

Journal of Liberal

HISTORY



Charles James Fox 1749 – 1806

David Wilson

The year of the Fox The Whig leader commemorated in stone

Roy Douglas

The Liberal predicament, 1945–64

J. Graham Jones

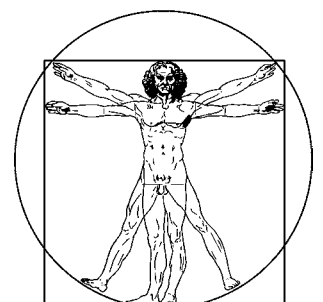
'To hold the old flag' Biography of Henry Haydn Jones MP (1863–1950)

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Return from Bosnia Paddy Ashdown on Lib Dems, Labour, Bosnia, Iraq

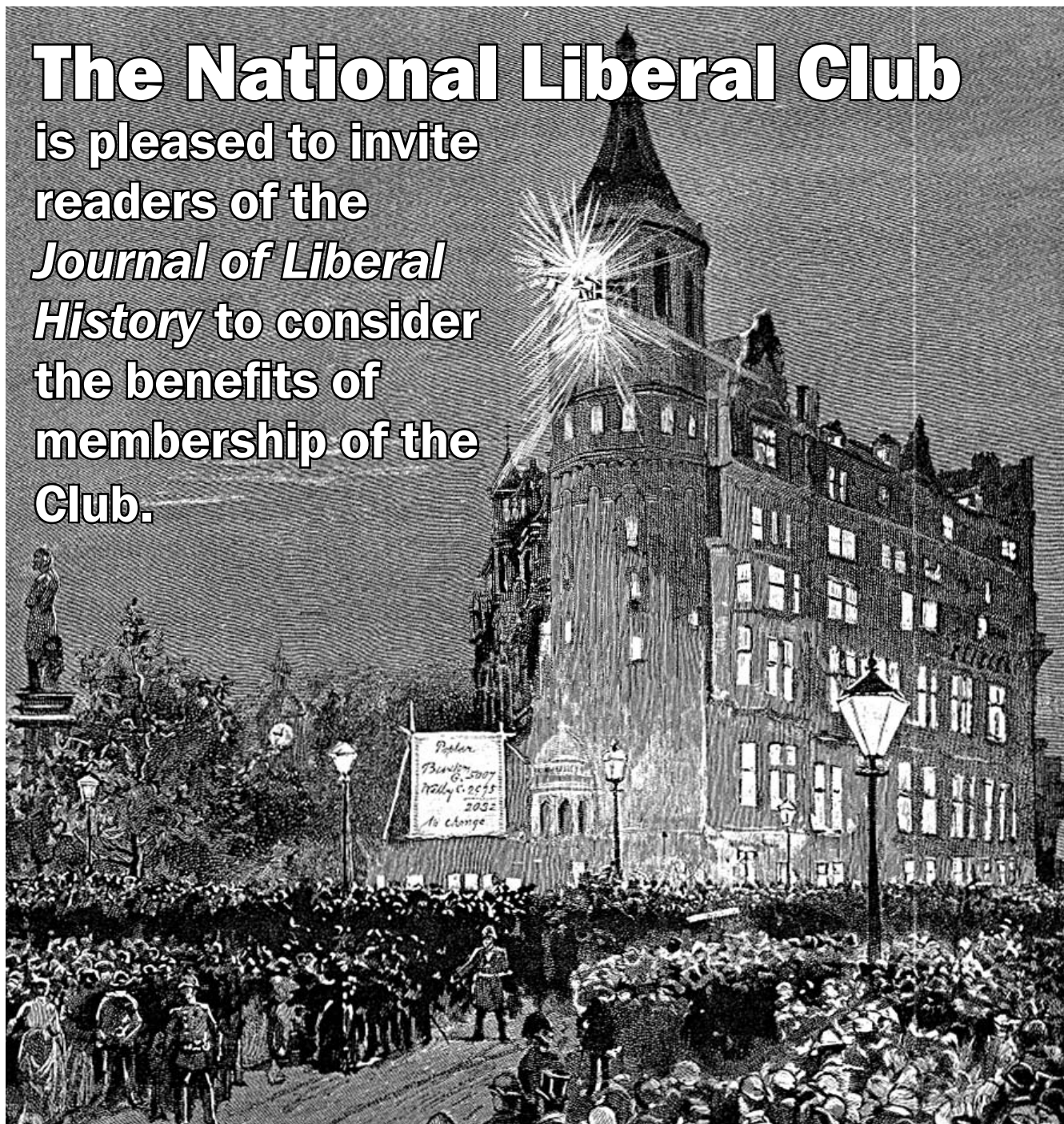
Menzies Campbell, Simon Hughes, Chris Huhne

Old heroes for a new leader Lib Dem leadership contenders' political heroes



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Liberal Democrat History Group

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THE YEAR

The last twelve months or so have seen a major resurgence of interest in the iconography of Charles James Fox (1749–1806), the great eighteenth-century Whig politician, orator and statesman.

It coincides with a vigorous campaign to rehabilitate the reputation of George III (reigned 1760–1820), popularly thought of as the ‘mad King’ who lost the American colonies. That cruel and inaccurate portrayal belies the King’s significant role as a patron of the arts, science and architecture during a period of extraordinary advancement in manufacturing and technology, as well as the development of the arts. **David Wilson** looks at how Fox is commemorated in stone – in busts, statues and monuments.



Figure 1. Bust of Charles James Fox by Joseph Nollekens RA, signed and dated 1 March 1796. National Portrait Gallery, London. Private Collection; © Hilary Chelminski.

R OF THE FOX

George III's achievements have been much overshadowed by the extravagant and profligate behaviour of his eldest son, later Regent and in due course King George IV. Charles James Fox is credited by many historians (and was certainly regarded by George III) as the prime influence on the Prince and as being responsible for leading the young George into a dissolute life of debauchery and excess, which soured forever the Prince's relations with his father. This recent interest in Fox has been greatly encouraged by the permanent display, since 2003, of a magnificent eighteenth-century white marble portrait bust of him by the great sculptor Joseph Nollekens RA in the new Regency galleries at the National Portrait Gallery (Fig. 1) and by a project, undertaken with support from English Heritage, to re-landscape Bloomsbury Square in London, the site of Richard Westmacott RA's posthumous statue of Fox. These developments are a prelude to celebrations to be held in 2006 to mark the bicentenary of Fox's death on 13 September 1806.

Fox combined a long political career, spanning thirty-five years, with an unconventional lifestyle: he cohabited for many years with the famous courtesan, Elizabeth Bridget Cane (commonly called Mrs Armitstead) whom he subsequently married in secret in 1795,

only revealing the marriage to his family and friends in 1802 (Fig. 2).

Fox is remembered for his opposition to the war with the American colonies, and his support for the campaigns for Parliamentary reform and the abolition of slavery. Fox held junior office in the early 1770s and subsequently was Britain's first Foreign Secretary (in 1782, in the cabinet headed for a few months by the Marquess of Rockingham). Thereafter, apart from two relatively brief periods when he was in the cabinet (as Foreign Secretary, for most of 1783 and in the eight months before his death in 1806), a combination of personal grudges and his increasingly radical views became a barrier to his reappointment to high office, and most of his career was spent in opposition to the government.

Although, through his eloquence and determination, he rose to become the leader of the 'official' Whig opposition in the House of Commons, his own temperament was his downfall. It found expression in his support for the French Revolution and his opposition to the war with France and to various measures (such as the suspension of habeas corpus in 1794) enacted by a fearful British government against its own citizens, some of whom were suspected of plotting insurrection. There were numerous disputes with George III, especially over Fox's relationship with the King's unpopular son George, Prince of

Wales (who had himself been a former lover of Mrs Armitstead and who was regularly with Fox at the racecourse and gambling tables). In 1788, during the temporary illness of the King, and without a care for the prospects of his political faction in the Commons, Fox argued for the automatic Regency of his friend the Prince of Wales, thus denying the right of Parliament to debate anything regarding the Prince, and in the process destroying his party's credibility as the defender of the rights of Parliament. These matters and a number of other instances where Fox allowed his passions to rule his intellect, secured for him a place in the political wilderness, a landscape of which he was the chief cultivator. Despite his long parliamentary career, Fox's total time in office was only five years, including his three periods as Foreign Secretary that totalled less than two years.

Fox's political arch-enemy, William Pitt, died in 1806, having held the premiership almost continuously from 1783 until his death, with only one break between 1801 and 1804. Only then was a 'Ministry of all the Talents' given the seals of office and George III, recognising that Fox was now the only great statesman alive, acquiesced in Fox's appointment as Foreign Secretary and the real head of the government under the nominal premiership of Lord Grenville. Fox was, however, by then ill with dropsy, and died

Fox combined a long political career, spanning thirty-five years, with an unconventional lifestyle.

THE YEAR OF THE FOX



Figure 2. Mrs Armitstead, engraving after Sir Joshua Reynolds PRA, National Portrait Gallery, London.



Figure 4. Nollekens' statue of Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd Marquess of Rockingham in Garter Robes, with the plaster replica bust of Fox in the background, in the Mausoleum at Wentworth Woodhouse.



Figure 3. Mausoleum at Wentworth Woodhouse, Yorkshire, dedicated to the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham.



Figure 5. Fox's neo-classical temple at St. Anne's Hill, Chertsey, as it appeared in 1974. Photograph courtesy of Knight Frank.

within months of taking office. Ironically, he was buried beside Pitt in Westminster Abbey.

Fox's association with Rockingham and his deep and lifelong friendship with the Marquess's heir and nephew, the fourth Earl Fitzwilliam, led to the commission of Nollekens' bust of Fox. Modelling of the bust probably started in 1789 and the marble was completed in 1791. The bust had been intended for a temple of political friendship at Wentworth Woodhouse in Yorkshire, the ancestral home of Rockingham, to whom the temple was dedicated by Fitzwilliam (Fig. 3). Rockingham had also briefly held the premiership between 1755 and 1756, during which time he secured the repeal of the infamous Stamp Act, the much despised measure that taxed the legal transactions of the Americans (and other colonists) who were nevertheless denied representation in Parliament. The temple (the work of the architect John Carr of York) is described in both the estate accounts and in correspondence as a 'mausoleum', although Rockingham (who died in July 1782 after only three months in office) was not, in fact, buried there, but in York Minster. The temple, owned by the Fitzwilliam Wentworth Amenity Trust, is open to the public for part of the year.

Nollekens' full-length statue of Rockingham in the temple is not surrounded by his ancestors, but by eight busts (many by Nollekens) of friends and political allies, including Fox, Lord John Cavendish (Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Rockingham government) and Edmund Burke, the politician and political philosopher and writer, who at one time had been Rockingham's Private Secretary. The busts were removed from the temple some time ago to a private collection, and replaced with plaster casts (Fig. 4). Fitzwilliam's temple of political friendship was a sort of Whig cabinet, reflecting the cabinet presided over by Rockingham in the early months of 1782 and of which Fox, Fitzwilliam and Cavendish were

members. Ironically, the friendship of Fox and Burke terminated irretrievably in 1791 following their irreconcilable differences over the French Revolution (which Burke deplored), and a serious breach occurred in the relationship between Fox and Fitzwilliam when, in 1794, the latter and a number of other senior Whigs defected and went over to the government, leaving Fox to preside over a disaffected and demoralised 'rump' opposition whose effectiveness was fatally damaged. Fitzwilliam was then appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland by Pitt, but was not a success.

The bust of Fox, Nollekens' most famous production, has been described by leading experts as 'commanding' and as Nollekens' 'masterpiece in the Baroque manner'. As Margaret Whinney has pointed out, 'the flamboyance of Fox's character has been seized to perfection and the grossness of his physique has been emphasised rather than ignored. The swift turn of the head with the curls jutting from it, and the piercing eyes are all the more impressive against the bulk of the shoulders. Here is a man who could dominate the House of Commons, infuriate the Tories by the liberality of his views, and command the unswerving loyalty of his friends.'

Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, was a great admirer of Fox and wished to acknowledge his friendly diplomacy during the Russo-Turkish war, which broke out in 1788. During the period of March to April 1791, in powerful displays of eloquence in the Commons Fox galvanised public opinion against the government and dissuaded Pitt from sending ships to secure the restitution to Turkey of the fortress of Oczakow and a small strip of land lying between the rivers Bug and Dniester, which had been seized by the Russians from the Turks. The grateful Catherine let it be known that she desired a marble bust of Fox. On learning this news, Fitzwilliam ceded the bust to Catherine (it is now in the Hermitage) and then com-

'Here is a man who could dominate the House of Commons, infuriate the Tories by the liberality of his views, and command the unswerving loyalty of his friends.'

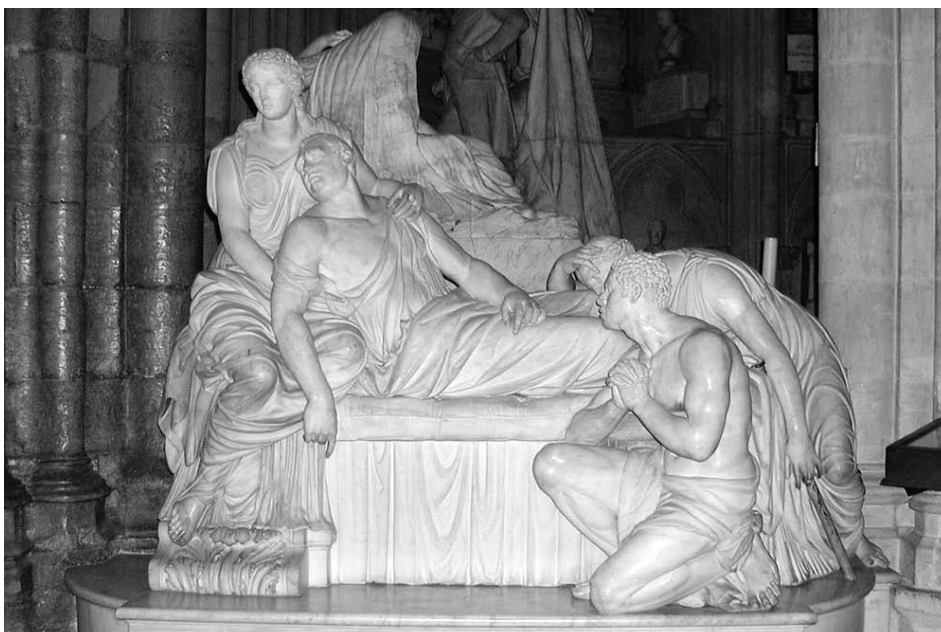
missioned a replica of the bust from Nollekens for the temple of political friendship at Wentworth Woodhouse.

A number of the close political associates of Fitzwilliam and Fox commissioned replicas of the bust. Some eleven are recorded, including the bust now in the National Portrait Gallery. That one was specifically commissioned from Nollekens by Fitzwilliam as a gift for Fox's partner, Mrs Armitstead, to whom it is inscribed. The gift seems to have been something of a 'peace offering' and reflected a rapprochement between Fox and Fitzwilliam following the latter's dismissal by Pitt from the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland in 1795. The bust was completed on 1 March 1796, when it was despatched to St Anne's Hill at Chertsey, the country home shared by Fox and Mrs Armitstead, where they were very happy together, became very keen gardeners, and where Fox enjoyed the life of a country gentleman and indulged his passion for classical literature. The bust stood in one of three niches in a small temple of friendship in the grounds of St Anne's Hill, that had been erected in 1794 and was dedicated to Fox's nephew (and intended political successor) Henry, third Lord Holland, with whom Fox and Mrs Armitstead were very close (Fig. 5). It was to St. Anne's that Fox retired after declaring in 1797 that he would attend Parliament no more. Over the years, and before Fox resumed his seat, St. Anne's became a place for entertaining Fox's political associates and friends including George, Prince of Wales.

The socle (base) of the bust was inscribed with a quatrain extolling the virtues of Fox, written by his friend and brother-in-law, the satirist and poet Richard Fitzpatrick. The quatrain reads:

A Patriot's even Course he
steer'd,
Mid Factions wildest Storms
unmoved;
By all who mark'd his Mind
revered,

THE YEAR OF THE FOX



By all who knew his Heart
beloved.

While apparently posthumous, these lines were actually added to the socle in Fox's lifetime and were most likely intended as an expression of the popularly perceived qualities of Fox, not least his title, 'Man of the People'. This was earned in Fox's election campaign of 1780 for the seat of Westminster, when he invited his friend, Georgiana, the dazzling Duchess of Devonshire, to join him on the hustings. Fox was magnificent, whipping up the crowd with speeches about the rights of the British people, Parliamentary reform and the consequences of royal tyranny.

In 1802 Nollekens completed a new bust of Fox, commissioned by Francis, fifth Duke of Bedford, for his Temple of Liberty at Woburn Abbey, which was intended to honour Fox as the great champion of civil liberty and justice and the opponent of tyranny and oppression. The 1802 bust, in which Fox is portrayed with short hair in the manner of a Roman Republican, was accompanied in the Woburn temple by busts of Fox's political associates (also made by Nollekens). The second bust is thought to have been reproduced in Nollekens' studio at least fifty times in marble and many more times in plaster, possibly reflecting the cult that grew up around Fox. This second posthumous bust of Pitt were frequently exhibited as a pair.

John Kenworthy-Browne has commented that, 'as an expression

Figure 6. Statue of Charles James Fox, by Richard Westmacott RA, Bloomsbury Square, London.

Figure 7. The restoration of Bloomsbury Square, London, under way in 2003, with Charles James Fox looking north toward Russell Square and the statue of his friend Francis, 5th Duke of Bedford.

Figure 8. Monument to Charles James Fox, Westminster Abbey, by Richard Westmacott RA.

of Whig liberalism a Temple of Liberty was not new: the Gothic temple at Stowe had originally been so described. But in 1800 such a fane [temple or shrine] must necessarily be associated with the French Revolution. Of the Revolutionary aims, *liberté* came first. There was a temple dedicated to Liberty at Nantes in 1790 and doubtless others elsewhere.' Nicholas Penny has also pointed out that such temples were 'not an uncommon type of garden building in the eighteenth century' but that the temple at Woburn was unusual, not only because it had been brought indoors (forming a part of the main structure of the house), but because it honoured not Liberty in general, but Fox, its human and living embodiment.

Following his death, Fox's friends joined together to raise the money to pay for his funeral in Westminster Abbey, to pay his debts and provide a pension for his widow. A committee, comprising a number of his close political associates, was formed to erect a monument and a statue, and its members (who included Earl Fitzwilliam and Richard Fitzpatrick) all contributed very generously, as did George, Prince of Wales, whom Fitzwilliam described (some seven weeks after the death of Fox & has not recovered his spirits since'. The committee chose Richard Westmacott RA as the sculptor for both commissions.

A bronze statue, completed in 1814, was eventually unveiled in June 1816, after a long search for an appropriate site. In the end, the committee agreed that the statue should be located in Bloomsbury Square on land donated for that purpose by John, sixth Duke of Bedford, the brother of Francis, the fifth Duke (Fig. 6). The statue of Fox is positioned on the north end of the square facing north so that the great man can look directly down Bedford Place to the statue (also by Westmacott) of his dear friend Francis, Duke of Bedford, which had

Figure 9. Statue of Francis, 5th Duke of Bedford, by Richard Westmacott RA, Russell Square, London.



been placed, facing south, at the south end of Russell Square (Fig. 9). Francis had been one of the noble Lords who remained faithful to Fox when many senior Whigs, no longer able to support Fox's opposition to the war with France, deserted him and went over to the government in 1794. To the intense grief of his friends, not least Fox, the Duke died suddenly in 1802 following an operation.

Westmacott's statue of Fox was admired by the press, the critic in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1816 commenting: 'Dignity and repose appear to have been the leading objects of the artist's ideas ... the likeness of Mr Fox is perfect and striking ... This statue, and the statue of the late Duke of Bedford, by the same artist [Westmacott], at the other extremity of Bedford-place, form two grand and beautiful ornaments of the Metropolis.' Mrs Fox recorded in her diary of 30 June 1816: 'Went afterwards to Bloomsbury Square to see the statue of my angel which is magnificent and simple just as I could wish, but I do not like its being placed there. If it could not be placed in Westminster it should have been on this dear Hill [St Anne's] which he so

much loved. It was a melancholy sight, God knows ...'

The year 2003 saw refurbishment works at Bloomsbury Square in London. They included extra protection for the statue by the reinstatement of railings around the plinth and some radical pruning of the foliage adjacent to the statue so as to expose it more fully for public view. This, incidentally, has helped to fulfil one of the benefits intended by those who erected the statue, namely that Fox should be able to gaze upon his friend Francis, fifth Duke of Bedford in nearby Russell Square (Fig. 7).

The work on Bloomsbury Square happily coincided with the *Save our Sculpture* campaign, an initiative of the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association, which is intended to help the public identify and protect sculptures at risk and to increase public awareness of the wealth of public sculpture throughout Britain. One of the most evident examples of the cultural output of nineteenth-century Britain is its public sculpture, of which there are possibly as many as 15,000 examples, ranging from sculptural reliefs on buildings through political and imperial heroes to war

THE YEAR OF THE FOX



Figure 10.
Statue of Fox
by EH Bailey
RA. © Palace of
Westminster.

