of artefacts from around the world to the country.

Born in Bridgwater, Somerset, the son of Quakers,

Frederick Horniman (1835–1906) in 1897 (© National Portrait Gallery, London); Emslie Horniman (1863–1932) in 1898



his father John invented a tea-packaging machine, and when the selling of tea in sealed packets proved profitable, he established the tea business Horniman & Co, and the family moved to Croydon.

On leaving school at 14 Frederick Horniman joined the increasingly successful family business, and on his father's retirement in 1868, he and his brother took over the family firm. By 1891 it was described by the *St Stephen's Review* as 'the biggest tea firm in the world'.

At the same time, the by now wealthy Horniman was travelling widely – to India and beyond – and collecting rare objects, as well as 'those illustrative of natural history, arts, and handicrafts from all over the world,' on an ever-increasing scale. By 1890 his collection filled his Surrey House, Forest Hill home so he opened it as a free museum to the public for three days a week.

Five years later, he became Liberal MP for Penryn, Falmouth and Flushing, representing it until his death in 1906. He was, by all accounts, an 'active' MP and helped secure the passage through Parliament of a bill abolishing the rector's rate which, he argued at a meeting in 1897, had been 'a noxious impost' on the borough since the reign of Charles II.

Outside politics, his great passion remained his collection. By 1897 electric lighting



had been installed in Surrey House and the collections on display included birds, butterflies, Egyptian antiquities, coins, manuscripts, porcelain and oriental ethnography. Indeed it proved so popular with visitors that Horniman decided to demolish the existing museum and build a purpose-built new one in its place.

Four years later, the new Charles Harrison Townsend-designed building, consisting of two large galleries and a distinctive tower – which has been described as 'a masterpiece of English free-style architecture' – was completed at a cost of £40,000. Shortly afterwards it was presented, with the collections and 15 acres of gardens, to the London County Council which Horniman considered representative of 'the people of London'.

Horniman's son Emslie was not just an enthusiastic

collector of arts and 'curiosities', like his father, but followed his lead politically too. In 1906 he was elected Liberal MP for Chelsea, though he lost it to the Conservatives in 1910. The following year he donated a public park – known ever since as Emslie Horniman's Pleasance – in Kensal Town (then part of Chelsea) to the London County Council. Furthermore, on his death in 1932 he gave £10,000 to the LCC to build an extension to the Horniman Museum.

Father and son may have lived during the British Empire's zenith and been men of their time, but one hopes that given their progressive views, had they been alive today they would have approved of the Horniman Museum's trailblazing actions in repatriating historically significant artefacts to their country of origin.

*York Membery*

# We need a Meetings Organiser

The Liberal Democrat History Group is looking for a new organiser for our discussion meetings. The role involves:

- Identifying topics for our meetings – usually four a year, two at Liberal Democrat conferences and two in the National Liberal Club or, sometimes, Parliament.
- Identifying and approaching potential speakers.
- Organising the meetings – booking the venue, liaising with speakers, working with the *Journal* editor and our website coordinator to organise publicity.



You need to be an organised individual. A general knowledge of Liberal history will help, but you don't need to be an expert – you'll have plenty of help from the History Group's executive committee and meetings group.

Interested in learning more? Contact the Editor, **Duncan Brack** ([journal@liberalhistory.org.uk](mailto:journal@liberalhistory.org.uk)) – we would love to hear from you.

## Richard Cobden: Manchester Citizen to 'International Man'

Richard Cobden (1804–65) is usually remembered as a leader of the Anti-Corn Law League, which campaigned for free trade in food during the 'hungry forties', but his public career embraced far more.

He was a supporter of educational reform, press freedom, and extension of the



vote. He was a leading figure of the international peace movement, a critic of British foreign policy, and an opponent of slavery and imperialism. However, before he became the 'international man', Sussex-born Cobden was an active Manchester citizen: a contributor to local societies and leading campaigner behind the establishment of Manchester's first elected municipal council.

Manchester Central Library is hosting an exhibition tracing Cobden's life, career, and legacy from 5 April until 30 June. It is part of a project led by Leeds

Richard Cobden (1804–65), ca. 1860 (© National Portrait Gallery, London)

Beckett University and the University of East Anglia and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which is making thousands of Cobden's letters available online and using his correspondence to develop teaching materials around the theme of active citizenship.

Further details can be found at: <https://manclibraries.blog/2023/03/27/richard-cobden-manchester-citizen-to-international-man/>

*Anthony Howe*

## Corrigendum

Our apologies for the slight error that crept into John Smithson's letter in *Journal of Liberal History* 117 (winter

2022–23) – which itself was written to correct an error in the report of the History Group’s meeting on ‘The Two Davids: Owen versus Steel’ in issue 115 (summer 2022)!

The letter stated that Simon Hughes MP summed up the debate on the amendment to the defence motion at the Liberal Assembly at Eastbourne in 1986. In fact he spoke in the middle of the debate; it was Michael Meadowcroft MP who summed up for the amendment.

# Letters to the Editor

## Lincoln Liberal Club

I’ve just been to historic Lincoln for the weekend and was saddened to see the local Liberal Club boarded up and derelict (see photo).

Given its state of disrepair, the handsome red brick building dating back to the 1890s, must be under threat of demolition. I just wondered if anyone locally knows the state



of play? Hopefully it can be saved.

*York Membro*

## 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**.

### March

*2 March 1852:* Amidst fears that the Corn Laws may be reintroduced by the newly formed Conservative administration led by Lord Derby, a meeting is held in Manchester to revive the Anti-Corn Law League. The meeting is addressed by Cobden, Bright and Milner-Gibson and £27,700 is raised within half an hour. In the House of Commons Bright repeatedly challenged Disraeli, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, to state the government’s policy on protectionism but the Chancellor, fearful of the fragility of the government’s position, refused to oblige.

### April

*3 April 1908:* Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman resigns as Liberal Prime Minister. After signing his resignation letter to King Edward VII, Campbell-Bannerman says to his private secretary Vaughan Nash, ‘That’s the last kick my dear fellow, I don’t mind. I’ve been Prime Minister for longer than I deserve’..

### May

*11 May 1940:* Churchill forms his all-party coalition government. Liberal leader Sir Archibald Sinclair becomes Secretary of State for Air. Other Liberals joining the government include Harcourt Johnstone (Parliamentary Secretary to the Overseas Trade Department), Gwilym Lloyd George (Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade) and Dingle Foot (Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Economic Warfare). Leader of the National Liberals, Sir John Simon, accepts a peerage and becomes Lord Chancellor. Lloyd George declines an invitation to join.