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memorials. English Heritage's involvement with the London Borough of Camden in the restoration of Bloomsbury Square, including the associated work to assist the public visibility of Westmacott's statue of Fox, is very welcome. Some further works of tree pruning are to be undertaken, but money also needs to be raised to clean the statue.

Westmacott was also the sculptor commissioned by the committee to produce the monument to Fox in Westminster Abbey (Fig. 8). The monument was not unveiled until 1822, largely due to delays occasioned by alterations to the Abbey as part of the preparations for the somewhat theatrical coronation of George IV. The critic in *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction* for February 1823 commented that 'the head of Mr. Fox is admirably executed, the likeness good; and those generous and magnanimous feelings which predominated in the expression of his countenance, strongly portrayed'. The monument has been stated by Margaret

Whinney to be 'probably Westmacott's masterpiece, and has a greater composition of nobility than any monument in St. Paul's. Fox, the great Whig, dies in the arms of Liberty, while Peace bends, mourning, at his feet.' The famous slave kneels in front, gazing at Fox who had spoken strongly in favour of his liberty. It is a most impressive work. The great Italian neo-classical sculptor, Antonio Canova (of whom Westmacott was a pupil in the early 1790s) once commented that he had never seen any work which surpassed Westmacott's figure of the slave on the monument.

Before the monument was installed, a controversy arose over the length and content of its inscription. One draft was composed by Fox's close friend Charles (Earl) Grey. Mrs Fox was shown Lord Grey's lines, but reluctantly rejected them: 'Alas! What Inscription can tell the hundredth part of the virtues of his heart and mind or of his benevolence to Mankind, no words can do it'. In her view, the

lines were 'fitter for a paragraph in history than for an inscription for a Monument' and in her diary Mrs Fox, truly upset at causing any offence to Grey, wrote: 'I am afraid my not liking it as well as many of my friends do may hurt Lord Grey which will give me real pain to do but ... I am more than ever convinced that the name only is the best to have on the monument ...' Westmacott solved the dilemma himself, by producing a pedestal with insufficient room for a lengthy inscription. The inscription, in stark contrast with the magnificent statuary above, merely states Fox's name and dates of birth and death. Mrs Fox saw the monument in November 1822. In her diary entry for 14 November she wrote: '... afterwards to Westminster Abbey to see the Monument parts of which I like very much. I think upon the whole it is beautiful, but it is ill placed and rather too low ...'

The subject of Fox iconography cannot be left without some mention of the representation of

the statesman in Parliament, which was, after all, his spiritual home. St Stephen's Hall in the Palace of Westminster contains the white marble statue of Fox sculpted by E. H. Bailey RA in 1855, after being offered the commission by HM Commissioners of Fine

Arts (Fig. 10). The price was £1,000. The statue was completed and erected in the year of its commission and was favourably commented on by the critic in the *Art Journal* of that year. In its treatment of the head and face of Fox, it closely follows the model-

ling of the earlier (1791) bust of Fox by Nollekens, with its long hair and curls.

David Wilson is Director-designate of the Wordsworth Trust, Centre for British Romanticism, Cumbria. He has researched and published widely on eighteenth-

and nineteenth-century sculpture and pictures. He is currently editing the diaries and papers of 'the anonymous Republican' Thomas Hollis (1720–74) on whom he has already published extensively. He can be contacted through the Wordsworth Trust at d.wilson@wordsworth.org.uk.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

If you can help any of the individuals listed below with sources, contacts, or any other information — or if you know anyone who can — please pass on details to them. Details of other research projects in progress should be sent to the Editor (see page 3) for inclusion here.

Hubert Beaumont MP. After pursuing candidatures in his native Northumberland southward, Beaumont finally fought and won Eastbourne in 1906 as a 'Radical' (not a Liberal). How many Liberals in the election fought under this label and did they work as a group afterwards? *Lord Beaumont of Whitley, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW; beaumontt@parliament.uk.*

Letters of Richard Cobden (1804–65). Knowledge of the whereabouts of any letters written by Cobden in private hands, autograph collections, and obscure locations in the UK and abroad for a complete edition of his letters. (For further details of the Cobden Letters Project, please see www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/projects/cobden). *Dr Anthony Howe, School of History, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ; a.c.howe@uea.ac.uk.*

Cornish Methodism and Cornish political identity, 1918–1960s. Researching the relationship through oral history. *Kayleigh Milden, Institute of Cornish Studies, Hayne Corfe Centre, Sunningdale, Truro TR1 3ND; KMSMilden@aol.com.*

Liberal foreign policy in the 1930s. Focusing particularly on Liberal anti-appeasers. *Michael Kelly, 12 Collinbridge Road, Whitewell, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT36 7SN; mmjkelly@msn.com.*

Liberal policy towards Austria-Hungary, 1905–16. *Andrew Gardner, 17 Upper Ramsey Walk, Canonbury, London N1 2RP; agardner@ssees.ac.uk.*

The Liberal revival 1959–64. Focusing on both political and social factors. Any personal views, relevant information or original material from Liberal voters, councillors or activists of the time would be very gratefully received. *Holly Towell, 52a Cardigan Road, Headingley, Leeds LS6 3BJ; his3ht@leeds.ac.uk.*

The rise of the Liberals in Richmond (Surrey) 1964–2002. Interested in hearing from former councillors, activists, supporters, opponents, with memories and insights concerning one of the most successful local organisations. What factors helped the Liberal Party rise from having no councillors in 1964 to 49 out of 52 seats in 1986? Any literature or news cuttings from the period welcome. *Ian Hunter, 9 Defoe Avenue, Kew, Richmond TW9 4DL; 07771 785 795; ianhunter@kew2.com.*

Liberal politics in Sussex, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight 1900–14. The study of electoral progress and subsequent disappointment. Research includes comparisons of localised political trends, issues and preferred interests as against national trends. Any information, specifically on Liberal candidates in the area in the two general elections of 1910, would be most welcome. Family papers especially appreciated. *Ian Ivatt, 84 High Street, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3JT; ianivatt@tinyonline.co.uk.*

Liberals and the local government of London 1919–39. *Chris Fox, 173 Worplesdon Road, Guildford GU2 6XD; christopher.fox7@virgin.net.*

The Liberal Party in the West Midlands from December 1916 to the 1923 general election. Focusing on the fortunes of the party in Birmingham, Coventry, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Looking to explore the effects of the party split at local level. Also looking to uncover the steps towards temporary reunification for the 1923 general election. *Neil Fisher, 42 Bowden Way, Binley, Coventry CV3 2HU; Neiltfisher@aol.com.*

Recruitment of Liberals into the Conservative Party, 1906–1935. Aims to suggest reasons for defections of individuals and develop an understanding of changes in electoral alignment. Sources include personal papers and newspapers; suggestions about how to get hold of the papers of more obscure Liberal defectors welcome. *Cllr Nick Cott, 1a Henry Street, Gosforth, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, NE3 1DQ; N.M.Cott@ncl.ac.uk.*

Life of Wilfrid Roberts (1900–91). Roberts was Liberal MP for Cumberland North (now Penrith and the Border) from 1935 until 1950 and came from a wealthy and prominent local Liberal family; his father had been an MP. Roberts was a passionate internationalist, and was a powerful advocate for refugee children in the Spanish civil war. His parliamentary career is coterminous with the nadir of the Liberal Party. Roberts joined the Labour Party in 1956, becoming a local councillor in Carlisle and the party's candidate for the Hexham constituency in the 1959 general election. I am currently in the process of collating information on the different strands of Roberts' life and political career. Any assistance at all would be much appreciated. *John Reardon; jbreardon75@hotmail.com.*

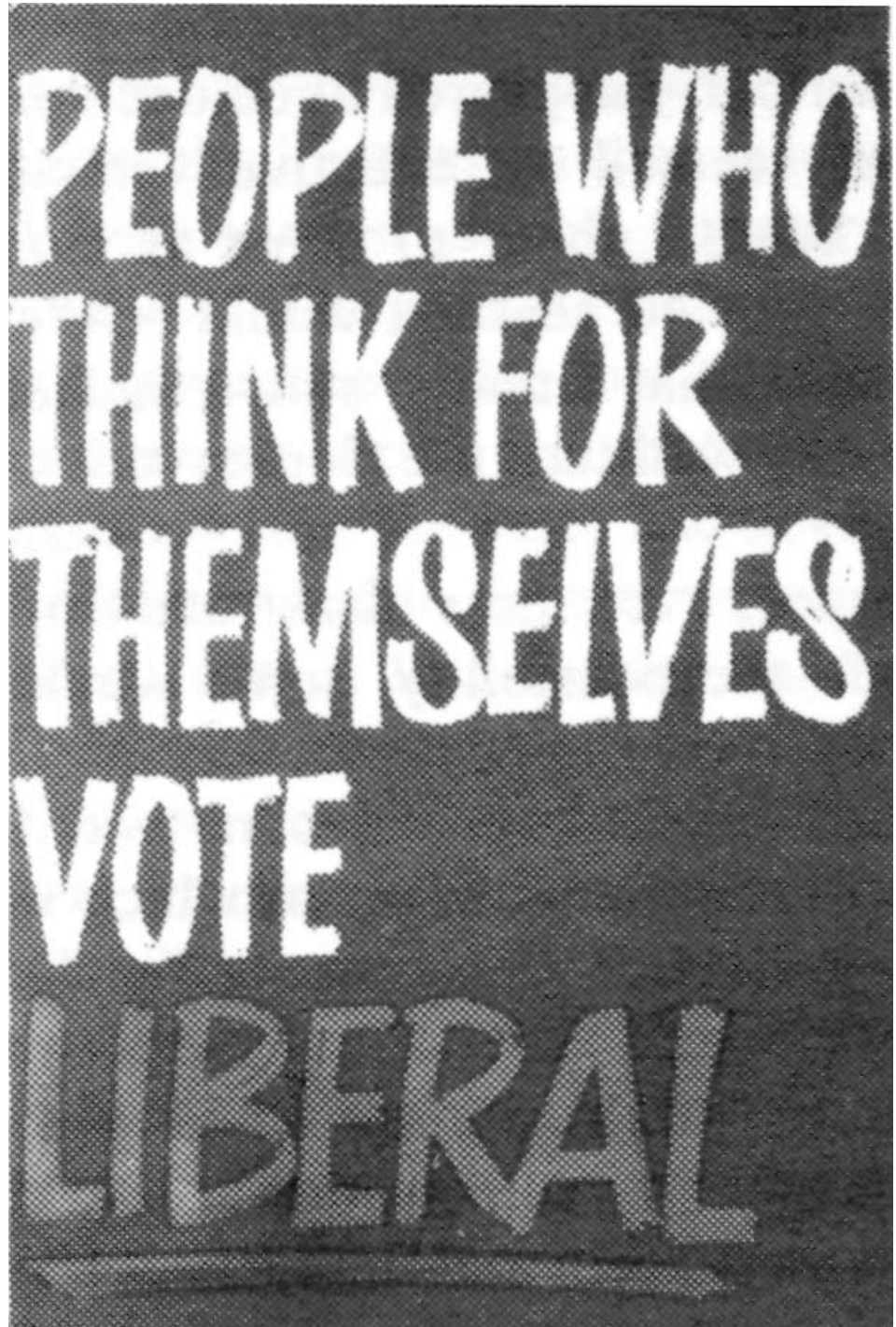
Student radicalism at Warwick University. Particularly the files affair in 1970. Interested in talking to anybody who has information about Liberal Students at Warwick in the period 1965–70 and their role in campus politics. *Ian Bradshaw, History Department, University of Warwick, CV4 7AL; I.Bradshaw@warwick.ac.uk*

Welsh Liberal Tradition – A History of the Liberal Party in Wales 1868–2003. Research spans thirteen decades of Liberal history in Wales but concentrates on the post-1966 formation of the Welsh Federal Party. Any memories and information concerning the post-1966 era or even before welcomed. The research is to be published in book form by Welsh Academic Press. *Dr Russell Deacon, Centre for Humanities, University of Wales Institute Cardiff, Cyncoed Campus, Cardiff CF23 6XD; rdeacon@uwic.ac.uk.*

Aneurin Williams and Liberal internationalism and pacifism, 1900–22. A study of this radical and pacifist MP (Plymouth 1910; North West Durham/Consett 1914–22) who was actively involved in League of Nations Movement, Armenian nationalism, international co-operation, pro-Boer etc. Any information relating to him and location of any papers/correspondence welcome. *Barry Dackombe, 32 Ashburnham Road, Ampthill, Beds, MK45 2RH; dackombe@tesco.net.*

THE LIBERAL PREDIC

For most of the twenty years from 1945 to 1964, it looked as if the Liberals were finished. They were reduced to a handful of MPs, most of whom held their seats precariously. They were desperately short of money and organisation, and were confronted by two great parties, both seeking to look as 'liberal' as possible. For the ambitious would-be Liberal politician, there was practically no prospect of a seat in Parliament, or even on the local council. **Roy Douglas** examines why, despite the desperate state of their party, many Liberals kept the faith going, and not only carried on campaigning, but also laid the foundations for long-term revival.



Liberal election poster, 1964

CAMMENT, 1945 – 64

The great Liberal victory of 1906 had been won, more than anything else, by the party's devotion to free trade and its resistance both to the protectionist campaign of renegade Joseph Chamberlain and to the temporising of Tory Prime Minister Arthur Balfour. In that election the Labour Representation Committee (the incipient Labour Party) showed as much concern for free trade as did the Liberals themselves. This was not surprising. In the great battles of the nineteenth century, free trade had been perceived to be at least as much in the interest of working people as of any other class in society – more so, perhaps, because the poorer people were the more important it was that they should be able to buy things as cheaply as possible.

The new government which was triumphantly confirmed in office in 1906 set a pattern which would dominate Liberal thinking for a great many years to come, and is not without influence to this day. In the next few years it was proved that a free trade economy was wholly consistent with a vigorous programme of social reform which laid the foundations of the welfare state, with major constitutional changes in the direction of democracy and with radical economic reform pivoting on the taxation of land values.

When war was declared in 1914, there was a universal sentiment among Liberals that the government's work was unfinished.

It wasn't at all like 1874, when a Liberal government had more or less worked itself out of a job, or 1886, when a Liberal government was divided on a major issue of policy, or 1895, when a Liberal government collapsed in chaos. Wisely or (to the author's mind) unwisely, the controversial elements in the immediate Liberal programme were thrust aside in the interests of 'national unity'. Irish home rule was put in cold storage, while the land valuation which was to be the foundation of land value taxation was suspended and other social reforms were set aside.

By the end of the war, Liberals were profoundly split by issues which had little to do either with the radical programme on which they had been engaged in 1914 or with the long-term aims of liberalism. Most crucial of those issues was whether Liberal aims could best be attained through complete independence or by cooperation with others, and specifically the Conservatives, in a coalition. This dispute among Liberals opened up a great opportunity for the Labour Party to seize leadership of the forces of reform. After the general election of 1924 there was little doubt in most people's minds that the immediate future lay between the Conservative and Labour Parties. There followed a serious, but foredoomed, attempt by Liberals to recapture their party's historic role as the mainspring of political change, but by the middle of 1929 it was plain that the attempt had

failed. At the general election of that year, the Liberal Party won a little under 5.3 million votes, against well over 8 million each for the other two parties; but they only obtained fifty-nine MPs, one of whom promptly defected to Labour. Liberals were conscious that they had scraped the bottom of the barrel of their resources, and there was no prospect of them mounting a comparable campaign in the foreseeable future.

So what were Liberals to do? In the 1920s and 1930s, many decided that the logic of the situation prescribed that they should shift either to Labour or to the Conservatives, perhaps via the 'Liberal Nationals'. Others refused to do so. They continued to preach pre-1914 Liberalism, with adjustments for changed conditions. These included some significant additions wholly consistent with the pre-1914 tradition, notably an active programme to conquer unemployment, policies designed to spread the ownership of property much more widely, and support for electoral reform through proportional representation. In the closing years of the 1930s, however, international questions subsumed all others.

1945 and after

When the Second World War came to an end in 1945, the familiar inter-war policies remained the objective of active Liberals, with important wartime additions bearing the stamp of Sir William Beveridge – notably

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further policies to eradicate unemployment and a greatly extended programme of social welfare. No important Liberal saw any inconsistency between these various policies. The Liberal programme, as presented to the electorate in anticipation of the 1945 general election, looks like a document which would have received the eager approval of Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith and Lloyd George in the early years of the twentieth century.¹ Liberals believed that this programme also corresponded much more closely with the needs and wishes of the British people than did the programme of any other party, and they were probably right.

The Liberal election manifesto of 1945 was designed for a Liberal government. Unfortunately, a Liberal government was not a serious possibility at that election. The party still had an impressive list of leaders. Lord Samuel and Sir Archibald Sinclair had served in cabinets – Sinclair very recently as Secretary of State for Air. Sir William Beveridge was universally known as the author of famous and popular reports on social policy. Dingle Foot, Graham White and Gwilym Lloyd-George had held ministerial office. It is likely that Clement Davies had been of crucial importance in the chain of events which led to Winston Churchill becoming Prime Minister in 1940.² Lady Violet Bonham Carter was undeniably of ministerial calibre, and was a well-known public figure.

The Liberal Party had recently received a large influx of eager and able young supporters. Yet its organisation and financial underpinning were vastly inferior to those of the other parties. Liberals took the field in rather less than half the constituencies, not because suitable candidates were unavailable, but because the organisation did not exist to support them.³ A great many constituencies had no Liberal Association at all, and in most of the others it was little more than nominal. In the event, Labour

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won a great majority, while Liberal representation in the House of Commons crashed to twelve, the lowest figure ever. The major Liberal personalities were defeated: the leader Sir Archibald Sinclair, the chief whip and sole London MP Sir Percy Harris, even Sir William Beveridge. So were long-serving MPs like Graham White, Sir Geoffrey Mander and Dingle Foot. Not a single Liberal seat was held in or near any large town. The Liberal MPs who had somehow survived the maelstrom were largely unknown, even to each other, and the choice of Clement Davies as their chairman in the aftermath of the election was by no means a foregone conclusion.⁴

For Liberals, the natural response was to reform the party machinery. In the later 1940s, under the inspiration of very active, relatively young and hitherto unknown men like Frank Byers, Philip Fothergill and Edward Martell, they devised a programme for improving the organisation and finances of the party at all levels. Martell's later peregrinations should not blind Liberals to the immensely valuable services he rendered to the party at this stage. To a considerable extent they succeeded. Liberal Associations were set up almost everywhere, and most of them acquired some idea of the sort of organisation that was necessary to get their message over to the electorate. When the general election of 1950 came, 475 candidates were fielded, a far greater number than at any time since 1929. During the heady period around 1946, when the Tories had not yet recovered from the blow they had sustained in 1945, the Liberals appeared to be making a real revival. In London the Liberal Nationals rejoined the Liberal Party and there was, briefly, some sign that the same thing might happen on a national scale.⁵ The party rank and file was encouraged to believe in the possibility of a Liberal government in the near future.

By 1950, however, this prospect seemed excessively unlikely to most objective observers, but the leadership could not be seen to resile from its optimism. Certainly there were shades of opinion visible in the Liberal Party at this time, as in any other democratic party, but the whole *raison d'être* of the party was to present a distinctively Liberal point of view, and most of the Liberal notables avoided meticulously any sign of leaning towards one or other of their opponents. This impartiality did not satisfy all Liberals, not even the MPs. Long before 1950 Tom Horabin (who had briefly been chief whip) defected to Labour, and Gwilym Lloyd-George was regularly voting with the Conservatives. The general election manifesto of 1950 nevertheless began with the words, 'The Liberal Party offers the electorate the opportunity of returning a Liberal Government to office'.⁶ Like that of 1945, it was a programme designed for a Liberal government to follow, and traditional policies like free trade featured prominently.

But the Liberal organisation of 1950, though considerably better than in 1945, was vastly inferior to that of the other two parties in nearly all constituencies, and hardly anybody took the prospect of an immediate Liberal government seriously. At the same time, most people, however they voted, perceived the gap between the two larger parties to be enormous. Many Conservative voters feared that the return of another Labour government would result in wholesale nationalisation; many Labour voters feared that return of the Conservatives would restore the massive unemployment and social deprivation which had blighted the inter-war period. Thus perceptions were such that every Liberal supporter who could possibly be bumped into voting for one of the other parties probably would be. Liberal canvassers were constantly reporting large numbers of voters who declared that their sympathies lay with the Liberals, but

proposed to vote for somebody else. The Conservatives in particular argued strenuously that a Liberal vote was ‘wasted’, and urged Liberals to believe that the Conservative Party had been ‘liberalised’. In the upshot, Liberal representation was reduced to nine seats, and a large majority of Liberal candidates forfeited their deposits. This was not quite as bad as it sounds, for the threshold for keeping the deposit was then 12½ per cent of the votes cast, not 5 per cent as at present, but it was bad enough. The Labour government was returned, but with only a tiny majority, and it was evident that a new general election was likely in the near future.

Adjusting to disaster

After this ghastly result, there was no more talk of a Liberal government coming to office in the foreseeable future. Most of the rank-and-file activists remained in the party, but there were huge tensions among the parliamentarians. What was tearing them apart was not disagreement about what a Liberal government should do, but whether they preferred Labour or the Conservatives. To give but one example, in a critical division on housing in November 1950, three Liberal MPs supported the government, four voted with the opposition and two did not vote.

These arguments over which other party they preferred were not the only difficulties Liberals faced. They had more or less

exhausted their financial resources and in most places could not afford to guarantee a candidate’s very vulnerable deposit, still less to mount a serious campaign. Around eighteen months were allowed for the Liberals to lick their wounds, and when a new general election was called only 109 candidates took the field. In the election manifesto of 1951, Liberals did not even pretend that a Liberal government was a possibility, and the thrust of their argument turned on the more modest and realistic contention that a substantial contingent of Liberal MPs could exert a significant and beneficial influence on a government of a different political colour.⁷ Liberal policies which were sure to be unacceptable to both of the other parties were soft-pedalled in the official manifesto, even though some individual Liberal candidates continued to emphasise them. Thus, free trade, which had been an important feature in the 1950 manifesto, was not mentioned explicitly in 1951, though 35 per cent of Liberal candidates referred to it in their addresses.⁸ This was not because either the writers of the manifesto or the party as a whole had changed their minds on the subject, but because there was no immediate prospect of bringing that policy into effect.

Results were even worse than in 1950. This time it was the Conservatives and not Labour who won a tiny majority. Only six Liberal MPs were elected. The three who had been leaning

towards Labour, Lady Megan Lloyd-George, Edgar Granville and Emrys Roberts, were all defeated. At this level the Liberals stuck for most of the remainder of the decade, dropping to five when they lost Carmarthen in 1957, but recovering to six after their Torrington victory in the following year.

Siren voices were heard. Asquith’s daughter Lady Violet Bonham Carter, who had played a large part in keeping the party together in the wartime period, received the active support of Churchill in her 1951 campaign in Colne Valley, and later made it plain that if she had been elected, and had been offered a place in Churchill’s government, she would have accepted.⁹ Clement Davies was offered the post of Minister of Education, with a seat in the cabinet, but rejected it on the advice of colleagues.¹⁰ Gwilym Lloyd-George, who had been moving in the Conservative direction for several years, did accept a job in the new cabinet. Others looked in a different direction. In the late 1940s and the 1950s, a number of recent Liberal MPs joined the Labour Party. In addition to Tom Horabin, they included Sir Geoffrey Mander, Dingle Foot, Edgar Granville, Wilfrid Roberts and Gwilym’s sister Lady Megan Lloyd George.

The various defectors to Labour contended that the Liberal Party as a whole was moving strongly in the direction of the Conservatives in the 1950s.

Party performance 1945–66

Year	Liberal	Cons.*	Labour	Others	Total	LIBERALS			
						No. of candidates	Votes (1000s)	% poll	Lost deposits
1945	12	210	393	25	640	306	2252	9.0	76
1950	9	295	315	3	625	475	2621	9.1	319
1951	6	321	295	3	625	109	731	2.6	66
1955	6	345	277	2	630	110	722	2.7	60
1959	6	365	258	1	630	216	1641	5.9	55
1964	9	304	317	0	630	365	3099	11.2	52
1966	12	253	364	1	630	311	2327	8.6	104

* Including Liberal Nationals and others taking the same whip as Conservatives.

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This view was wrong, but there was some superficial evidence for it. The cabinet offer to Clement Davies, and the likelihood that Lady Violet would have received ministerial office if she had been elected, provide support for the argument, and there is other evidence pointing in the same direction. Five of the six Liberal MPs returned in 1951 had no Conservative opponents. In Huddersfield there was a nod-and-a-wink understanding as early as 1950, by which the Conservative had no Liberal opponent in the East seat, while the Liberal had no Conservative against him in the West. In Bolton there was a formal pact in 1951 to a similar effect. Many Liberals, including the present author, were shocked by this, fearing that the Liberalism of the two MPs would be compromised. We were wrong: both Donald Wade and Arthur Holt were absolutely staunch in their devotion to Liberalism, as were all their parliamentary colleagues.

There is even something to be said for the view that Churchill's cabinet offer, and the Conservative abstention in a few Liberal constituencies, were prompted not only by the Prime Minister's wish to win Liberal support for a Conservative government, but also because he hoped to 'liberalise' that government. Gwilym Lloyd-George once told the author that, when Churchill offered him a job in the government, he replied that he could only join as a Liberal. 'And what the hell else can you be?' was the robust reply. It may also be significant that a number of leading Liberals had a personal regard for Churchill which they would not transfer to any other Conservative. Sinclair and Lady Violet were his personal friends, and Clement Davies had played a major part in bringing him to power in 1940. In Churchill's Tory moments there was always a streak of Liberalism, just as there was always a streak of Toryism in his Liberal moments.

What ideas kept the remaining Liberals faithful to the party in the 1950s? There was no more dispo-

sition to lean towards the Conservatives than towards Labour. A glance at the resolutions carried at Liberal Assemblies suggests that the rank and file of the party still believed in more or less the same things that they had supported for many years.

The 'Radical Programme' adopted at Hastings in 1952 declared for free trade in terms which would have warmed the heart of Cobden, supported the essentially twentieth-century policies of 'ownership for all' and social welfare, and rounded off by calling for constitutional changes such as a Liberty of the Subject Bill, reform of the electoral system and devolution for Scotland and Wales. There was not much in all that which would have disturbed Asquith, and a lot of it would have been welcomed by Gladstone. As the decade advanced, subsequent Assemblies continued to pronounce in similar terms.

Meanwhile, election manifestos continued to be pitched at immediate problems on which they might reasonably hope to exert influence, although in 1959 there was a glimmer of the old optimism, and the hope was expressed that Liberals would be able 'to consolidate and improve (their) position as a first step to the eventual formation of a Liberal government.'¹¹ Worryingly, a Gallup poll of March 1959 disclosed that 59 per cent of the voters did not know what Liberals stood for, and almost half of those who proposed to vote Liberal came in the same category.¹² Despite this, there were also some signs of a slight improvement in the Liberals' position. In 1951 their 109 candidates secured 2.5 per cent of the total vote; in 1955 they put up 110 candidates and secured 2.7 per cent; in 1959 they stood 216 and won 5.9 per cent. This could not be called rapid progress, but at least it confuted the view, widespread at the beginning of the decade, that the Liberal Party was about to disappear altogether.

When Clement Davies retired from the Liberal leadership in

1956 and was succeeded by Jo Grimond, there was a change in personality and emphasis but no immediate change in policy. As in the past, different Liberals laid different stress on the policies which seemed important to them. Some argued that a combination of free trade, the taxation of land values and related economic policies would strike at the roots of poverty and social injustice, while others were disposed to favour a mixture of more or less interventionist policies. Many Liberals, probably the large majority, would have seen no incompatibility between these approaches. The dichotomy, insofar as it existed at all, did not exhibit any perceptible correlation with age; some of the most enthusiastic advocates of the traditional free trade-land taxing view were in their twenties or early thirties.

Towards the end of the decade, some difficulty arose in connection with agriculture. Most of the existing Liberal seats, and a substantial proportion of those which appeared winnable, were largely rural. Farmers were receiving large government subsidies, which were anathema to staunch free traders, and some candidates were worried about the likely effect which declaring against those subsidies would have on their own electoral chances. Liberals who understood the free-trade case were able to point out that subsidies were just one side of the coin, for the price of goods which the farmer needed were forced up by import duties which would also abate under free trade, and the farmer would benefit on balance by losing that burden, even if he lost his crutch as well. There was a confused discussion on the subject at the Torquay Assembly in 1958. Proceedings on this and other matters appear to have been chaotic, with little or no guidance from the platform, but, in the upshot, the more staunch free traders appear to have been satisfied with the substantive policies decided.¹³

(Opposite page)
Clement Davies,
Leader of the
Liberal Party
1945–56; Jo
Grimond, Leader
of the Liberal
Party 1956–67;
Orpington by-
election, March
1962.

Europe

The proposed Liberal Assembly of 1959 was cancelled because of the general election, and by the time a new Assembly could be held in 1960, attitudes to policy questions had been transformed radically. This change is partly attributable to a general feeling that the shambles of 1958 must not be repeated, but it is due even more to changing views of 'Europe'. The root of this matter calls for consideration, because it is highly relevant to Liberal policies both in the period covered in the present study and for long afterwards.

As far back as 1950, Liberal election manifestos made reference to the need for Britain to participate actively in European affairs,¹⁴ and that view was repeatedly reaffirmed in Liberal literature thereafter. This in no way implied a weakening of support for free trade in relation to non-European nations, any more than Cobden's commercial treaty with France in 1860 impeded Britain in pursuing a free-trade policy towards other countries. Unfortunately neither Labour nor Conservative governments in the 1940s and 1950s showed a similar interest in Europe, and when the negotiations were inaugurated which eventually led to the establishment of the European Economic Community – the 'Common Market' – in 1957–58, Britain played no active part. She did, however, take the lead in the establishment of the European Free Trade Area, EFTA. The EEC – 'the six' – included France, West Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries, and was roughly coterminous with Charlemagne's empire at the time of his death in 814. EFTA – 'the outer seven' – comprised Britain, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Portugal. Both European bodies sought the establishment of free trade between their own members. The essential difference was that the EEC required common trading policies towards outsiders, while EFTA allowed members to



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By-elections affecting Liberal representation

Constituency	Date	Result	Liberal MP	
Carmarthen	28 February 1957	Labour gain from Liberal		(caused by death of Sir Rhys Hopkin Morris)
Torrington	27 March 1958	Liberal gain from NL + Con.	Mark Bonham Carter	
Orpington	14 March 1962	Liberal gain from Con.	Eric Lubbock	
Montgomery	15 May 1962	Liberal held	Emlyn Hooson	(caused by death of Clement Davies)
Roxburgh, Selkirk & Peebles	24 March 1965	Liberal gain from Con.	David Steel	

pursue what trading policies they wished towards outsiders. The initial Liberal response to these developments was declared in an article published in *Liberal News* on 1 February 1957, stated to have been ‘prepared after discussion among those chiefly responsible for guiding Party opinion and ... with the endorsement of ... Mr Jo Grimond’. It declared that:

Liberals support the proposals that the United Kingdom should join THE FREE TRADE AREA – NOT THE CUSTOMS UNION. The more countries are committed to lowering tariffs while still free to fix the level of their tariffs against countries outside the Common Market, the more likely it is that tariffs all round will be low, so that trade will be increased.

This, of course, was wholly consistent with traditional Liberal free trade policy. Neither Liberals nor any other party appear to have said much about future British relations with the Common Market, one way or the other, in the 1959 general election.¹⁵

But in July 1960, profoundly different signals were sent to the Liberal Party. An all-party group of MPs, including Jo Grimond, Clement Davies, Arthur Holt and Jeremy Thorpe, signed a statement in favour of Britain initiating negotiations to join the EEC. On the same day a pamphlet entitled *New Directions* was issued by a committee working under Jo Grimond, and expressed the same view. What had happened

to change people’s minds? This is by no means clear, but a possible answer is that Britain was at the time in the economic doldrums, while early reports suggested that the EEC was surging ahead. Not surprisingly, one might say – the EEC countries were knocking down trade barriers against each other, while they had not greatly altered barriers against outsiders.

At the Eastbourne Liberal Assembly in the early autumn of 1960, the party upheld the view already expressed by its notables. The case for approaching the EEC was presented by Mark Bonham Carter, son of Lady Violet, who had been victorious at the 1958 by-election in Torrington (though he lost the seat at the general election of the following year).¹⁶ His argument for membership was expressed in terms designed to win support from convinced free traders: ‘the whole point of Britain going into a wider free trade area in Europe was that she would be better able to persuade other nations on greater free trade liberalisation for the benefit of all countries.’ A few critics – old newspaper files remind me that I was one of them – pointed out that while membership of the EEC would mean free trade with six countries of western Europe it would also imply the obligation to impose tariffs against the rest of the world. What worried free traders about the EEC was not the barriers it would knock down, but the new barriers it would erect.

People who recall the atmosphere of Liberal Assemblies of the period (the position is probably not wildly different in party conferences today) will probably agree that when a controversial question arises, there are usually relatively small groups of informed enthusiasts on both sides, while most delegates swing to the view which is entertained by the recognised leadership. Exactly that happened in 1960, and the Assembly gave a large majority to those who sought EEC membership negotiations. There is little reason to doubt that if the leadership had stuck with the view expressed in 1957, most of the delegates at Eastbourne would have given them similar support.

What were critics to do? Some, like Oliver Smedley, a Vice-President of the Party, dropped out of party politics entirely. As far as the author is aware, not one of the free traders joined any other party. As Smedley put it in a somewhat different context: ‘Where else can we go?’ Other free traders, like the present author, remained in place. I vividly recall what happened in Gainsborough, where I was candidate. Some of the active Liberals agreed with me. Others were rather shocked: not because they considered my view wrong, but because I was disagreeing with the ‘official’ view of the party. If the 1960 Assembly had voted the other way, they would have been perfectly happy to go with my anti-EEC opinions. A carload of Gainsbronians went over to Yorkshire to meet Donald Wade, who

was then chief whip. He personally supported the ‘official’ view, but he saw no reason why my different view should disentitle me to continue as a Liberal candidate. So I stayed put, and eventually contested the 1964 general election. In my election address I stated my own views, but also pointed out that the Liberal Party, like all others, was not unanimous on the subject. I don’t think that the stand I took significantly affected the votes I received one way or the other.

To return to the general story, the following year, 1961, saw the first British application to join the EEC, at the instance of Harold Macmillan’s Conservative government. After more than a year of negotiations the attempt failed, because President de Gaulle of France interposed his country’s veto. There was an atmosphere of anticlimax. Both pro- and anti-Marketees had to think of something else, at least for the time being.

Signs of recovery

While all this was happening, there was a succession of by-elections which showed the tide running strongly in the Liberals’ favour. For many years, Liberals had regarded a saved deposit as something of a victory, but between the 1959 general election and the late winter of 1962 they did much better than that, and climbed to second position in eight places. Then, in March 1962, came three astonishing results. At Blackpool North the Liberal came within a thousand votes of victory, and at Middlesbrough East there was another commendable second place, with the Conservative barely saving his deposit. Most impressive was Orpington, a seat which seemed about as rock-solid Conservative as any in the country. Eric Lubbock, the Liberal, won the seat with a convincing majority, and Labour lost its deposit. Less than a fortnight later Clement Davies died, and Liberals were required to defend what at one time had

looked very much like a personal seat. Emlyn Hooson (who was a Euro-sceptic) held Montgomeryshire with an overall majority in a four-cornered contest.

My judgement in such matters may be biased, but my recollection is that official Liberal support for entry to the EEC appeared to play little, if any, part in producing these spectacular advances. What appears to have happened was that the Conservative government was rapidly losing popularity, for a variety of reasons. Until not long before the next general election Labour was experiencing troubles of its own, and the Liberals were the natural beneficiaries. When a general election came in October 1964 the Liberals boosted their representation to nine – no great advance, indeed, but something. A year and a half later they reached twelve. At last they were back in double figures!

Conclusions

So what conclusions may be drawn from Liberal experiences in the two decades after 1945? In the first half of the period the Liberal Party sank to such a low position that it was touch and go whether it would survive at all. This was not the result of what Liberals did, or failed to do, after 1945, but the legacy of many years of factions and folly, and an almost complete neglect of organisation. After 1945 they made a serious attempt to rebuild organisation and to provide an extensive list of candidates. Many people consider that the broad front of 1950 was a mistake. I don’t agree. Without the post-war reorganisation, and the promise of a broad front which was a necessary corollary, the party would have disintegrated.

After the 1950 general election, the tensions between two closely matched great parties could easily have torn the Liberals to pieces. By refusing to jump to one side or the other, Clement Davies and his colleagues again averted destruction, though it was

a close call. The pay-off began to appear in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It had little or nothing to do with the new policies which appeared in that period, but everything to do with the courage, tenacity and sheer obstinacy of a small group of people who stuck to the Liberal Party in its darkest days because they felt that there was nothing else they could honourably do.

Roy Douglas was a Liberal parliamentary candidate five times. Long ago, he was Chairman of the National League of Young Liberals, of which his wife Jean was Hon. Secretary. He is the author of History of the Liberal Party 1895–1970 (1971), Liberals: The History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties (2005) (reviewed in this issue of the Journal), Land, People and Politics (1976), plus several books on political cartoons and on aspects of political and diplomatic history. He is active in the land value taxation movement.

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- 1 See Iain Dale (ed.), *Liberal Party General Election Manifestos 1900–1997* (London, 2000), pp. 61–68.
- 2 Lord Boothby, *Boothby: Recollections of a Rebel* (London, 1978), pp. 136, 142–45.
- 3 Sir Percy Harris, *Forty Years in and out of Parliament* (London, 1949), p. 184.
- 4 Hopkin Morris once told the present author that the MPs met together to consider the matter. Each one left the room while the others discussed his suitability. Hopkin, whose claims on the Chairmanship were better than most, refused to let his name be considered.
- 5 See discussion in Roy Douglas, *Liberals* (London, 2005), p. 253.
- 6 Dale (ed.), op. cit., p. 71.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 81–85.
- 8 D. E. Butler, *British General Election of 1951* (London, 1952), p. 58.
- 9 Violet Bonham Carter to Gilbert Murray 20 December 1951, cited in Mark Pottle (ed.), *Daring to Hope: The diaries and letters of Violet Bonham Carter 1946–1969* (London, 2000), p. 105.
- 10 Douglas, op. cit., p. 259.
- 11 Dale (ed.), op. cit., p. 97.
- 12 D. E. Butler and Richard Rose, *British General Election of 1959* (London, 1960), p. 33.
- 13 *The Times*, 20 September 1958.
- 14 Dale (ed.), op. cit., p. 77.
- 15 Butler and Rose, op. cit., p. 72.
- 16 *The Guardian*, 30 September 1960; *The Times*, 30 September 1960.

'TO HOLD TH SIR HENRY HAYDN J

The Liberal Democrats, and before them the Liberal Party, has always possessed its share of 'good constituency MPs', those whose career in parliament is undistinguished but who remain devoted to representing their constituency. **Dr J. Graham Jones** looks at the life and political career of one such – Sir Henry Haydn Jones (1863–1950), Liberal MP for Merionethshire from January 1910 until 1945, and the only Asquithian Liberal MP returned in the whole of Wales in the 'coupon' general election of December 1918.

Photos courtesy
of the National
Library of Wales.



THE OLD FLAG'

JONES 1863 – 1950

Sir Henry Haydn Jones was born at Ruthin in north-east Wales on 27 December 1863. The premature death of his father when Jones was only ten years of age saw his widowed mother return to her home area – Towyn in Merionethshire in north-west Wales. Jones attended the Towyn Board School and later Edwin Jones's academy in the same town. Upon leaving school, he spent a brief period at his grandparents' farm at Caerlle before becoming part of the iron-mongery business of his uncles Messrs J. and D. Daniel, based in the High Street, Towyn. He was later to assume control of the business on his own account and remained in charge until within a few days of his death.

From early manhood, Jones also took a keen interest in local political life and in 1888, aged only twenty-five, he became a member of the provisional Merionethshire County Council which preceded the first elected county council established in January of the following year. He was returned unopposed for the Towyn Urban division. In 1900 he was elected the Council's chairman, and in 1904 became an alderman. When he finally

resigned office, still an alderman, in March 1949, he could claim sixty-one years of distinguished continuous membership of his county council.

Jones also achieved especial prominence in the field of local education. By the time of the passage of the Balfour Education Act in 1902, he commanded sufficient local respect to speak out in protest against the Lloyd George policy of the 'Welsh Revolt' against the Act's provisions. He led his county's opposition to the 1902 Act by a different route. Following the establishment of the county's education committee in 1902, Jones became its honorary secretary and subsequently its director of education. He had also been one of the leading protagonists of the movement to set up an intermediate school at Towyn under the terms of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act of 1889. He was still a life governor of the school at his death in 1950, by which time he was the only surviving member of the original governing body of the school. He was also a local magistrate in the county from 1894 until his death – a record fifty-six years. Sir Haydn had also come to further prominence as a result

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of his role in relation to the 1905 Education (Local Authority Default) Act.

He was chosen during 1909 as the Liberal candidate for Merionethshire after A. Osmond Williams, Liberal MP for the county since 1900, had announced his intention to retire from parliament at the next general election. The county was predominantly nonconformist and Welsh-speaking (a massive 93.8 per cent of its population was Welsh-speaking at the time of the 1901 census), and it possessed a distinct industrial base – at the turn of the twentieth century, almost a quarter (23.4 per cent) of its occupied males were employed in the slate and limestone quarries. Ffestiniog and Corwen were the heartland of the slate-quarrying area and considered to be strongly Liberal at the beginning of the twentieth century. At the same time 24.4 per cent of the occupied male population was engaged in agriculture.

In the general election of January 1910, Jones defeated his sole Conservative opponent, R. Jones Roberts, by 6065 votes to 1873, a considerable personal triumph and a clear demonstration of his personal popularity and esteem in the county. It would appear that



most of Jones's election expenses, thought to total between £800 and £1000, were raised by the herculean efforts of the Merionethshire Liberal Association. This was the first contested election in Merionethshire since 1895.

Jones was, from the outset, to prove a model constituency MP, generally holding court in the famous upstairs office of his Towyn ironmonger's shop, always clad in black striped trousers and frock coat and sitting in his swivel chair: 'Literally surrounded by papers, Sir Haydn transacted a great deal of Big Business in that upstairs room. It was here that he interviewed "his people". It was here that many a fight was fought and many a battle lost and won.'¹ He always went to a great deal of trouble on behalf of his constituents. But from the time of his first election to Westminster at the beginning of 1910, Jones found it both irksome and demanding that he needed to juggle his parliamentary duties, extensive business and commercial interests and his active role in local government. His health was not robust, and he grew to dislike intensely the constant round of engagements and commitments within his constituency.

Jones was, from the outset, to prove a model constituency MP.

Difficulties were compounded by his uneasy relationship with Lloyd George, since 1908 the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Asquith's government, and by Jones's heartfelt distaste for the rather low-key Welsh home rule campaign launched by E. T. John in the summer of 1910. Much to the relief of both Jones himself and the membership of the Merionethshire Liberal Association, Jones was returned to parliament unopposed in the general election of December 1910. He received a further fillip when MPs began to receive a salary for the first time during 1911. Although Jones evidently received a substantial and growing income from his wide-ranging commercial and industrial concerns (he was to accumulate more than £72,000 by the time of his death in 1950), he still relished the opportunity to receive official remuneration for his parliamentary work.

Some problems, however, persisted. His health remained generally poor, and he found ever more taxing the constant necessity to combine his political work and his business commitments, now exacerbated by the acute difficulties facing the severely depressed north Wales slate industry. The

quarry owners had found it necessary to reduce sharply the price of slates, but sales still continued to plummet.

During the First World War, Jones looked askance at the introduction of the Conscription Bill in January 1916, although he was eventually persuaded to come into line and he reluctantly supported the government in the division lobbies during the measure's second reading later the same month. There was even a real risk that Merionethshire, as a result of its falling population, might cease to exist as a separate parliamentary division in the redistribution of parliamentary constituencies in 1918, but eventually a change in its boundaries was to save the day.

When the war ended in November 1918 and the inevitable general election – the first for eight long years – loomed, Jones was sorely tempted to retire from Westminster: 'I had *quite* made up my mind to retire. I have a happy home, heaps of work & politics are not inviting to a man who plays the game *cleanly*.'² After a great deal of vacillation and heart-searching, and under intense pressure from many quarters, he reluctantly

allowed his better judgement to be overcome. He did so partly because he feared that, if he retired, the seat could well fall to the Conservatives in a contested election. In the event, he secured the distinction of being the only Asquithian Liberal MP returned in the whole of Wales in the 'coupon' general election of December 1918. (David Davies (Llandinam), MP for the neighbouring constituency of Montgomeryshire, was, it seems, given the 'coupon' at the eleventh hour, and appears to have been returned unopposed as the representative of both wings of the Liberal Party.) Half-hearted attempts to find a Coalition Liberal candidate to oppose Jones soon floundered, partly because of political apathy and the conspicuous lack of a tradition of political activity and involvement in Merionethshire. Throughout the lifetime of the post-war Coalition government (1918–22), Jones yearned for the coalition to collapse.

He had his wish in October 1922. He defeated a sole Labour opponent, John Jones Roberts, in the general elections of 1922 and 1923, and won through in a three-cornered fight in 1924. In the autumn of 1924 he returned to parliament inevitably much dejected as one of a small phalanx of just forty Liberal MPs on the Liberal benches, facing a Conservative government led by Stanley Baldwin with a majority of no fewer than 223.

The desperately needed Liberal fight-back was spearheaded by Lloyd George, at whose instigation a number of independent investigations were set up to examine the social and economic ills of the nation and to evolve radical, progressive new policies for their remedy. Their conclusions were published in reports such as 'the Green Book' (*The Land and the Nation*), and 'the Brown Book' (*Towns and the Land*) – the former containing far-reaching proposals for rural regeneration, in part by a highly controversial scheme for

the state purchase of agricultural land, and the latter devoted to town planning on regional lines. Jones tended to remain critical. In his May 1929 general election address his endorsement of his party's new policy initiatives was conspicuously muted. Rather, he still came before the Merionethshire electorate as a traditionalist: 'I offer myself as a staunch and convinced Liberal. Liberalism stands opposed on the one hand to Reaction and on the other to Revolution. It stands for sane and ordered progress. It is the only safe path for a nation to tread.'³

Again, Jones won through after a keenly fought three-cornered contest, but, like so many other Liberal MPs, he returned to Westminster in June 1929 with a heavy heart. In spite of a dazzling election campaign, dynamic new policies, and a total of no fewer than 513 candidates, only fifty-nine Liberal MPs were elected, just thirteen more than at the dissolution of parliament in May. Many of Jones's closest associates had either retired or else been defeated at the polls. The health of both Jones and his wife was at best fragile. He tended to hark back nostalgically to the days when he first entered parliament – when his party remained in government and some of the party's giants remained. But, by 1929, 'they have gone & unfortunately we have no such men to fill their place'.⁴ As the 1930s began, Liberal politics in Wales seemed in irreversible, terminal decline. Jones looked askance as the membership of the Parliamentary Liberal Party grew ever more fractious. It never now succeeded in acting in unison and it sometimes displayed bizarre voting records in the Commons lobbies. In June 1931, Ellis W. Davies, a former Welsh Liberal MP, on a return visit to Westminster, found Jones 'pessimistic as usual'.⁵

When the so-called National Government was formed in August of the same year, Jones predictably joined the

Throughout his long period as Liberal MP for Merionethshire, he continued to manage his well-known ironmongery business in the High Street at Towyn.

mainstream group of Liberal MPs led by Sir Herbert Samuel. His pessimism was profound and enduring throughout the long 1930s. 'This is a gloomy time in the affairs of our country', he wrote the following Christmas to Sir J. Herbert Lewis, '& as yet there is no sign of the dawn.'⁶ Rumours again circulated as each successive general election loomed that Jones was seriously considering standing down. Doubtless he was, but on each occasion he confounded the political pundits, winning keenly fought three-cornered contests in October 1931 and June 1935. By the latter occasion, Lloyd George had launched his 'New Deal' proposals, unveiled at Bangor in January 1935. Jones remained unimpressed; to his mind, the novel policy initiative was simply 'a re-hash of the policy "I can cure unemployment"' which the electorate had received so coolly back in May 1929.⁷ In March, Ellis Davies, having dined with Jones, found him 'as pessimistic as usual as to everything & everybody'.⁸ Throughout the years from 1931 he disliked intensely the concept of a Tory-dominated National Government and rejoiced at the substantial Labour gains in the London County Council elections in March 1934. To his mind, the National Government 'for some time [had] been doing nothing but trying to get the public to believe it to be the only possible government'.⁹

Haydn Jones was destined to remain at Westminster for a further full decade – until the 1945 election at the end of World War Two. In 1937 he was given a knighthood, a long overdue gesture which was greeted enthusiastically both at Westminster and in Merionethshire. Throughout his long period as Liberal MP for Merionethshire, he continued to manage his well-known ironmongery business in the High Street at Towyn – the biggest ironmongery business in the whole of Merionethshire – and was regularly to be seen in the

'TO HOLD THE OLD FLAG'

General election results in Merionethshire, January 1910–1935			
January 1910			
H. Ha ydn Jones	Liberal	6065	(76.4%)
R. Morris Jones	Conservative	1873	(23.6%)
	Majority	4192	(52.8%)
December 1910			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	unopposed	
1918			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	unopposed	
1922			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	9903	(58.3%)
John Jones Roberts	Labour	7071	(41.7%)
	Majority	2832	(16.6%)
1923			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	11005	(60.5%)
John Jones Roberts	Labour	7181	(39.5%)
	Majority	3824	(21.0%)
1924			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	9228	(47.8%)
John Jones Roberts	Labour	6393	(33.1%)
Robert Vaughan	Conservative	3677	(19.1%)
	Majority	2835	(14.7%)
1929			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	11865	(48.2%)
John Jones Roberts	Labour	7980	(32.5%)
Charles Phibbs	Conservative	4731	(19.3%)
	Majority	3885	(15.7%)
1931			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	9756	(40.8%)
J. H. Howard	Labour	7807	(32.6%)
Charles Phibbs	Conservative	6372	(26.6%)
	Majority	1949	(8.2%)
1935			
H. Haydn Jones	Liberal	9466	(40.0%)
T. W. Jones	Labour	8317	(35.2%)
Charles Phibbs	Conservative	5868	(24.8%)
	Majority	1149	(4.8%)

shop until within a few weeks of his death in 1950. He owned and was actively involved in the running of the famous Talylyn miniature-gauge railway, the picturesque narrow-gauge line which was one of very few in the whole of Britain to remain in private ownership. He was also the owner of much of the village of Abergynolwyn, and owned both the Bryneglwys slate quarry and a part-interest in the Aberllefenni slate quarry, which he leased from its owner Mrs. A. Hamilton Pryce of Machynlleth. A number of the farms in the area were also in Sir Haydn's possession. By the end of his life, he had become a very wealthy man with extensive business interests of various kinds, and was a significant local employer. A long-serving elder of the Presbyterian church, he also became a precentor at Bethel C. M. [Calvinistic Methodist] Church, Towyn. He inherited his father's love of music and edited a collection of hymns and hymn tunes entitled *Cân a Moliant*. He also wrote a large number of hymn tunes himself.

One of Haydn Jones's best-known personal characteristics was the carrying of an umbrella which he used as a walking stick, and he was especially pleased to receive a presentation of one, gold-mounted and inscribed, from the quarrymen of Aberllefenni on the occasion of his knighthood in 1937. In some aspects of his personal life he remained proudly and stubbornly old-fashioned. Until the end of his life he doggedly refused to own a typewriter – all his letters are penned in his own distinctive longhand – and he disliked intensely the use of the telephone. When he died in the summer of 1950, he and his two surviving brothers appeared to be survivors of a bygone age. One of his brothers, J. D. Jones, had published an engrossing volume of reminiscences, *Three Score Years and Ten*, in 1940, a volume which chronicles some of the family background.

In 1903, Jones married Gwendolen, the daughter of Lewis D.

Jones of Chicago. She survived him, together with their one daughter, Mrs. Eryl Mathias of London. He was buried at Towyn cemetery at a public service where the Rev. H. Jones-Griffith, pastor of Towyn Welsh Presbyterian Church, officiated. At the graveside a huge gathering of mourners sang the tune 'Capel y Ddol' which had been composed by Sir Haydn's father.

As a politician, Sir Henry Haydn Jones did not distinguish himself at Westminster in any way. He hardly ever delivered speeches in the House of Commons, although he did put down a number of parliamentary questions – generally on agricultural or industrial concerns – and served on several committees. Nor was he an impressive platform performer: 'His voice had a somewhat hoarse quality, and he was keener on marshalling his facts and figures than on pretty turns of phrases.'¹⁰ But he rendered formidable service as a county Member and assiduous constituency MP, responsive to the needs of his constituents for more than thirty-five years. Although an MP, Sir Haydn remained regular in his attendance at the meetings of the Merionethshire County Council and the Local Education Authority. He served as chairman of the Welsh Parliamentary Party in 1934, and modestly refused repeated suggestions that there should be a public testimonial to him in recognition of his services to the county. He won impressive victories in avidly fought three-cornered parliamentary contests in four successive general elections – in 1924, 1929, 1931 and 1935. Following his re-election in November 1935, an admirer from Bangor wrote to him:

As Celt says no one ever questioned the result in Merioneth, though some parts could have done better, and having regard to all circumstances, I think the victory is a splendid one – a personal and well-deserved compliment. To hold the old flag in spite of every onslaught is no

mean achievement, & I have often wondered if you have ever realised how high you are held in the esteem of crowds outside your constituency. We know something of your 'cymeriad' ['character'] in the old county, but during the fourteen years I have spent in Bangor, you would be surprised the number of people one has met who claim you as their own. You stand for something that is very sacred to them – reliability, consistency, strength of character & outstanding personality – Wales must have its unchanging mountains. May you go back to Westminster gladdened by the fact that your great labours have not been in vain. We are proud of you.¹¹

Haydn Jones remains of interest as one of the last representatives of the traditional rural Welsh Liberal political culture. He undoubtedly accumulated a substantial personal vote which helped to ensure his return to parliament in 1931 and 1935. The local agricultural vote also remained significant: 32.7 per cent of the occupied male population of Merionethshire was engaged in agriculture in 1921, and still 30.4 per cent in 1931. In contrast, the proportion engaged in mining and quarrying, almost sure to vote Labour by this time, had fallen to 17.2 per cent by 1921 and fell still further to 13.5 per cent by 1931, as the local slate-quarrying industry contracted. This socio-economic structure, reinforced by family values, the persistence of the Welsh language and the continued strength of the nonconformist ethos, helped to buttress and perpetuate the deeply entrenched Liberal tradition in the county and thus impede somewhat the advance of the Labour Party. This tradition also played a part in enabling Sir Haydn Jones's successor, Emrys O. Roberts, to retain Merionethshire for the Liberals in 1945 and 1950. Like Anglesey (represented by Lady Megan Lloyd George), it did not fall to Labour until October 1951.

Haydn Jones remains of interest as one of the last representatives of the traditional rural Welsh Liberal political culture.

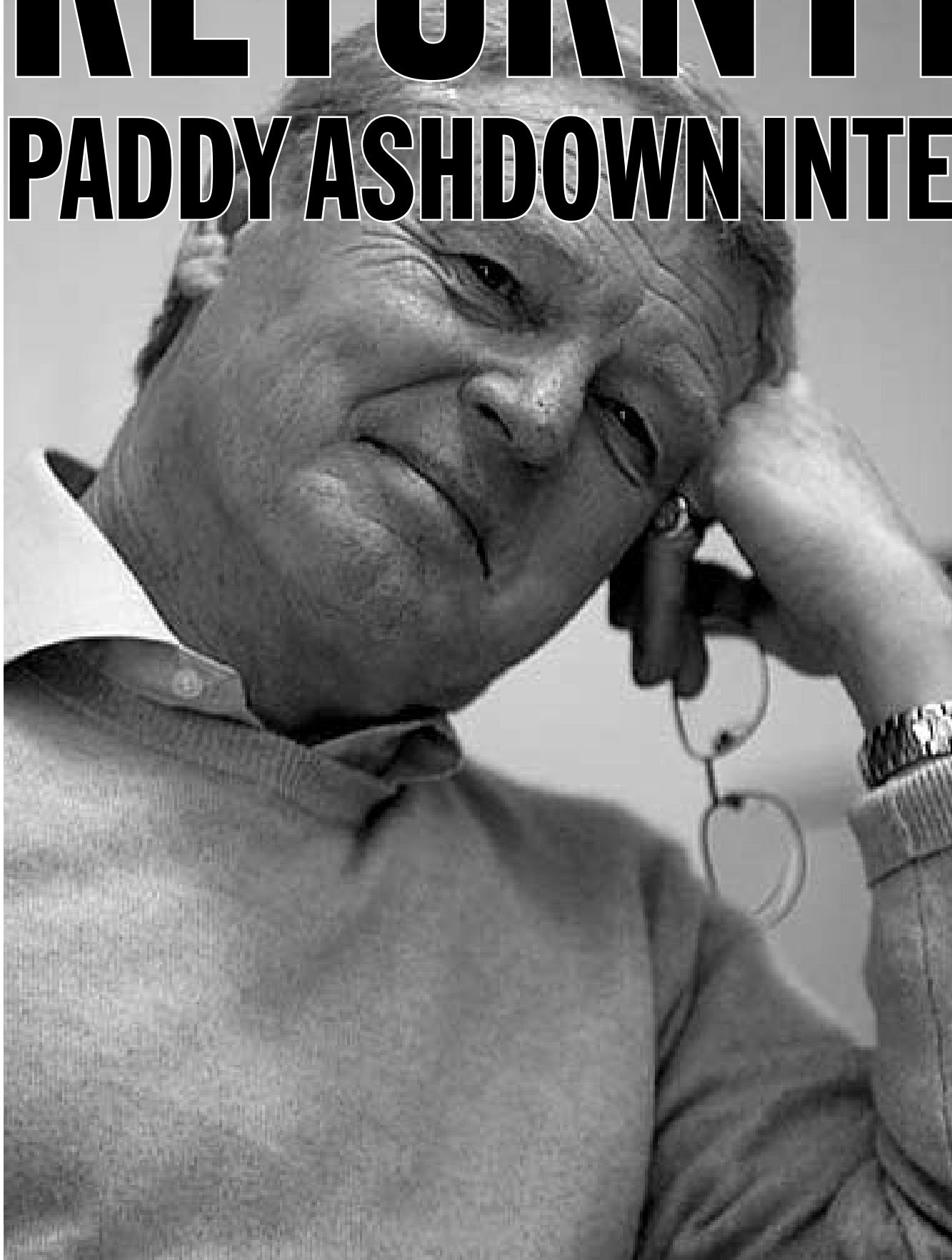
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Note on sources

Nothing of substance has ever been published about Sir Henry Haydn Jones. A useful collection of his papers was donated to the National Library of Wales by his widow in 1955. Other collections in the custody of the National Library which include helpful material are the papers of Ellis W. Davies MP and Sir John Herbert Lewis MP, together with those of Liberal journalist E. Morgan Humphreys. The local newspapers the *Cambrian News*, *Y Rhedegydd* and the *Liverpool Post and Mercury* have also been quarried extensively in the preparation of this article. Obituary notices and tributes were published in the following newspapers: *Cambrian News*, 7 July 1950; *The Times*, 3 July 1950, p. 8, col. c; *Liverpool Daily Post*, 3 July 1950; and the *Merioneth County Times*, 8 July 1950.

- 1 *Cambrian News*, 7 July 1950.
- 2 National Library of Wales (hereafter NLW), E. Morgan Humphreys Papers A1628, Haydn Jones to Humphreys, 22 November 1918 ('Private').
- 3 Election address of Henry Haydn Jones, May 1929, entitled 'The Road to Prosperity'.
- 4 NLW, Sir John Herbert Lewis Papers A1/405, Jones to Lewis, 21 December 1929.
- 5 NLW, Ellis W. Davies Papers 13, diary entry for 15 June 1931. For Haydn Jones's reflections on this occasion, see NLW, Sir John Herbert Lewis Papers A1/547, Jones to Lewis, 1 July 1931.
- 6 *Ibid.*, A1/609, Jones to Lewis, 24 December 1931.
- 7 NLW, Ellis W. Davies Papers 28/21, Jones to Davies, 16 January 1935.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 13, diary entry for 4 March 1935.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 28/1, Jones to Davies, 15 March 1934.
- 10 *Cambrian News*, 7 July 1950.
- 11 NLW, Sir Henry Haydn Jones Papers 650, Idris Williams, Upper Bangor, to Jones, 18 November 1935.

RETURN FROM PADDY ASHDOWN INTERVIEW



FROM BOSNIA VIEWED BY ADRIAN SLADE

It was a cold and horrible night in Blackpool in January 1988. The occasion proved to be the last-ever Assembly of the Liberal Party. The next day Liberals would vote overwhelmingly for merging their party with the SDP. After the pre-debate rally that night, and I suppose because I was party president, I found myself in the unlikely company of Jo Grimond, Roy Jenkins and Ludovic Kennedy. Ludo bought us all a drink and we were chatting about the prospects for the future when Jo suddenly said to me ‘Do you know this chap Ashdown? I understand that we may soon have our first leader to have killed somebody with his bare hands!’ An apochryphal anecdote, of course, but Jo had latched on to the fact that the MP for Yeovil had spent his earlier years as a soldier in Northern Ireland and then as a member of the Special Boat Squadron of the Royal Marines. Jo might also have added ‘... and the first leader to speak Chinese and to have been both a diplomat and a youth worker.’

That was the unusual CV of Jeremy John Durham ‘Paddy’ Ashdown, who did indeed become the first elected leader

of the newly merged party. David Steel, the architect of merger, had decided not to stand and David Owen had chosen to do a UDI from it all and go off with a rump minority of the SDP, so the field was left open for Ashdown to compete for the job with Alan Beith, the Liberal MP for Berwick-on-Tweed. He won comfortably and remained as leader for eleven years, handing over to Charles Kennedy in 1999.

Then, three years later, to his obvious surprise and delight, he was appointed High Representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an area in which he had taken an intense interest ever since the Balkans trouble began again in the early 1990s. It was an appointment made, on the recommendation of Tony Blair, by the Peace Implementation Council set up under the Dayton Peace Agreement of 1996. This council consists of all the countries that subscribed to the Dayton Agreement, including Russia and Japan. It is sanctioned by the UN Security Council and the European Union. The High Representative is answerable to both bodies and also, by his actions, to the people of Bosnia, but the agreement gives him considerable powers of direction in the setting-up of

structures for a democratic state. Paddy Ashdown succeeded three previous High Representatives, in the process becoming probably the most powerful British Liberal since Lloyd George.

I had not seen him since well before he went but he agreed to meet again shortly after his return from nearly four years in Bosnia exercising his powers. He invited me to the House of Lords – not, incidentally, a place in which he feels comfortable. I asked him first how he was finding his return to British politics?

‘I’m delighted to be back. I should be so lucky that, at the end of a life that was already fairly interesting, culminating in the undoubted pinnacle of leading the party I love for eleven years – at the end of that most people would say “that’s enough for one life” – then someone says to you: “Go off to a country you have grown attached to and know a bit about and help to build a state”. As someone who has been fascinated all my life about how you build states, combat racism and nationalism, of the kind I had seen in Northern Ireland, I could not miss an opportunity like that. By the way, what we did when we got there was apply the Lib Dem manifesto of 1992.’

‘By the way, what we did when we got to Bosnia was apply the Lib Dem manifesto of 1992.’

RETURN FROM BOSNIA: PADDY ASHDOWN INTERVIEW

I suggested that, when he was Liberal Democrat leader, he could not possibly have envisaged doing that job after he had finished, and he agreed emphatically that he had not. Implementing the Lib Dem manifesto also seemed a little improbable, given the substantial sole powers granted to the High Representative. I questioned whether these fitted easily with being a Liberal and a democrat, and one who had not been in government before. He saw no problem with that.

'The presumption that lies at the heart of your question is that this is an unnatural, unreasonable and unprecedented structure that you should have – after a war, an internationally managed, tutelage democracy. But it's not unnatural and unreasonable at all. It's exactly what happened in Germany. It happened in Japan. It happened in Kosovo. Quite frequently between a terrible war and the onset of democracy you have a period of physical and mental reconstruction. Don't forget that Liberals were closely involved with the reconstruction of Germany through the Allied Commission. That's why Germany has devolved government and proportional representation. It's not at all unusual for Liberals to exercise these sorts of powers and be involved in the business of state-building. If this kind of job has to be done I would rather have it done by a Liberal any day.'

Was it a lonely role?

'No, not at all. You know you have the international community behind you and you also know that you are accountable to them. Of course you have to fall back a lot on your own judgment and I think that here the skills of a politician are more useful than those of a diplomat. My predecessors were mostly diplomats. But knowing politics, knowing what makes people work, what makes states work and above all not being frightened of contention, is immensely valuable. The stuff of ambassadors is to avoid crises. The stuff of politicians is to know how

'That said, the pinnacle of my life was undoubtedly leading the Liberal Democrats. It's just that the day-to-day satisfactions of my job in Bosnia were probably a little higher.'

(Opposite page:) Ashdown as Leader; on the roof of the offices of the High Representative in Sarajevo; in Srebrenica.

to handle them to achieve what you want. Insofar as we were successful a lot of it was to do with that fact, that I had those political skills.'

He explained the highly complex appointment and accountability structure that he had had to deal with, but he added: 'By the way, if someone had said to me "If you are managing a peace stabilisation issue would you prefer to have around you what is broadly an ad hoc international coalition of the willing or be run by the UN Department of Peace-Keeping in New York?"', there is no doubt which I would go for. Unlike my colleague in Kosovo it was comparatively easy for me to make decisions and get on with real things.'

He is a little reluctant to list his principal achievements in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which he thinks are for others to decide, but he didn't dodge my question and his answer sounds impressive. 'I set out to try and do three things. First, to make the process of building a state irreversible. In those four years we created a single judiciary, a single judicial code, a single customs service, a single army under the control of the state, a single intelligence service accountable to parliament, a single taxation service and a unified city of Mostar. By the time we left we could say that the country was well on its way to democratic statehood. My second aim was to bring the country to the threshold where it could enter the European process. That's now beginning to happen. And thirdly, to come as close as possible to getting rid of the need for a High Representative. We are not there yet, but nearly.'

And he believes that, if the EU remains true to its intention to consider the Balkan countries for entry, the structures will stand the test of time. He is disappointed that the Serbian leaders Karadic and Mladic have still not been caught but pleased that the changes in policy towards them and other potential war criminals that he helped to initiate have

already led to a number of arrests and, he believes, a change in attitudes. 'But you can't have peace without justice, so they must be caught. I don't think they can now reverse the processes in Bosnia but until that happens, they can still slow them up.'

So how do the satisfactions of those years compare with the satisfactions of leading the Liberal Democrats – or were they not comparable? And here he revealed his true feelings about the Palace of Westminster.

'Oh, they were comparable but they were very different. In this bloody awful place called parliament you run around like a white mouse in a cage and wonder what you achieve. There were not many days here when I felt I had done anything that genuinely affected ordinary people's lives, whereas in Bosnia Herzegovina you made anything up to thirty decisions a day which genuinely did affect people. That said, the pinnacle of my life was undoubtedly leading the Liberal Democrats. It's just that the day-to-day satisfactions of my job in Bosnia were probably a little higher.'

We left the Balkans and went back to where Paddy Ashdown had come from and why he had accumulated such a varied CV.

'My life has been an accident. Nothing I have done has been planned. Why did I become a soldier? Because I was eighteen, into rough and tumble, first XV, Victor Ludorum at the athletics – I was fascinated by the romance of it. Why did I leave the services in 1970 to become a diplomat? Because I'd studied Chinese and Malay, I had seen a wider world and the Foreign Office offered me a chance to join them when I was serving in Hong Kong. I remained a diplomat until 1976 but one day in 1974, and I promise you this is true, I was at home in Somerset from Geneva when I was canvassed by a Liberal in a woolly hat and anorak. It was during one of the elections. I think I was pretty grumpy with him but he persisted and I invited

him to come in (something canvassers should never do!). An hour later he had persuaded me that I was a Liberal. The next thing was that by 1976 I had decided to join the Liberal Party, leave the Foreign Office and try and stand for my home constituency of Yeovil. Everyone thought I was mad. At that time Yeovil was 78th on the Liberals' winnable seat list, but I did it.'

Sadly we shall never know who recruited the future MP and party leader. Ashdown cannot remember his name and has never seen him since.

His diplomatic time in Geneva had been with the British mission. He was co-opted on to then Foreign Minister Jim Callaghan's team at the Cyprus peace conference in 1975 where he first met the minister's assistant, Tom McNally, later to be one of his closest advisers in the Liberal Democrats. At that time McNally tried to persuade him not to join the Liberals, but he left the FO and took on the candidacy of Yeovil at what was, thanks to its internal and well-documented difficulties, one of the lowest points in the Liberal Party's history.

His conversion to Liberalism had been exactly as he had described. He admitted to no previous Liberal heroes ('I don't believe in heroes'), not much previous knowledge of the Liberal Party and none of the works of John Stuart Mill. Surprisingly he does attribute some of his dormant Liberalism to his time as a leader in the Special Boat Squadron. 'I was commanding people who were just as good as me. It was a pure accident of birth that put me in charge and that made me think a lot about the need for a classless society in which every individual has the same rights.' In 1976 he took the plunge.

'I think the party stood at 8 or cent in the polls,' he says. 'Nevertheless I presumed that as I was such a wonderful person I only had to descend on the constituency and eat a strawberry cream tea or two and the seat would be

mine. I was wrong. It took me eight years and two periods of unemployment to win Yeovil.'

That was also the time of Ashdown the youth worker, with his patient wife Jane and two young children, Kate and Simon, to support. When he was eventually, and proudly, elected it was 1983, at the height of the Liberal/SDP Alliance. Had he seen the Alliance at that time as workable or a confusion?

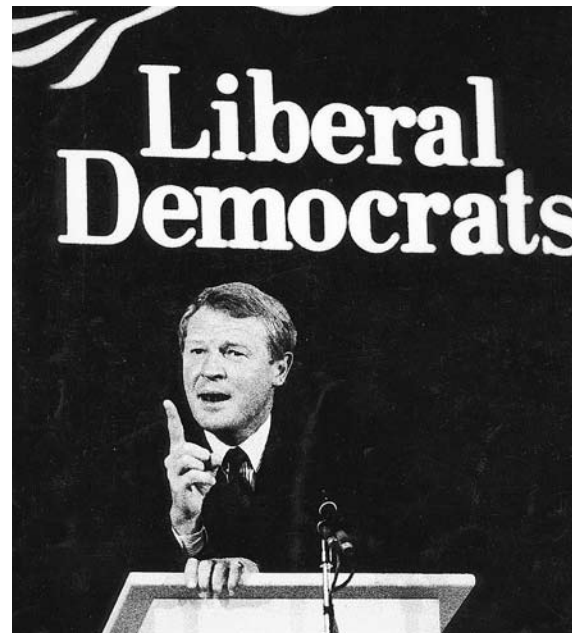
'Oh, a confusion. I remember saying that I didn't see why we should be selling our birth-right for this mess of pottage. I was wrong by the way, but in '83 Roy Jenkins was a terrible drag on our ability to win votes, and I regarded the SDP as a means of weakening our radicalism. I was very wary of them.'

In those days he had a reputation as a party rebel, particularly on defence, but he claims not to have seen himself that way, even if he admits to playing to the rebel gallery occasionally in order to get himself noticed. 'I remember over-hearing [Lord] Gruff Evans describing me as "Bloody Ashdown. He's like a bounding young boy scout".' Or a 'Tigger', as others described him then and later.

By 1987 his view of the SDP had mellowed and he was one of the first to express his support for merger of the two parties. 'Over those four years I came to the view that the SDP actually added to us things that we did not have, like a certain intellectual rigour, lost by being in opposition for too long; the importance of modernity and being able to communicate your message in a professional and sharp-edged way; and, lastly, the recognition, as I have always believed, that a strain of Liberalism is economic liberalism, not to dominate social liberalism but to be brought together with it.'

Would he call himself an economic liberal?

'Well, Alan Beith and I deliberately did everything we could after the merger to bring the merged party on to the economic



RETURN FROM BOSNIA: PADDY ASHDOWN INTERVIEW

liberal ground. So, yes, I would but I do not accept that there has to be a dichotomy between the two. By liberalising the marketplace you can help to solve poverty by giving everyone the opportunity to generate their own wealth, while at the same time assisting those at the bottom of the pile.'

He smiled the faraway Ashdown smile when I suggested that he might not have expected both David Steel and David Owen to opt out of standing as leader of the party. 'Oh, I don't know. I was an ambitious man and I was watching. Mind you, I think Owen was a fool to opt out. He could have been leader. It was all about his personal vanity.'

The merged party Ashdown inherited turned out to be economically verging on bankruptcy and politically holed by David Owen's suicidal decision to try and go it alone in competition. After the heady days of the early '80s the best the merged party and the rump SDP could muster between them was less than 10 per cent in the polls. The nadir for both of them came in 1989, when the Greens won 15 per cent in the Euro-elections and beat them both. That signalled the death knell for the rump SDP and near financial collapse for the then named Social & Liberal Democrats.

'It was the worst point of my leadership,' says Ashdown, 'and, if you remember, the economic crisis meant that most of us in charge were in danger of being personally liable.' Luckily for all, the financial measures taken and the disappearance of Owen signalled an about-turn in party fortunes. Ashdown was able to think more about defining what the new party was about. How did he see Liberal Democracy at that time?

'First of all, to have been the founding leader of the party was my greatest pride, but you're right – we had to give it its shape, give its quality, structure and organisation, its badge, its bird, its colours and a better name. And my perception then was very clear. The

Tories were going to become discredited and Labour under Kinnock and John Smith was not going to be able to make the change necessary to fill the space. So I saw us as positioning ourselves almost where we are now, in the centre-left position.'

He confesses to being disappointed by the party's results in the 1992 general election and blames himself and his campaign chief Des Wilson for putting too much emphasis in the last two weeks on holding the balance of power. 'We would never actually have gone into coalition with the discredited Tories but it put us centre stage. Unfortunately people also took another look at Kinnock's Labour and his disastrous Sheffield rally and decided that we might let him in by the back door, and they didn't want that. In retrospect it was probably better for us. We would never have got the result we did in 1997 if we had just been in coalition government with Kinnock's Labour.'

Tony Blair was a very different matter. It is obvious that Ashdown struck a good political relationship with him at a very early stage and, despite disappointments, he persisted with that relationship long after many others would have put an end to it. He sees the big pluses for the party that came out of it as the agreement to a form of PR and devolved government for Scotland and Wales, as argued for in the pre-election joint constitutional discussions with Labour; the introduction of PR for the European elections; and the fact that the Liberal Democrats more than doubled the number of their seats at the 1997 election.

'Not a bad achievement for a third party when the government has an overall majority of 179,' he says, but he had also wanted PR for Westminster and that never happened. 'And the overall aim I had also set myself was bigger than just electoral reform. I wanted to realign British politics.' He and Blair might well have gone further down that road if they had not both been taken by surprise

by the size of the Labour majority. Ashdown was looking for cabinet seats for Liberal Democrats to go with the promise of PR for Westminster, and he believed Blair wanted to deliver – but, even if he had, would Ashdown have persuaded his party that coalition was the right thing to do?

'I don't know, but the point about leaders is that they have to lead and do things. I think if I had turned up with Labour's agreement on the Jenkins Report on PR and the opportunity to go into government with two or three positions I believe I would have got the party's support. But Jack Straw killed the Jenkins Report and without it I would never have agreed to any form of coalition. I had already made it clear to Blair that I would never agree to any amalgamation of our two parties.'

Charles Kennedy is usually credited with having put an end to the relationship with Blair's government. Paddy Ashdown describes the Kennedy process as 'understandably letting it wither on the vine.'

'With the benefit of hindsight' he says, 'it is obvious now that until about November 1997 all of the things we wanted were possible but that beyond that Blair's power was already diminishing. Then came Jack Straw's performance on *Newsnight* over Jenkins. If I had remained as leader beyond 1999, I would have killed the whole relationship sooner rather than later.'

As we moved towards a close, and with Charles Kennedy still in mind, I felt that I had to ask Paddy Ashdown whether, if he had still been leader, he would have supported the government over Iraq. His answer was the most measured of this interview. I relay it as fully as space allows.

'I say this now because Charles has gone. Yes, I would have done. I am very clear that it was necessary to do. I could not have predicted that they would make such a mess of the peace, but I was very clear that something needed to be done at that

If I had remained as leader beyond 1999, I would have killed the whole relationship with Labour sooner rather than later.'

particular point, and I think history may well agree with that. I realise that if I had recommended that course to the party as leader they might have rejected it, and me with it, but you have to do what you believe to be right. My reasons were very simple.'

'It didn't matter how we had got ourselves into this situation. In the end it was a confrontation between an extremely evil man, Saddam Hussein, and the United States, and to allow the United States to be defeated in this would have been devastating for western power. We remain dependent, whether we like it or not, on the United States to help us to establish a broadly liberal world, even if I would not necessarily ascribe that aim to the current administration.'

'Secondly, the consequences for the Middle East of a triumph for Hussein would have been catastrophic, not least in Iran. And, by the way, I don't resile from that position today, although I grant that the situation has been nuanced by the disastrous way in which they have dealt with the peace. But one of my other calculations was not whether Saddam had weapons of mass destruction or not. In a sense, that did not matter. What was important was to show we were serious about doing something about WMDs. I am very confident that without doing so we would not have been able to bring, for example, Libya back into the fold. Nor could we have stood up to the threats in North Korea and Iran, if we had not shown we were serious about them. The world would have been a more dangerous place.'

'If the Middle East and the Arab world is to turn towards democracy, its chances of doing so are greater today than they were. The extremist Islamic movement has no sustainable message that can win. In the end, that must be defeated by the forces of democracy and liberalism. I believe the fact that we have attempted to put democracy into place in Iraq, albeit rather cack-handedly,

may hopefully be seen by history as the determining moment at which the democratic processes and liberal values of the state can come elsewhere. It may not look like it at the moment but we are still too close to make absolute judgments.'

'Yes. It was a tough decision but at the time I would have gone along with it and even today I don't think to say it was the wrong decision.'

Listening to that answer, it had become obvious that under Paddy Ashdown the last few years would have been very different for the Liberal Democrats. In conclusion, I moved hastily on from the might-have-been to the present. He had, of course, voted successfully for Menzies Campbell as leader and I knew that he would not be drawn into giving him advice through me, but I wanted to know how he viewed the effectiveness of the challenge from a Labour Party under Gordon Brown and a Tory party under David Cameron.

'I remember once saying in a conference speech – not a bad line actually – that the day there is a change in Downing St from Blair to Brown it would be a change overnight from Camelot to Gormenghast. We would see the spectral figure of this dour Prime Minister flitting down Downing Street after the midnight hour, counting the stamps of his ministers. But now it may be different. There may be a certain cathartic release from a Prime Minister who is seen to be all about spin to someone who perhaps is of more substance, and that could easily mean a lift in the polls for Brown.'

'As for Cameron, I don't think we should underestimate what he is doing. He is doing the things that are necessary. Why do the Lib Dems keep on winning seats? Because the Tory party is the nasty party and respectable people don't like to admit being Tories. That's changing. I think he is reasserting the old liberal-Conservative (if that is the word) tradition so I think it

'[The invasion of Iraq] was a tough decision but at the time I would have gone along with it and even today I don't think to say it was the wrong decision.'

will be quite appealing. But the significant thing about him and Brown is that they are both, in a flawed and fractured way, trying to get on to our ground because theirs is so untenable. So there is a danger of the middle ground becoming quite crowded. There is only one answer. We just have to be better, more convincing and sharper than they are about putting forward the policies of the Liberal position. But they both, particularly Cameron, have a problem with credibility and there is plenty of opportunity there for us.'

You get the feeling that, for all his protestations that he does not want another political job because he has had a wonderful and busy career and now wants to take life a little easier, inside Paddy Ashdown there is still a restless politician packed full of energy and trying to get out and be useful. On the day of our interview he denied vigorously a *Guardian* report that he was going to become a roving foreign affairs 'ambassador' for Menzies Campbell and the Liberal Democrats. 'It's *Guardian* nonsense. I was never offered such a job,' he says.

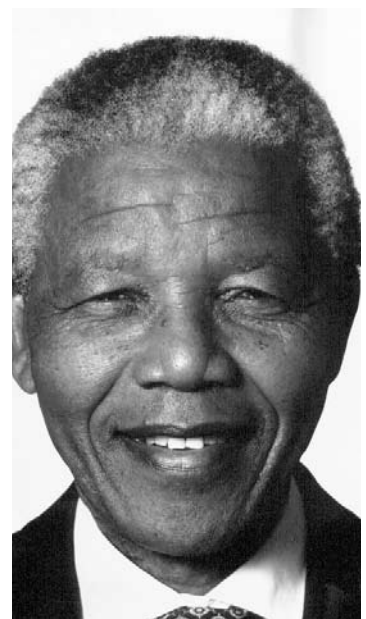
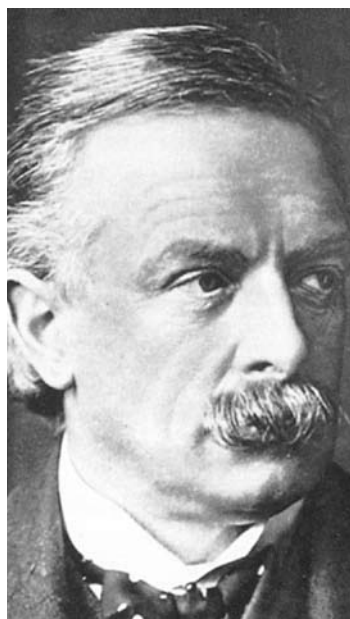
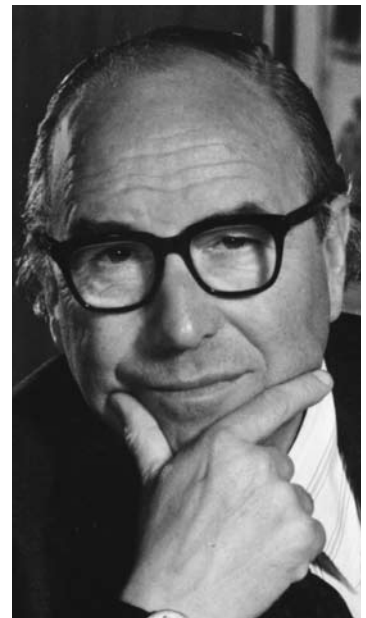
Time will tell whether other jobs will tempt him. Meanwhile I doubt that he will be spending a lot of time in the tea room of the House of Lords and I suspect that, if you are looking for a view on any major issue, this endlessly energetic, national, and now international, figure will be very happy to give you one.

Adrian Slade was the last President of the Liberal Party from 1987 to 1988 and, with Shirley Williams, Joint Interim President of the Social & Liberal Democrats after the Liberal merger with the SDP, from March until July 1988, when Paddy Ashdown and Ian Wrigglesworth were elected as the party's first Leader and President respectively.

A shortened version of this interview will appear in Liberal Democrat News in May 2006.

OLD HEROES FOR

As we did in the last Liberal Democrat leadership election, in 1999, in February the Liberal Democrat History Group asked all the three candidates for the Liberal Democrat leadership to write a short article on their favourite historical figure or figures – the ones they felt had influenced their own political beliefs most, and why they had proved important and relevant. Their replies were posted on our website during the leadership election, and are reproduced below. Their heroes? Roy Jenkins, Jo Grimond, David Lloyd George and Nelson Mandela.



Heroes: clockwise from top left – Grimond, Jenkins, Mandela, Lloyd George.

R A NEW LEADER

**Sir Menzies Campbell QC
MP –**

Roy Jenkins and Jo Grimond

I have two favourite historical figures – Roy Jenkins and Jo Grimond. I believe that without them, the identity and vitality of the Liberal Democrats would be significantly weaker than it is today.

Roy Jenkins was always a liberal. At the Home Office, he was responsible for some of the most significant social reforms in this country's history. In the early 1970s, he successfully took on the Labour left over Britain's entry into the Common Market. We should all be grateful to Roy for his political courage and integrity and for all he did to make Britain a more open, tolerant nation.

I came to know Roy very well as a friend and colleague. I admired him for the way he so clearly saw the big picture, the broad sweep of our politics. I agreed wholeheartedly with his vision for the future of the centre-left. But it was Jo Grimond who first inspired me to become a Liberal.

Given my family's allegiances, I might well have joined the Labour Party. But Labour was just as hide-bound and backward-looking as the Tories and neither of the two old parties seemed to offer much vision or hope. Grimond,

by contrast, had ideals and imagination. He sought out new ideas and became their champion. He recast the Liberal Party as the true radicals and innovators of British politics; thanks to him, we became the real party of reform and fresh thinking. I am proud of the mantle Jo Grimond gave us and we must never let it go.

He recognised that our destiny lay in Europe and forcefully made the case for joining the Common Market. Grimond sought to bring government closer to the people it is meant to serve. He supported for many years the cause of home rule for Scotland.

Grimond was unashamedly a man of the centre-left. But decades before the current debates on public services, he was suspicious of solutions based on big, centralised bureaucracies. He recognised they would limit people's ability to shape the decisions that affect their own lives. Grimond gave the Liberal Party a new political compass, arguing that it should become the focus for a new alignment of progressive forces in this country.

In 1979, Jenkins also made a dramatic case for political change, based on an entirely new party. His Dimpleby Lecture is remembered as the intellectual launchpad of the SDP, a counterpoint to the Labour left. He called for

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a new political force that was committed to Europe, a modern economy and political reform. But the speech was a powerful early critique of Thatcherism as well. For Jenkins always believed that government had a duty to tackle poverty and promote social mobility. The speech, like many that Jenkins made, still reads well today as a powerful statement of why the Liberal Democrats exist.

Together, Jo Grimond and Roy Jenkins gave modern liberals our sense of purpose and our moral core. We owe them both a great deal.

**Simon Hughes MP –
David Lloyd George and
Nelson Mandela**

Lloyd George really did know my grandfather. I was first taken to Lloyd George's childhood home (and his final resting place) by the banks of the River Dwyfor by my grandfather before I was three. I have visited regularly ever since. Lloyd George has been an inspiration partly because he had no privileged background and a difficult upbringing. In spite of the inevitable human weaknesses of all politicians, he was the central figure of one of the two greatest periods of radical change this country has known during the last hundred years.

OLD HEROES FOR A NEW LEADER

Lloyd George brought the Liberal Party into the twentieth century, making it a social liberal movement well suited to the demands of the new industrial era. His determination to set in place the beginning of our pension and social security system, together with his great 'People's Budget' of 1909, the first truly redistributive budget, alone would merit his place in any Liberal's pantheon of heroes. Alongside that should be remembered his commitment to constitutional reform and dis-establishment and his abiding interest in international affairs.

Above all, his willingness to remain a radical when in office as well as when in opposition makes him one of the greatest Liberals. The Welsh wizard had the ability to inspire ordinary people, to engage them in the political process, to support radical politics and to get them to respond to the liberal message. Making liberal democracy popular is a cause we still need to champion.

Just as Lloyd George was my hero from the first half of the last century, so Nelson Mandela is my hero from the second. I am privileged to have met him.

When I first started campaigning against apartheid (with Peter Hain, among others), Nelson Mandela was one of the leaders of the struggle from behind bars. When I first went to South Africa in 1986, I stood amongst the burned-out homes of the Crossroads squatter camp, encircled by South African Defence Force armoured cars, and sneaked into townships at night to see families whose members had been necklaced. Mandela was the liberation leader waiting in the wings.

When I spoke alongside Jesse Jackson to tens of thousands in Trafalgar Square at an anti-apartheid rally, Mandela was the inspiration for the international solidarity and struggle. When Mandela walked free from his prison cell, he was the symbol of the triumph of good over evil, and of perseverance over adversity.

When the first South African democratic elections took place, Mandela was the leader who rose above party politics. When he was President of South Africa he was the living embodiment of the qualities of forgiveness, generosity and statesmanship. Even in retirement and infirmity he has continued to display those qualities, alongside the charm and warmth of spirit that makes everyone who meets him feel immediately welcome.

Mandela is the radical pluralist, an enlightened, principled kind of leader who is an inspiration for millions. He is an object lesson to us all.

Chris Huhne MP – David Lloyd George

David Lloyd George will always be a controversial figure in the history of the predecessor parties of the Liberal Democrats, because he is associated both with the great climax of Liberal reform after 1906 and then with the declining and divided years of the historic Liberal Party after universal suffrage.

For me, Lloyd George's appeal is that he was a radical to his bones. His early prominence came in part through his campaign against the Boer War, when he helped to build an anti-war coalition that included not merely the advanced elements of the party, outraged by imperial aggression, but also some of the most conservative and rural elements, who identified with the independent qualities of the Boer community.

In government, Lloyd George had a passionate belief in his own ability to cajole and persuade, amply demonstrated during labour disputes as President of the Board of Trade. He was a great speaker, but also a great listener. The two are connected: great speakers have to be ever-sensitive to the moods and motivations of their audiences. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, he was the kingpin of the government's attempt to force through social welfare

and overcome the opposition of the House of Lords.

The old age pension is Lloyd George's most durable domestic achievement, and a testament to his New Liberal thinking. The roots of this tradition, in the ideas of Edwardian thinkers like L.T. Hobhouse, are the wellspring of Liberal Democrat thinking today, whether coming through the New Liberal – now 'social liberal' – tradition or the social democratic tradition in the Labour Party that rejoined us in 1981.

I also find Lloyd George's style as a politician appealing. He was always an optimist who believed in the power of ideas to persuade and change the world, and he was always prepared to throw himself into the political battle even when the odds looked stacked against him. He was an anti-metropolitan politician: a believer that the best and purest instincts were to be found in the misty valleys of his beloved Wales, from which he always drew emotional strength. Combined with this optimism was a great sense of mischief, captured for me in the marvellous Low cartoon, a copy of which I have on my study wall. Lloyd George is sitting, elfin-like, laughing on the green benches, hugging himself with mirth; never pompous, always able to see the folly and the ridiculousness of power and position.

Lloyd George has the strongest claim to be the father of the British welfare state and a great war leader at a time of desperate national need. In the 1930s, he was the only mainstream politician who understood John Maynard Keynes's analysis of the causes of mass unemployment and the only statesman with the vision to banish it. If in 1929, or later, he had been able to mount a more effective challenge for power, much economic and social hardship would have been averted. It is the country's loss that he was never given the chance to do so.

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REPORTS

Election 2005 in historical perspective

Fringe meeting, September 2005, Blackpool, with John Curtice, Andrew Russell and Chris Rennard

Report by **Neil Stockley**

The Liberal Democrats seemed to have much to celebrate as they gathered for the Blackpool conference in September 2005. At the general election on 5 May, the party saw sixty-two MPs returned, more than at any time since the 1920s. In terms of votes cast, the Lib Dems broke the 20 per cent barrier. For the first time, they won a handsome number of seats from Labour.

Yet a vague but real sense of disappointment came over the party during the summer. Simon Hughes, the party president, agreed that the party had expected to do even better. It was an open secret that the Liberal Democrats had wanted and expected to win at least seventy seats. After all, the unpopularity of the Labour government, coupled with the Conservatives' lack of credibility, seemed to present them with an open goal. Such was the backdrop to the party's gloomiest conference for many years and the History Group fringe considered whether the election represented steady progress or a missed opportunity for the Liberal Democrats.

All of the speakers reminded us that by many yardsticks, the party had made more than steady progress on 5 May. Andrew Russell (Manchester University) saw the election as a 'remarkable achievement'. He pointed out that the Liberal Democrats won 22.6 per cent of the votes cast and, for the second time in a row, increased both their overall support and their numerical strength in the Commons. They came second to Labour in Scotland

and the north-east of England and emerged as the main challengers in Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Cardiff. The Liberal Democrats also came second to the Conservatives in the south-east and south-west of England. Indeed, they were the only party to increase its share of the vote in every region of Britain and to take seats from both the other main parties in the Commons.

Professor John Curtice (University of Strathclyde) went even further, arguing that, by historical standards, the 2005 election was nothing less than 'mould-breaking' for the Liberal Democrats. One of the old rules of British politics held that when a Tory government is defeated, the Liberal share of the vote goes up; but during a period of Labour government, the Liberal share drops sharply. But in the two general elections since the Blair government came to power in 1997, the Lib Dems' share of the vote has grown by 5.5 per cent. Another tenet of conventional wisdom was that, barring mishaps, the party could not hope to win Labour seats. In all the general elections between 1945 and 2001, the Liberal Democrats and their antecedents took just four seats from Labour. On 5 May, eleven Labour seats fell to the Liberal Democrats.

The Liberal Democrats' Chief Executive, Chris Rennard, placed the results in the context of recent general elections. In 1992, when John Major won, the Conservatives outpolled the Liberal Democrats by 24 per cent. By 2005, this gap had dropped to 10

per cent. Over the previous thirteen years, the party had made a net gain of thirty-five seats from the Tories. Similarly, in 1997, the year of the first Blair landslide, the Liberal Democrats finished 26 per cent behind Labour. In 2005, this figure had dropped to 13 per cent. The electoral dynamics have changed and the Liberal Democrats are in a much stronger position against both the other main parties. They came second in 189 seats, well up from 109 in 2001.

But none of this could mask the brutal truth that with one exception the Lib Dems failed in their plan to dislodge senior Conservative MPs from marginal constituencies. Indeed, the party suffered a net loss of two seats to the Tories. Dr Russell highlighted the ways in which the jump in Liberal Democrat support was 'lumpy' and 'uneven'. Across the country, the party's vote went up by 4 per cent from 2001. In those seats where a Liberal Democrat was the main challenger to Labour, the Lib Dem vote increased by 7.7 per cent. Where the Conservatives were trying to take seats from Labour, the Lib Dem vote went up 4.7 per cent. By contrast, in the seats that the Liberal Democrats were defending against the Conservatives, their support rose by an average of 0.6 per cent, and where they were challenging the Conservatives, the Lib Dem vote went up by an average of just 0.5 per cent.

In short, 5 May 2005 was really two elections. In the first, fought against Labour, the Liberal Democrats made significant progress. The other, fought against the Conservatives, was, if not a missed opportunity, then a source of major frustration. The speakers had more convincing explanations for the results of the 'Labour' election than they did for its 'Tory' parallel. Andrew Russell argued that in Labour-held target seats, the Lib Dems succeeded in scooping up protest votes against the New Labour 'project'. John Curtice added that the party was able to do

All of the speakers reminded us that by many yardsticks, the party had made more than steady progress on 5 May.

REPORTS

so because of its clear, positive stances on the issues fuelling such discontent, most notably the war in Iraq and tuition fees. He noted that the Lib Dems were more likely to draw more votes from Labour in constituencies with a substantial Muslim population and in those with a relatively large number of students. But Andrew Russell was more cautious, noting that in the fifty seats with the largest Muslim populations, the Lib Dems were successful in just two, Brent East and Rochdale, and had indifferent results in nearly all of the others. He attributed this to the local credibility achieved through the by-election win in Brent East in 2003 and the fact that Rochdale had previously returned Liberal and Liberal Democrat MPs.

Similarly, the party won just six of the 'student seats' held by Labour but failed in the other eight. Otherwise, just two seats in this category were won from the Conservatives. All in all, Russell put greater store in the way that the 'student-plus vote' had deserted Labour and turned to the Liberal Democrats in target seats and across such cities as Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. He described this grouping as urban and suburban, 'youngish middle class', graduates and working in professional jobs. They became very anti-Conservative in the 1990s (and remain so) and turned decisively to New Labour in 1997. By 2005, these types of voters 'had reached their own parallel critique of the New Labour project'. Crucially, they should not be confused with Labour's traditional base in the white working classes, where the Lib Dems did not do nearly as well.

The factors that enabled the Lib Dems to pick up support amongst this mainly public-sector salariat may have had implications for the results of the 'second election', the battle against the Conservatives. Russell suggested that such developments as the defection of former left-wing Labour MP Brian

Sedgemore and 'some policies' may have helped to push away 'soft' or 'one-nation' Conservative voters. These were, after all, the very sorts of voter that had been so important in delivering many of the Lib Dems' past gains. In some ways, he suggested, the party's old positioning of 'neither left nor right' had become one of 'either left or right'. This argument was certainly plausible. But it was neither fully developed nor substantiated. For instance, we do not know for sure which offerings on the Lib Dem menu were the ones that Conservative voters in marginal seats did not find so palatable.

John Curtice agreed that the Liberal Democrats were more successful at peeling away middle-class Labour supporters than at making inroads into its white working-class base. However, he did not agree that this achievement came at the price of victories against the Conservatives. Yes, the Tories managed to increase their average support in seats where the Lib Dems were in second place in 2001. But this increase was only fractionally greater than in the seats where Labour was in second place. Curtice argued that the Lib Dems failed to win seats against the Conservatives because, quite simply, they did not win over Labour supporters in sufficient numbers. To put it another way, there was usually no Labour vote left to squeeze! But this was not wholly convincing either. We can see that Labour's support in these seats was heavily eroded in 1997 and 2001 and, in some cases, in 2005. In order to win those target seats, the Lib Dems needed to convert Conservative voters to their cause. But it is evident that very few of them switched over to the Liberal Democrats; indeed, the Tory vote firmed up and turned out to vote in these closely fought contests. Perhaps we will need to assess the full results of the British Election Study and similar exercises before reaching a conclusion on this important point.

Where have the embryonic breakthrough against Labour and the disappointing 'other election' left the Liberal Democrats? The party may make more gains at Labour's expense at the 2010 (or, more likely, 2009) general election. Another view is that the 2005 outcome is as good as it gets and that the Lib Dems may lose a number of seats to the main parties. After all, Labour will surely not be so vulnerable next time, given that there will be a new prime minister. The conflict in Iraq may still be controversial but it will not play in the same way. Similarly, the Conservatives may have 'flatlined' – winning the support of around 32 per cent of the electorate – for three general elections in a row, but surely they will not carry on making the same mistakes and with a new leader could even stage a full-scale revival as Labour falters. Indeed, when the meeting took place, most pundits were picking David Davis as the next Conservative leader; David Cameron's personal breakthrough was still to come.

Andrew Russell tried to dissuade the audience from a rush to pessimism. He suggested that the Labour government is unlikely to be more popular at the end of its third term than it was at the end of the second. Lord Rennard stressed that Gordon Brown's government may be so unpopular that the Liberal Democrats would have big new opportunities. There are also no guarantees that even if the Conservatives start to recover, they will win back large numbers of Lib Dem seats. Indeed, Professor Curtice argued that the electoral bridgehead that the Lib Dems have established against Labour should help to insulate the party against a Conservative revival. He showed that even if the next election saw a swing from Labour to Conservative of 8 per cent, the Liberal Democrats would still have as many as fifty-five MPs, so long as their own vote holds steady. Curtice also argued that the new electoral dynamics make hung parliaments

John Curtice agreed that the Liberal Democrats were more successful at peeling away middle-class Labour supporters than at making inroads into its white working-class base. However, he did not agree that this achievement came at the price of victories against the Conservatives.

more likely from now on. The party needs to start preparing for such an eventuality.

Still, the Liberal Democrats will need to make some important strategic and tactical decisions in the next few years if they are to take full advantage of these opportunities. Understandably, the meeting presented the questions more assuredly than it provided the answers. John Curtice suggested that the Lib Dems should try to continue with the steady progress of recent elections, picking up a few more seats by ensuring that they are well placed to benefit from discontent with the Labour government. This would mean identifying the issues that are of most concern to voters in target seats and where public discontent is greatest and then establishing both clear positions and credibility with the public.

This is an incremental strategy and has the advantage that the party would find it familiar. Still, Curtice did not give any impression that it would be easy. For instance, he believed that one area where the government will be open to attack from now on is the economy – but this has often been a weakness for the Liberal Democrats in the past. Indeed, Curtice noted that the one region where Conservative fortunes definitely revived was the south-east of England. Here he suggested that the Tories, rather than the Liberal Democrats, had been able to benefit from simmering voter angst about the economy (and immigration?). The second challenge – not unrelated? – is the party's relatively poor showing in white working-class areas and Conservative-held seats as a whole. The Liberal Democrats may need to rethink how they appeal to these sorts of constituencies. Achieving all of this will be very taxing indeed – though not impossible. Most likely, further gains would come mostly at the expense of Labour.

Andrew Russell's prescription was no less challenging. He was clear that the 2005 results

This fringe meeting showed how much the political terrain changed on 5 May, leaving the Liberal Democrats with a great deal to play for next time.

showed that a strategy of 'either left or right' will not deliver the kind of breakthrough that the party wants and needs. Rather, returning to a positioning of 'neither left nor right' – appealing to progressively minded voters by carving out distinctive and radical policy positions – 'is the only game in town'. This would mean making a 'positive appeal' based on the party's 'core values' but accompanied by, possibly, a 'retreat from certain ideological positions'. Andrew Russell was correct that gaining a few Labour seats but losing more to the Conservatives would not represent steady progress, let alone a breakthrough. But the question of which of the party's core values should be projected and how this should be done was left for the party to resolve another day. Similarly, the question of which specific positions that should be

jettisoned was not considered in any detail.

For his part, Chris Rennard was determined in his optimism about the future and was at pains to stress that the party would succeed by continuing to stick to its principles – even where these might be unpopular – and by being honest with the electorate. That was reassuring as the party buckles down to a major rethink of its policies and the way they are projected to the electorate, to say nothing of a fresh round of local government contests. For this fringe meeting showed how much the political terrain changed on 5 May, leaving the Liberal Democrats with a great deal to play for next time.

Neil Stockley is director of a public affairs company and a frequent contributor to the Journal of Liberal History.

BLPSG conference

Joint British Liberal Political Studies Group (BLSPG) and Liberal Democrat History Group Conference, January 2006, Gregynog

Report by **Russell Deacon**

The BLPSG held its first conference on 14–16 January 2006, in the splendid location of the University of Wales Conference Centre, Gregynog, Powys.

The mansion of Gregynog was once owned by the Liberal MP David Davies, later Lord Davies of Llandinam. It had also, in the 1930s, acted as a country retreat for Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. It was with this historic setting in mind that delegates came from eleven universities, including one from France and one from Greece; there were twenty-four in total. The conference was co-hosted with the Liberal Democrat History Group, and the University of Wales Institute Cardiff acted as

the host institution. We believe it was the largest ever gathering of historians, political scientists and politicians, from across the UK and Europe, who study the Liberal Party and Liberal Democrats in the UK.

Dr Glyn Tegai Hughes, a senior Welsh Liberal and a member of the Liberal Party's National Executive during the 1950s and 1960s, was the Friday evening speaker. The audience was entertained with stories about Clement Davies, Megan Lloyd George and Violet Bonham Carter, to name but a few of the illustrious Liberals Dr Hughes had known in person. The BLPSG was also able to obtain Lord Carlile of Berriew QC, the independent reviewer of the Anti-Terrorism,



Conference delegates at Gregynog.

Crime and Security Act 2001, as its after-dinner speaker on the Saturday. Lord Carlile gave a fascinating account of his time as independent reviewer and also allowed a series of interesting questions to be raised afterwards.

Of the various panels held, topics included Liberal ideology, counterfactual history, Liberal Democrats and the 2005 general election, policy, campaigning, gender and candidate selection, the Scottish Liberal Democrats and devolution and Prime Ministers, leaders and other important Liberal figures.

Greynog is set in hundreds of acres of landscaped gardens and woodland, around ten miles from the nearest town and outside the reach of the mobile phone networks. Payphones, therefore, were the link for delegates with the outside world – something of a novelty for many mobile-phone-dependent delegates! The conference's somewhat remote location also ensured that attendance for all panels was high, not

only because of the quality of panellists but also because there were no opportunity to 'slip off'.

The BLSPG also held a short AGM at Gregynog. It was agreed that the weekend had been successful and that the 2007 conference would be held at

the University of Birmingham between the 19–21 January 2007. So please put that date in your diaries.

Dr Russell Deacon is BLPSG and Conference Convenor.

1906 remembered

Scottish Liberal Club lecture, February 2006, Edinburgh, with Willis Pickard

In a lecture to the Scottish Liberal Club a hundred years to the week after the opening of the 1906 Parliament, Willis Pickard, chairman of the club and former editor of the Times Educational Supplement Scotland, sought to identify a line of development within the Victorian Liberal Party in Scotland which contributed to the electoral triumph a century ago.

Dr Pickard took as his starting point the life of Duncan McLaren (1800–86), a wealthy Edinburgh draper, Lord Provost of the city and one of its MPs from 1865–81. Three of his sons were also Liberal MPs. McLaren has had a bad press, from his own day onwards, partly because of a humourless rasping style but more because he successfully challenged the Whig

establishment than ran post-1832 Scotland and left behind it letters and journals denouncing the upstart shopkeeper. He represented the political wing of the Voluntary church movement, Presbyterian opponents of the established Church of Scotland and the funding it received from the state and through local impositions like the annuity tax peculiar to Edinburgh by which the city's established ministers received their stipends but from paying which the leading lawyers were exempt. In the 1830s McLaren made his name opposing the tax and, as City Treasurer, leading Edinburgh out of the bankruptcy into which the pre-Reform self-perpetuating Tory council had plunged it.

Challenging the lawyer-led Whig dominance of Edinburgh and Scottish politics, McLaren and other members of the 'shopocracy' formed Radical alliances on burgh councils. Initially, it was burgh reform and not the very limited Scottish parliamentary reform that gave these new Liberals their opportunity. The period was fraught with religious controversy: after the Disruption of 1843 three Presbyterian groups vied for dominance – the Established Church, the new Free Church and the major Voluntary groups who formed the United Presbyterians in 1847. What appears as sectarian (and bigoted) wrangling over irrelevancies like the Maynooth grant was also jostling for political power. Dr Pickard argued that McLaren was among the most skilful manipulators of a religious congregation as a political power base. Many of his allies challenging the Whig lawyers were fellow Voluntaries for whom the Free Church's adherents were as much a threat as those remaining loyal to the Established Church. But to Macaulay, an Edinburgh MP until ejected at the 1847 election by McLaren and his allies, sectarianism had taken over. The Whig historian's arrogant dismissal of his electors' preoccupations, including abolition of

the Corn Laws, contributed to his downfall, but McLaren and the Radical Liberals struggled to shake off their reputation for bigotry and internecine scuffling. In 1852 the city, nationally shamed by what it had done to the great man, restored him to Parliament, defeating McLaren in the process.

The Radical leader John Bright, however, recognised McLaren as an able fellow spirit – and accepted him as brother-in-law. Priscilla Bright, McLaren's third wife, was to become a leader of the movement for women's rights in Scotland. Before entering Parliament at the age of sixty-five, McLaren had worked with Bright on Reform legislation, and the Bright-McLaren family alliance was increasingly influential in the Liberal business circles of Yorkshire and Lancashire. McLaren, through ability (especially with figures), determination and wealth, came to typify the new Liberal leadership in Scotland – urban, self-made, church-oriented. He was too old when he entered Parliament to make a ministerial career and his relationship with Gladstone was always ambivalent. McLaren resented the GOM's refusal to commit to disestablishment of the Church of Scotland, and in his last months in retirement he split with the party over Irish home rule (he didn't want it for Scotland either). But by hard work on Scottish causes McLaren threw off his earlier reputation as a canting political bruiser and gained the soubriquet of 'Member for Scotland'. His Liberalism was of the kind that gave the party its Scottish backbone until 1918. Even when, as employer of hundreds of 'hands' in his shop he opposed the trade unions' attempts to make picketing legal and there were mass rallies against him in Edinburgh, he was still re-elected with thousands of working-men's votes.

Three years after going to Westminster McLaren found

a Radical ally in another businessman turned MP. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (as he later became) was from the Glasgow 'shopocracy' although his father and brother were keen Tories. The young MP for Stirling Burghs made his maiden speech on a topic that obsessed McLaren, the future of charitable 'hospitals' that were being turned into fee-paying day schools. JB Mackie, a journalist who wrote the authorised biography of McLaren two years after he died, and much later a short sketch of CB as a local MP, said of the latter: 'His speeches and his votes proclaimed his sympathy with the Manchester School, of which the most prominent English representative was John Bright, and the most unpromising Scottish advocate was Duncan McLaren.'

As Dr Pickard pointed out, no one on the Liberal benches in the 1870s and 1880s would have predicted that the amiable, solid but stolid Campbell-Bannerman would follow Gladstone and the real rising star, Lord Rosebery, into 10 Downing Street. But perhaps there was in the Presbyterian character shared by McLaren and Campbell-Bannerman an indication of the principles that CB brought to his leadership of the Liberal Party – not just belief in self-help and free trade but a feeling for the dispossessed. McLaren did not want charitable foundations to elide into schools for the comfortable middle classes. CB was appalled by British treatment of Calvinist Boer farmers and attracted to Boer leaders with whom he created the self-governing South Africa that was to be so valuable to Britain in two world wars.

Finally, Dr Pickard pointed to the nice timing by which three of the five towns incongruously forming CB's constituency of Stirling Burghs – Dunfermline, Culross and Inverkeithing – had returned to Liberal allegiance just in time for the 1906 centenary, thanks to Willie Rennie's victory in the Dunfermline and West Fife by-election.

No one on the Liberal benches in the 1870s and 1880s would have predicted that the amiable, solid but stolid Campbell-Bannerman would follow Gladstone and the real rising star, Lord Rosebery, into 10 Downing Street.

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Concise Churchill

Paul Addison: *Churchill: The Unexpected Hero* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

Given the spate of biographies (including the magisterial tome by the late Roy Jenkins) and other more specialised works on aspects of Churchill's life and career, one might well question the need for yet another, relatively short biography of the wartime leader. Any doubts, however, are immediately dispelled by a perusal of this immensely lucid, incisive and authoritative tome. The author is now the Director of the Centre for Second World War Studies at the University of Edinburgh. He is well known as the author of the authoritative and pioneering works, *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War* (1975, revised edition 1994) and *Churchill on the Home Front 1900–1955* (1992).

The present book has its origins in a lengthy article (rather more than 30,000 words) written by Addison for the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. The present offering is more than twice that length and was published to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of Churchill's death in January 1965. It is a pleasure to turn its pages, savour the narrative account, and read the array of carefully selected pungent quotations taken from a rich haul of sources, many of them new or little-known. The author is impressively well read, displaying a complete mastery of the secondary sources at his disposal.

Professor Addison intertwines two themes: the story of Churchill's life and career, and the story of his subsequent reputation. Writing from the perspective of

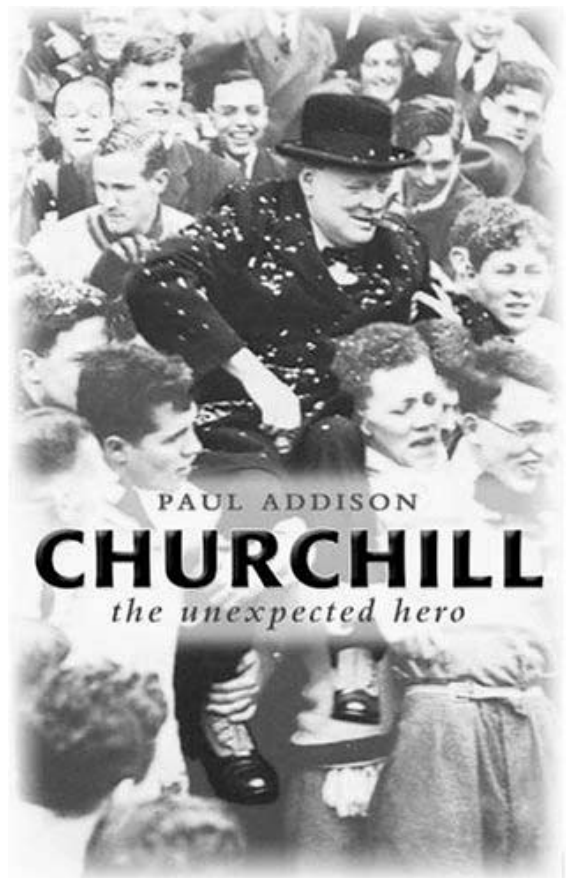
the start of the twenty-first century, he is able to stand back and analyse the reasons why the wartime premier was transformed into a national hero and the remarkable endurance of his status in spite of repeated attempts to demolish him. In a masterly, all too brief Chapter Eight, 'Churchill Past and Present' (pp. 246–54), the themes outlined in the book are conveniently summarised against the backdrop of the conclusions of a number of other historians. It may be hoped that the author will be able to expand the themes of this chapter into a further substantial scholarly article.

We are given masterly analyses of why Churchill 'crossed the line' to sit on the Liberal benches in the House of Commons, his heavy-handed response to the suffragette outrages and the strikes in south Wales before the First World War, and his role as First Lord of the Admiralty during the war. Later chapters survey his work as Chancellor of the Exchequer under Baldwin in the 1920s and his opposition to appeasement in the '30s. The war years are meticulously covered, followed by a briefer outline of the period after 1945.

The author draws most of his material from published works. Primary source materials cited in the references are relatively few, although it should be added that many of Churchill's own papers have been published in fourteen large volumes. Addison was no doubt constrained by considerations of space. The same reason no doubt accounts for a rather breathless air to the

narrative at times. In particular, I was surprised that more was not made of the Norway debate of May 1940 which dramatically propelled Churchill to the premiership. Also, the account of Churchill during the post-war Labour governments and indeed of his peace-time premiership of 1951–55 is perhaps a little cursory compared with the rest of the book. The general election campaigns of February 1950 and October 1951, when Churchill achieved his lifelong ambition of being *elected* prime minister by the British people for the first time at the relatively late age of 77, are given notably short shrift.

I was rather surprised that Addison did not include a small selection of photographs and cartoons which would certainly have added to the appeal and interest of a very attractive book, a real credit to the Oxford University Press. In particular publication of the highly significant cartoons by David Low to which the author refers on pages 167 and 217 would have been a most welcome addition.



The book is an admirable introductory text for those unfamiliar with the course of Churchill's life and career. It will appeal immensely both to the general reader and to students in the sixth form and at colleges and universities. The volume is a powerful reminder of the fine line which can often separate an outcast from a hero. OUP is also

to be congratulated on selling the book for the bargain price of £12.99, well within the reach of the book lover, and contrary to their usual practice!

Dr J. Graham Jones is Senior Archivist and Head of the Welsh Political Archive at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

A story of four Liberal Parties

Roy Douglas: *Liberals: A History of the Liberal and Liberal Democrat Parties* (Hambledon, 2005)

Reviewed by **William Wallace**

It's no easy task to capture the 150-year history of a party in 300 pages. The different elements of a party and its tradition, intellectual and social as well as party political and personality driven, shift over time. In such a compressed history the reader needs a convincing narrative: threads of continuity that link together the different leaders, the periods in power and periods in the wilderness. The underlying question, of course, must be how far the contemporary Liberal Democrat party stands for similar principles and policies, or represents similar interests, to those of its Edwardian and Victorian predecessors.

Roy Douglas has an encyclopaedic knowledge of twentieth-century British history. He fought five elections as a Liberal candidate, from 1950 to 1964, through the party's thinnest years. He published an earlier party history (covering the years from 1895 to 1970) thirty years ago, and has interviewed a great many leading Liberals over many years. The focus of this book, however, is not on the Liberal Party as he knew it best, staggering out of near-extinction to revival in the 1950s and 1960s. One hundred of the 300 pages are devoted to the twenty years between 1905 and 1924: the greatest years of

Liberal government, and the most catastrophic collapse. He argues that the Liberals were regaining the ground they had lost to the independent Labour Party in 1911–13; 'once the Liberal Government began to adopt a truly radical programme, and also arranged for the payment of MPs, the Labour Party began to wither away' (p. 149). This leaves him with some difficulty in explaining the rapid collapse of the Liberal Party over the following ten years; he attributes this firstly to the traumas of the war, and secondly to the deep rift between Asquith and Lloyd George.

He is much less confident in explaining how the disorganised and dispirited rabble that were the Liberals in Parliament by 1924 nevertheless managed to linger on for another generation, or to what extent the new members drawn in from the late 1950s onwards resembled the old. This is a pity, because he was himself one of those who kept the old faith, and fought in hopeless circumstances, in the post-war years. There are hints of his personal preferences – for free trade, against European integration – but no account of the rowdy Liberal Assemblies at which Oliver Smedley, Arthur Seldon and others defended

The underlying question, of course, must be how far the contemporary Liberal Democrat party stands for similar principles and policies, or represents similar interests, to those of its Edwardian and Victorian predecessors.

traditional economic liberalism, before walking off to found the Institute of Economic Affairs. He was not a fan of Jo Grimond, who gets far too little credit here for his role in the revival; he is, however, a strong defender of Jeremy Thorpe. He holds, correctly, that but for David Owen the Alliance between the Liberals and the Social Democrats would have moved swiftly towards a merger after the 1983 election, and that the 1987 election campaign was a near-disaster. David Owen, he concludes, 'must stand with Joseph Chamberlain as one of the great wreckers of British politics' (p. 300).

The primary focus of the chapters which cover the seventy-five years after 1924 are on the leadership, the parliamentary party, its repeated struggles to rebuild – and finance – an organisation outside Westminster, and the occasional glories of by-election gains. There is very little on the evolution of policy, beyond an insistence that a commitment to liberty (if not always to free trade and free markets) has distinguished the party from Gladstone's tenure to the present day. There is surprisingly little on Liberal thought and Liberal thinkers. And there's sadly little on the importance of religious nonconformity to the party, which might have thrown some light on the difficulties many local parties had with working men as candidates at the end of the nineteenth century, when the pillars of the nonconformist churches were often their employers. There is evidence from other studies, and from the Butler–Stokes electoral studies of the 1960s, that nonconformist roots played a significant part in regenerating local parties in the 1960s, and in inclining hesitant voters towards Liberal support. Douglas also virtually ignores the importance of community politics, the rebuilding of Liberal support and organisation from the bottom up through local government over the past forty years.

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There have been four distinct Liberal Parties since the organisation first took recognisable shape at the end of the 1850s: Gladstone's party, which he dominated and ultimately nearly destroyed; the 'New Liberals' of the turn of the century, whose ideas and determination sustained the Liberal government of 1906–14; the new Liberal Party that emerged forty years later out of the smouldering ashes of the old, under Grimond's leadership, but failed nevertheless to break through in national representation; and today's Liberal Democrats, rebuilt on the wreckage of the Alliance and on the local government base it had left behind, under Paddy Ashdown. This volume does not link these four movements entirely convincingly into a single tradition or socio-economic base. Its description of the party between 1925 and 1950, with warring Asquithians and Lloyd Georgists, leaves the reader wondering how on earth it managed to linger past the Second World War, and why it did not disappear into the Conservatives under Winston

Churchill. There's no hint of the sheer stubbornness of Liberal nonconformists, tempted by the other parties but recoiling against Labour's collectivism and (after Suez) Conservative imperialism, who rebuilt constituency organisations once Grimond gave the party a sense of direction again. So we must hope that Dr Douglas will now write a more focused history of the Liberal

Party between 1945 and 1975, to tell the story from his own perspective of how close the old Liberal Party came to extinction, and how and why it recovered.

William Wallace (Lord Wallace of Saltaire) is Honorary President of the Liberal Democrat History Group and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords.

Famous for being famous?

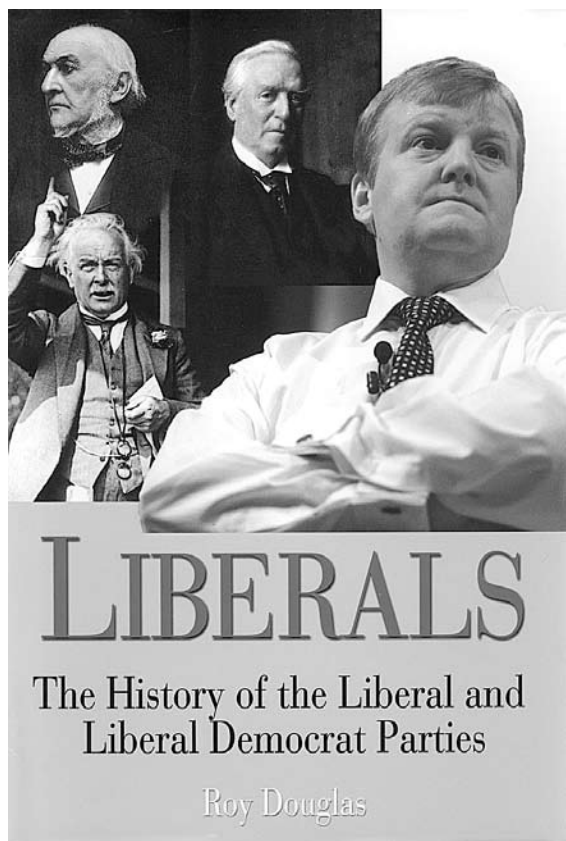
Leo McKinstry: *Rosebery: Statesman in Turmoil* (John Murray, 2005)

Reviewed by **Martin Pugh**

At the height of his fame Lord Rosebery had only to arrive at Waterloo Station to bring the whole place to a halt in the same way that a Madonna or a Beckham would do today. He possessed, as Leo McKinstry shows very effectively in this new biography, what we would today call 'star quality'. Though trapped in the House of Lords throughout his political career, Rosebery somehow contrived to appear more modern and more in touch than most of the lawerly, crotchety figures at the top of the Liberal Party during the late-Victorian era. He lived in a period when the glamour conveyed by wealth, title and land represented an asset with the expanding democracy. Despite being a basically insecure and even neurotic person, Rosebery could deliver inspiring speeches to mass audiences; and his fondness for horse-racing made him appear closer to popular tastes than was really the case. He remains the only prime minister whose horses have won the Derby; even as a student he had opted to leave Oxford without a degree when the authorities insisted that he suspend his racing while he was at the university. Of course, as Robert Spence Watson of the National Liberal

Federation reminded him, in a party dominated by the non-conformist conscience, horses and gambling commanded less than complete approval. But by the same token Rosebery was an asset to Liberalism by virtue of his capacity to appeal beyond the regular Liberal loyalists to an uncommitted electorate. McKinstry rightly emphasises that Rosebery spoke to the two popular themes of late-Victorian Britain: empire and democracy. As President of the Imperial Federation League he articulated the idea of the Commonwealth, admittedly with reference to the white colonies alone, and more generally he tapped into the feeling that the expansion of the empire was both a moral good and a material necessity for Britons; in one of his memorable phrases, he suggested that Britain was engaged in 'pegging out claims for the future' in Africa and elsewhere.

On the domestic front Rosebery espoused a catalogue of progressive and radical causes including agricultural trade unions, the secret ballot, the eight-hour working day and compulsory state education; he criticised parliament for failing to raise working-class living standards and he rejected



the justification for a hereditary House of Lords. By the mid-1880s he was regarded as Gladstone's heir apparent, and succeeded him as prime minister in 1894, the last peer to do so apart from Lord Salisbury.

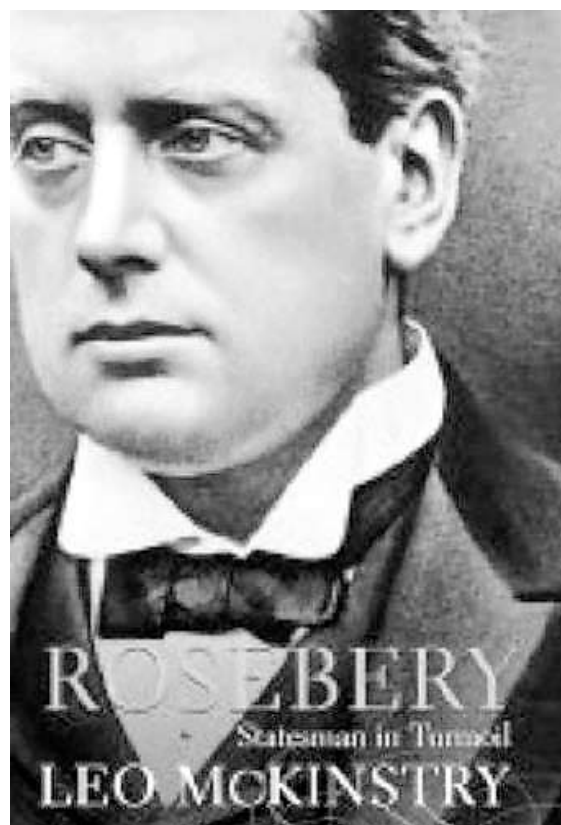
Yet despite all this, Rosebery was highly unsuitable as a party leader and his glittering career can only be regarded as a failure. Hence, perhaps, the neglect of him by historians. The last biography was by Robert Rhodes James in 1962, and before that came Lord Crewe's in 1931. Rosebery's problem lay in his temperament and personality. Ambitious but lacking in self-confidence, lonely and secretive, he was unable to handle other people and notably unwilling to make the sustained effort required to achieve anything in politics. He was also handicapped by his privileged background. Freed from any need to fight his way into politics, Rosebery had no experience of the House of Commons and no idea how to manage a modern political party. Much of McKinstry's book is taken up with tortuous accounts of the attempts made by his colleagues to persuade him to accept government office from 1872 onwards. That he rose to the top at all is a comment on the unsuitability of so many of the leading Liberals of the period rather than on his own talents. In 1892 when Rosebery consented to serve as Foreign Secretary in Gladstone's precarious new ministry, the irrepressible cynic, William Harcourt, told him: 'If you had not joined, the Government would have been ridiculous – now that you have it is only impossible.'

To describe Rosebery as famous for being famous might be a little severe, but it is not wholly unjustified. On searching his career one finds only three achievements, several of which seem less impressive on inspection. The first, which effectively launched him on his political career, was his promotion of Gladstone as Liberal candidate

in the Midlothian campaigns of 1878–80. With his local connections Rosebery acted as Gladstone's impresario in Midlothian and won huge personal popularity in Scotland generally. However, it has never been quite clear whether Rosebery really 'masterminded' the campaign as McKinstry suggests. He was, after all, ignorant of electoral politics, and the Liberals had their professionals in place to practise the vulgar arts of electioneering. The author offers no new evidence here, and his account is actually less full than the one given by Rhodes James.

Rosebery's second achievement was as chairman of the London County Council. However, his term as chairman was very brief. It is not clear how far he simply presided over meetings rather than taking an instrumental role in enacting the progressive programme. The praise heaped upon him by his colleagues signified little except their gratitude to him for conferring status and respectability on the new council; other county councils persuaded aristocrats to act as chairmen for the same reason.

By contrast Rosebery's one acknowledged area of expertise was foreign affairs. As Foreign Secretary from 1892 to 1894 he secured the annexation of Uganda by Britain at a time when there was strong pressure to withdraw. Yet Uganda offered little or no immediate prospect of economic advantage. The British East Africa Company, which failed to pay any dividends to shareholders, was a complete flop. Significantly even Lord Salisbury considered annexation pointless. Rosebery's actions over Uganda certainly offered some evidence of his command of the lower political arts. Scarred by their experience with the Sudan and General Gordon, most of his cabinet colleagues, including Gladstone, opposed annexation. However, Rosebery outmanoeuvred them by delaying the decision and then by appointing



a mission to investigate, which he loaded with a pro-annexationist chairman; he actually instructed the chairman not to consider evacuating the territory! The mission's recommendation, combined with Rosebery's threat to resign if thwarted, led his colleagues to swallow another flawed piece of imperial aggrandisement against their better judgement.

Despite this isolated success Rosebery showed that he had neither the appetite nor the energy for running a government when he succeeded Gladstone as prime minister in 1894. Under his leadership Liberal morale collapsed and he led the party into an unnecessary and disastrous general election in 1895, four years earlier than necessary, in which only 177 Liberal MPs were returned. He himself realised it had been a mistake to become party leader and resigned in 1896.

McKinstry's biography is a readable, sophisticated and well-researched study of this perverse statesman. While he does not significantly modify the traditional view of Rosebery's political

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career, he presents a much fuller picture of his character and private life than previous authors. In particular he offers a detailed and sympathetic discussion of Rosebery's sexuality, with reference to the assumption that he was homosexual. The subject went almost unmentioned by Rhodes James who referred to one of the key figures, Viscount Drumlanrig, in a solitary footnote. There is a great deal of circumstantial evidence for Rosebery's homosexuality, and it was believed that as Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister he had a relationship with his private secretary, Drumlanrig. This was a time when Drumlanrig's father, the obnoxious Marquess of Queensbury, was in full pursuit of Oscar Wilde because of his connection with his younger son, Lord Alfred Douglas. In his book, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (2003), Neil McKenna argued that the reason the authorities pursued Wilde was to satisfy the increasingly unpredictable Queensbury who was threatening to expose Rosebery himself. McKinstry, however, firmly rejects the idea that Rosebery was homosexual, though his counter-arguments

are by no means convincing. He is justified in claiming that there is no unequivocal evidence in the correspondence and diaries. Rosebery, who notoriously refused to allow anyone to open his mail, presumably destroyed anything incriminating. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to prove that Rosebery was *heterosexual*. No doubt he married and had children, but so did Lewis Harcourt and Lord Beauchamp, other notable homosexual Liberal politicians. In the present state of our knowledge one can only advise readers to compare McKinstry's discussion of the evidence with the diametrically opposed view presented by McKenna and come to their own conclusions.

Martin Pugh was Professor of Modern British History at Newcastle University until 1999, and Research Professor in History at Liverpool John Moores University from 1999 to 2002. He has written ten books on aspects of nineteenth and twentieth century history and is on the board of BBC History magazine. He is currently writing a social history of Britain between the wars.

Hay contends that the changes which occurred within the party from 1808 to 1830 made a significant contribution to the Whig-Liberal ascendancy which was to dominate British politics from 1830 to 1886.

to the Whig-Liberal ascendancy which was to dominate British politics from 1830 to 1886.

This is an eloquent and largely persuasive argument. Hay's strongest suit is his attempt to balance the high political strategy of the great aristocratic families of the Whig party with the increasingly vibrant sphere of extra-parliamentary politics. Indeed, his chief justification for basing the narrative around the Scottish Whig MP, barrister and publicist, Henry Brougham, is the fact that Brougham was the figure who most effectively managed to straddle both these worlds. While the Whigs had failed to establish a strong and charismatic leadership in the wake of Charles James Fox's death and the collapse of the Whig-dominated Talents Ministry in 1807, Brougham's national political strategy made him an increasingly influential figure in the gradual revival of the party's fortunes from 1810. Hay's chief contention is that Brougham harnessed the vibrant political energies of various provincial interest groups to the party politics of Westminster. Where the Whig party had become somewhat hamstrung by its failure to appeal beyond its aristocratic and metropolitan core, Brougham endeavoured to reach out across a range of concerns and allegiances – merchants, manufacturers in the growing towns of the north, religious dissenters and anti-slavery campaigners foremost among them. Herein, among these disparate and increasingly influential sections of British society, lay the mainstay of the Liberal Party's support for most of the nineteenth century.

This book expertly manages to fuse most of the recent trends of nineteenth-century British history historiography into a balanced and illuminating study. Hay's mastery of the high political intrigues and tensions among the leading Whigs does not prevent him from elucidating the formation of the loose, but cogent governing strategy which

Transforming the Whigs

William Anthony Hay: *The Whig Revival, 1808–1830* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), in the series *Studies in Modern History* (J. C. D. Clark ed.)

Reviewed by **John Bew**

William Anthony Hay's study of the transformation of the fortunes of the British Whig party in the first three decades of the nineteenth century is a welcome contribution to an area of British history which has long been in need of serious reappraisal. In recent years, the work of Boyd Hilton and others has thrown much light on the economic, religious and political dimensions of the

dominant Tory governments of the period. But much less is known about the Whig opposition in these inglorious years in which it was almost continually out of office for nearly five decades. By retracing the workings and strategy of the Whig party at the height of the wilderness years, Hay contends that the changes which occurred within the party from 1808 to 1830 made a significant contribution

was to prove so important to the Whigs after 1830. He restores the purely political without discounting recent literature on the importance of religion, popular political discourse and the language of identity and class. If anything, he has undersold his own achievement in demonstrating how the emergence of a wider British national identity was intrinsically linked to the growth of political consciousness outside Westminster and the exposure of constituency politics to national debates.

While the central thesis is sound, some additional observations might be made. The assumption that the Tories were standing still – relying on patronage, vested interests, or the support of the Crown – when the Whigs were gobbling up popular support, needs clarification. To a significant extent, the fiscal rationalisation under the ‘liberal Tory’ government of the 1820s demonstrated that the Tories were also making important strides in answering some of the most potent of the radical critiques of the previous forty years.

William Anthony Hay

The Whig Revival, 1808–1830



Indeed, it remains to be seen how successful the Whig ‘revival’ would have been viewed if the Tory government of the late 1820s had not ripped itself apart over the contentious issue of Catholic emancipation. As Hay shows, Brougham suffered several electoral setbacks in his attempt to defeat leading Tories with the force of the press and popular politics alone; the Tory intellectual Thomas Croker of the *Quarterly Review* was a serious and respected rival. Ultimately, it was events beyond the control of the Whigs – above all, the implosion of the Tory governing coalition in the late 1820s, precipitated by the death of Lord Liverpool and a political crisis in Ireland – which brought the Whigs back into power in 1830. Brougham himself, as Hay notes, was unprepared to wait around for the Whig cause to gain enough independent momentum to form an administration in its own right. Indeed, he irritated some of his more purist colleagues by advocating a compromise coalition with the less unpalatable elements in the Tory party. Perhaps the influence of George Canning’s short-lived Tory–Whig coalition government of 1827 on the future development of what was to become the Liberal Party is a theme worthy of further investigation.

While Hay is also successful in establishing Brougham as a key link man between the party politics of Westminster and the interests of various provincial groups, it should be emphasised that this was a two-way process. Brougham’s central significance was as a conduit for, rather than a leader of, extra-parliamentary public opinion. During the years of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, many radicals and dissenters had become disillusioned by the parliamentary process and distant from a Whig party which they saw as opportunistic and aloof. Crucially, these groups had to show themselves willing to be conciliated before the Whigs could attempt to

attract their support. Notwithstanding Brougham’s achievement, then, the precursor of any Whig ‘revival’ was the decision of leading radicals such as Major John Cartwright and Sir Francis Burdett to revive the dormant policy of putting pressure on Parliament from inside and outside Westminster. It was only in this context that Brougham’s pioneering and popularising strategy of ‘petition and debate’ really came into its own.

With recent publications on Admiral Nelson and the fight for the free press, the history of the early nineteenth century is now back in vogue. William Antony Hay has simultaneously produced a valuable contribution to the scholarship of that period and taken a big step forward in uncovering the political foundations of the Liberal ascendancy of nineteenth-century Britain. This is a book that needed to be written and Hay has done an admirable job.

John Bew is a Junior Research Fellow at Peterhouse, Cambridge. He is the author of Belfast Politics: Thoughts on the British Constitution (University College Dublin Press, 2005).

Email mailing list

In common with many other organisations, we are increasingly using our email mailing list to communicate news of events and publications in good time.

If you would like to receive up-to-date information on the Liberal Democrat History Group’s activities, including advance notice of meetings, and new History Group publications, you can sign up to the email mailing list. Visit the History Group’s website (www.liberalhistory.org.uk) and fill in the details on the ‘Contact’ page.

ARCHIVES

Liberal History Archives at Manchester Archives and Local Studies

by **Debbie Cannon**

Manchester is famous as a cradle of political liberalism in the early nineteenth century, and many of the better-known materials in Manchester Archives reflect the city's radical reputation: the papers of George Wilson, and J. B. Smith, for example, as well as the journal of Henry Hunt, and the memoirs and diaries of Samuel Bamford. However, both less well-known and less well-used are those archives produced by, and related to, the Liberal Party in Manchester held in Manchester Archives and Local Studies, dating from the nineteenth century up to the previous few decades. This review aims to provide a focus on some of these resources.

At the core of our collections are the records of the Manchester Liberal Federation, the organisation which went on to become the City of Manchester Liberal Party. From the central organisation of the party, we hold minutes from the General Council, the Manchester Central Liberal Registration Committee, the Finance Committee, and other committees, covering various periods between 1878 and 1965, as well as an incomplete series of accounts from between 1898 and 1946. The collection also incorporates minutes and/or accounts from several divisional associations, including political wards and the Manchester Women's Central Council, variously dating between 1919 and 1950. The catalogue for this collection (reference M283) can now be viewed in full on the internet as part of the 'Access to Archives' initiative, at the web-site www.a2a.pro.gov.uk

The Library holds collections from three other main Liberal organisations in the area: the Lancashire, Cheshire and North Western Liberal Federation (reference M390), the Lancashire, Cheshire and North Western Derbyshire Union of Women's Liberal Associations (reference M391/1), and the Society of Certified and Associated Liberal Agents, Lancashire and Cheshire (later North Western) District (reference M392). Again the records largely consist of minutes and accounts. The Lancashire, Cheshire and North Western Liberal Federation later evolved into the North West Liberal Federation, and then the Greater Manchester Liberal Party; as well as minutes from the Executive Committee Meetings (1908–69), and accounts covering 1959–62, and 1967–71, the records include a list of officers from 1938–53. From the Lancashire, Cheshire and North Western Derbyshire Union of Women's Liberal Associations, we hold minutes of committee meetings, AGMs, and spring conferences. Finally, the records of the Certified and Associated Liberal Agents, Lancashire and Cheshire District, encompass executive meeting minutes from 1903–51, and accounts from 1918–49. The catalogues for these collections are as yet not available on the internet, but paper versions can be viewed in the archive search-room whenever the Library is open.

In a series of deposits between 1961 and 1987, the Library was given the papers of Ernest Darwin Simon, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe (reference M11), who served as the Liberal MP for

Wythenshawe in 1923–24, and 1929–31, before switching his allegiance to the Labour Party in 1946. Born in Didsbury in 1879, Lord Simon studied engineering at Cambridge, taking over the running of his family's firms at the age of twenty. He married Sheena Potter in 1912, and the couple shared a passionate concern for social reform. Both served as city councillors and Lord Simon became the city's youngest Lord Mayor in 1921. Lord Simon's primary interests were in smoke abatement and housing, and the writings which he produced on the clearing of slum housing, and rebuilding of city dwellings, were very influential on government. In the 1930s he took practical steps towards improving housing in the city, purchasing Wythenshawe Hall and Park and gifting the estate to the city, enabling the suburb of Wythenshawe to be established. He was also very concerned with 'education for citizenship', the teaching of civic responsibility in schools to produce good citizens. In 1932 he was knighted, and from 1947 until 1952 he served as Chairman of the BBC.

The papers are to a large extent concerned with Lord Simon's interest in education, and in particular his involvement with the University of Manchester, for which he created research fellowships in the social sciences, and acted as Chairman in Council from 1941–57. However, his files, arranged by subject, include letters, notes, and documents displaying the diversity of his interests and activities. Topics include nationalised boards, nuclear disarmament, town planning, the USA, 'education for citizenship', and local government, as well as personal interview files. His diaries for various years between 1907 and 1944 are also available, together with extracts from his diaries from 1918–27 and 1929–35 transcribed by Lady Simon.

In 1961 and 1979 the Library was again fortunate in receiving deposits of the papers of Lady Simon of Wythenshawe

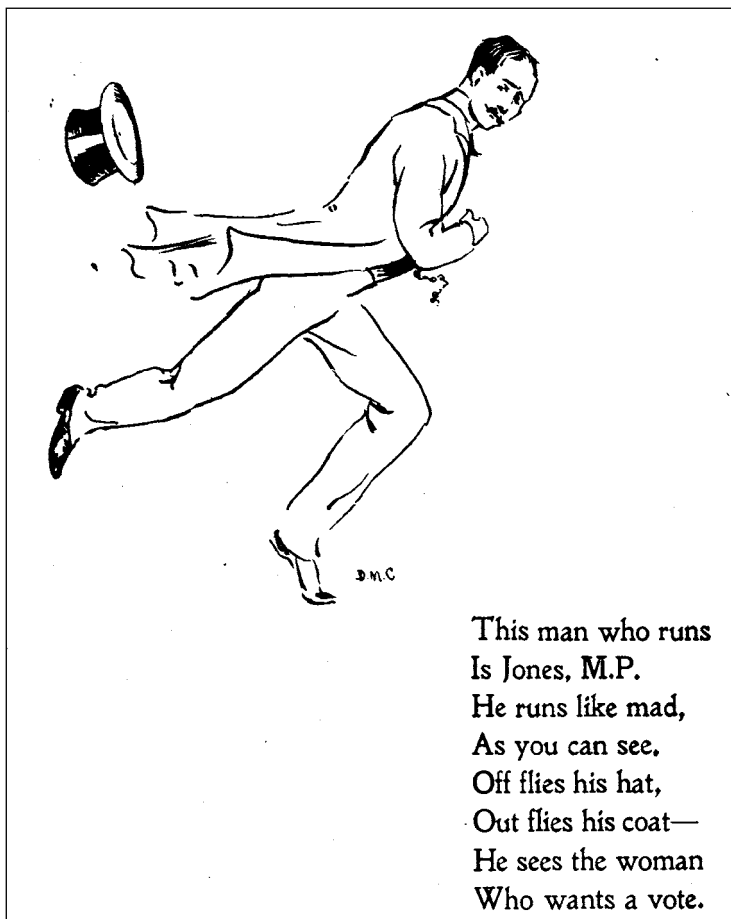
(reference M14). The collection similarly encompasses a wide range of subjects. As well as personal diaries, papers, and family photographs, Lady Simon's lifelong interest in education is strongly represented, together with the planning of the Wythenshawe estate.

Single items within other large collections will also prove of interest to researchers of Liberal history. The Women's Suffrage collection (reference M50), is one such example. This collection is made up of the archive of the Manchester Society for Women's Suffrage and the personal papers of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, and includes a number of items relating to the Women's Liberal Association, and the Women's Liberal Federation, and others simply reflecting attitudes amongst members of the Liberal Party to women's suffrage. Part of the catalogue to this collection has been put on the 'Access to Archives' web-site, and the whole collection has been microfilmed. Copies of the films can be consulted in the archive searchroom.

The papers of the Cobden family (references M87, and Misc./767/1-4), which cover the years 1817-87, incorporate papers relating to Richard Cobden's early business activity, and his political career, and include material concerning his relations with the Liberal Party. John Bright's correspondence (reference MS f 923.2 Br 13), dating from 1852-88, similarly includes letters which describe his dealings with the Liberal Party. Researchers can track other individual records relating to the Liberal Party in the subject index and catalogues in the archive searchroom. These include records such as a circular and subscription list for the South Manchester Liberal Association, dated in 1912, and a series of pamphlets describing meetings of the Manchester Liberal Federation from 1905-12.

Published material of local historical interest (including newspapers, and in many cases

Illustration from the Women's Suffrage collection; library reference M50/2/28.



**This man who runs
Is Jones, M.P.
He runs like mad,
As you can see,
Off flies his hat,
Out flies his coat—
He sees the woman
Who wants a vote.**

annual reports, as well as secondary literature) is held by the Local Studies Section of the Library. This is located immediately next to the archive searchroom, but has different opening times, as well as its own indexes. Over the years local press cuttings have been compiled on the Liberal Party, the Manchester Liberal Federation, and Liberal Clubs, and these are supplemented by official handbooks, annual reports, and formulations of policy, dating variously from the 1890s up to the present day. Local newspapers, including the *Manchester Guardian* and *Manchester Mercury*, can be viewed on microfilm in the Library's Microfilm Unit during normal Library opening hours. A full list of these, with dates covered, is provided on our website.

All of the above archive collections have been catalogued, and are open to researchers. Archives opening hours (different from the rest of the Library) are Monday to Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., and further

information on access requirements, and arranging a visit can be found on our website at www.manchester.gov.uk/libraries/arl Some of the collections listed are held in an out-store, so we require researchers to give us at least twenty-four hours notice if they would like to view them.

Prospective researchers should write, telephone or email Manchester Archives, Central Library, St Peter's Square, Manchester, M2 5PD, telephone 0161 234 1980, email archives@libraries.manchester.gov.uk

At the time this article was written, Dr Debbie Cannon was Archivist, Manchester Archives and Local Studies.

A National Liberal Club symposium

FREE TRADE, CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Political and historical perspectives of the 1906 landslide – a National Liberal Club participative symposium to mark the centenary of the Liberal victory.

Speakers: **Dr Frank Trentmann** (Birkbeck College, London), on free trade; **Professor Jose Harris** (Oxford University), on citizenship; **Dr Stefan Collini** (Cambridge University), on social inclusion. Commentators on contemporary comparisons will include **Professor Lord Robert Skidelsky** (Warwick University) and **Baroness Shirley Williams**. Chair: **Evan Davis** (BBC Economics Editor).

1.00pm – 5.00pm, Wednesday 17 May 2006

Applications to the Secretary, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE; registration fee of £20 (cheques should be made out to the National Liberal Club) includes lunch.

Liberal Democrat History Group meetings programme 2006

Landslide! The 1906 Election and the legacy of the last Liberal Governments

An informal colloquium at the Institute of Historical Research, in conjunction with the Liberal Democrat History Group.

The general election of 1906 has often been seen as a watershed in the history of British politics. It marked the beginning of the radical Liberal governments of 1906–14 and the breakthrough of the Labour Party into mainstream politics.

The centenary of the 1906 elections marks an important opportunity to re-evaluate both the period and its long-term political legacy. We welcome offers of papers on all related themes:

- Liberalism, Labour and the socialist challenge
- Electoral politics of the Progressive alliance
- Progressive taxation and fiscal policy
- The 'People's Budget' and the welfare state
- The protection of children debate
- The emergence of animal welfare legislation
- Trade unions and industrial relations
- The Land question
- 'New Liberalism' – the ideology and its limitations

All welcome. Please send proposals for papers (250 words) by 30 April to james.moore@sas.ac.uk

Or contact: Dr James Moore, Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU.

Saturday 1 July 2006

Institute of Historical Research, Malet Street, London

The Suez Crisis and its impact, fifty years on

In July 1956, the Egyptian president, Colonel Nasser, nationalised the Suez Canal to the anger and frustration of the British and French governments, who were the majority shareholders.

Prime Minister Eden came to a secret agreement with France and Israel to provoke hostilities through an invasion of Sinai by Israeli forces, using this as a pretext for Anglo-French military intervention in Egypt. The decision to send British troops to occupy the canal zone led to the downfall of Eden and represented what one historian of the Liberal Party has called a watershed for Jo Grimond and his party.

Fifty years on, two leading contemporary historians re-examine the impact of Suez for the opposition parties.

Speakers: **Peter Barberis**, Professor of Politics at Manchester Metropolitan University and author of *Liberal Lion*, a biography of Jo Grimond and **Brian Brivati**, Professor of Contemporary History at Kingston University, author of a biography of Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell.

7.00pm, Monday 3 July 2006

Lady Violet Room, National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1

The Dictionary of Liberal Thought

Launch of the History Group's latest publication. The aim of the *Dictionary* is to provide an accessible guide to the key figures, concepts, movements, factions and pressure groups associated with the ideas of the British Liberal Party (and SDP and Liberal Democrats) from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries. The *Dictionary* will also cover representative major thinkers from the wider international tradition of liberal thought.

8.00pm, Sunday 17 September 2006 (date and time provisional)
Brighton (fringe meeting at Liberal Democrat conference)